

Bristlecone Firesides Podcast, Season 2, Episode 1: Into the Wild

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Madison:

Well, Abigail, welcome to season two of Bristlecone Firesides.

Abigail:

Welcome back.

Madison:

How's your summer been?

Abigail:

It's been toasty.

Madison:

It's been warm?

Abigail:

A little too toasty.

Madison:

A little too toasty, a little smokey.

Abigail:

Yes.

Madison:

Yes, we did do our summer sessions, so our audience has definitely heard from us this summer. But this is the beginning of season two, and this is something that I'm really excited about because I love what we did in season one, but I feel like season

two– the topics we're gonna explore in season two are just kind of a natural outgrowth of what we did in season one.

Abigail:

A deeper dive, if you will, a deeper into some of the topics that were raised in season one.

Madison:

Yes. How's your schoolwork going?

Abigail:

You know, when we're here, we talk about the podcast... [laughter] No, it's good. My professors may say otherwise. [laughter]

Madison:

Well, before we jump into, into our introduction to season two, I think we have a couple, or at least one announcements that we need to talk about. We joined the Dialogue Podcast Network, which is really exciting. So for the, those in the audience that are unfamiliar, Dialogue Journal of Mormon Thought is the longest running and most well respected journal of Mormon studies that there is, it was, you know, born in like the sixties or something. And it's been running since then. And they published some of the best scholarship, poetry, essays, nonfiction, fiction, whatever they, they are at the core of, of some of the best thinking done in Mormonism . So we got invited to join their podcasting network, and the other podcasting shows on the network are, interestingly enough– another podcast called Fireside with Blair Hodges. Blair Hodges ran the Maxwell Institute podcast and so Fireside is his podcast. And, uh, it's funny that our podcast share a little bit of DNA in some of the name, which is cool. There's, uh, another podcast called Beyond the Block, which is about decentering the traditional narrative and, and centering more queer voices or People of Color voices. In terms of the gospel in the church. Holy Human is about a more neurodivergent approach to the gospel, which is really interesting. Face and Hat is, you know, some historical takes on, on, in Mormonism and Funeral Potatoes for the Singles Ward is about the experience of being single in Mormonism.

Abigail:

I love that name. And I love funeral potatoes. Can't see the same about singles wards, but you know what, I actually really like my ward right now. So shout out to my ward.

Madison:

Good for you. [laughter] There's nothing wrong with my ward.

Abigail:

We all go through the wards that are our favorites.

Madison:

I just sometimes don't feel like I belong in my ward.

Abigail:

Well, that's what we're gonna talk about today.

Madison:

That is what we're gonna talk about. So without further ado, welcome to season two of Bristlecone Firesides, casual conversation around a virtual fireside about faith, the earth, the universe, and everything. In this second season, we will be journeying into the spiritual wilds as we explore the theme of wilderness.

Abigail:

Joining us around our virtual fireside will be some familiar voices, as well as some new guests to help us rediscover the spiritual power of wild things. We are your hosts, Abby and Madison.

Madison:

Bristlecone. Firesides is recorded in the tiny carpet covered attic of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance with our partner for this and future seasons. For more info about SUWA and the fight to protect Utah's stunning redrock wilderness, visit suwa.org.

Why did we choose wilderness as the theme for our second season?

Abigail:

Well I think one of the reasons, back in the formation stage of this podcast, when we were just kind of throwing out ideas and outlining potential seasons, it felt like the most natural, at least in my memory, felt like one of the more natural kind of

outgrowths from some of the ideas that we covered in the first season. And just felt like the most conducive step towards other things that we wanted to talk about in the future. It felt like laying the groundwork for some of the other topics and ideas, and really deserved its own focus, because it is something that's so prominent both within, you know, our gospel, but also within like eco studies, I guess.

Madison:

Yeah, no— at least if any cursory read of the Bible or the book of Mormon or whatever, the, “the wilderness” is itself, a theme that pops up over and over and over again, and so if part of what season one's mission was, was to get ourselves to see ourselves as members of “the family of all things”, you know, quoting Mary Oliver again, that I think the, the exploration of wilderness, not just as, as a spiritual concept or as a, you know, an actual physical world concept of like going out into the wilderness, but as like an exploration of what does it mean to be spiritually wild, like that membership in the family, all things, how does that change me and how does that change the way that I act in the world and how I act in relationship to, to everything else.

And so in that respect, I feel it is a, a, this is almost a complimentary extension of our season, our first season, those ideas. I know you've you and I both read Al Leopold, uh, Henry David Thoreau, that there's this idea. And I know that I'm pretty sure when I was doing some research that Leopold misquoted Henry David Thoreau in this, but he says in, uh, Sand County Decree that in wilderness is the salvation of the world. And that's something that I am really struck by, and that, I think we owe it to ourselves, especially considering the world we live in right now with how, tumultuous, it seems to be feeling that if wilderness is, if in wilderness is the salvation of the world, we owe it to ourselves to really look at what it means to be wild and, uh, and see how that is supposed to save us. So what, what do you think, what do you think is meant by in wilderness is the salvation of the world is something you actually believe?

Abigail:

I think it is, but more in the, I mean, if we're talking about Aldo Leopold, one of the ideas that he upheld and, and he's been criticized for maybe being too idealistic about this approach, but I, I do think there's something to be said about his idea of the, kind of the reunification of man and land as being kind of the key to conservation, the key to preservation. and so I think, you know, it's, it's not, I, I do think that, that is true and that, you know, in wilderness is the salvation of the world that we've got, become so separate from that idea of wilderness, that we've even removed humans from wilderness or the idea that they can exist in wilderness. And I think one of the things that our gospel does so well and scriptures and, and these other things is that it really places us within the wilderness too. and sometimes it's not always like a interaction in fact, more often than not, it, it isn't, but I think there's

something to be learned from that. There's something that we, need to kind of revisit when it comes to wilderness.

Madison:

Yeah, no, I would agree, especially because like we talked about in last season, we see ourselves as a part from everything, right. And that is the fundamental one of the fundamental illusions of this world is separation. Uh, and that once we can overcome that, we can see ourselves as being a part of the Wilder, so that exists in this world, uh, and that we need desperately to, to, we, we desperately need to learn the lessons, the wilderness can teach us. I think one of the other reasons was that, I work for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, right. And so I live, I breathe and drink and eat wilderness all day every day for, for my work. And so that primes my eyes to, you know, when I'm reading sacred text or I'm out in the wilderness or I'm, you know, listening to podcasts or music or whatever, I'm primed to think about the world through the lens of wilderness.

And so it's been the idea of wildness and wilderness is an incredibly life giving idea of, for me, I also think, not just for, not just in terms of, uh, like climate change, right? So, you know, EO Wilson, right? He, uh, he has this idea that 50% of the planet by, by 2050 campaign. I don't know if you've heard that where his whole idea is we need to protect him preserve 50% of the planet by 2050 in order to combat climate change and the destruction of the world. Right? And there's some, there's some halfway goals for that, like the 30 by 30 campaign, which is something that President Biden is really, uh, committed to. and so not just in like, is the, the physical salvation of the world found in wilderness. I think personally, I think the spiritual salvation of the world is found in this as well, that ultimately like the lessons that we can learn through Jesus and God, and a lot of these scriptural figures from Eve to John the Baptist to Enoch, that we can learn that there's a certain degree of wildness in these figures that, that we need to learn how to emulate, uh, so that we can be become healed. Are there any other figures in scripture that seem to, I don't know, have a relationship to the wilderness?

Abigail:

Well, you talked about Eve, you talked about John the Baptist, right? Enoch mm-hmm, did you mention Jesus?

Madison:

Did I, I don't know. I don't, I may have, but, but yeah, Jesus.

Abigail:

Jesus. Noah, we just discussed Noah– and I mean, we, as in right before we started recording, so I think those are some, some pretty prominent figures within Scripture.

Madison:

Yeah, so John, the Baptist was, uh, I think he's one of the best examples because he was described as wearing camel hair and eating locust and wild honey, which was super, not a kosher diet at all. And he kind of existed on the periphery of his own community on the edges of his own community. Enoch describes himself as being a wild man in the book of Moses.

Abigail:

Also we can't forget Lehi and his sons. Oh, right. Yeah. Tearing through the wilderness. Yeah.

Madison:

Yeah. So there's something about the, the work of being a prophet, you know, quote unquote, air quotes, being a prophet that puts you at odds with society that makes you go cross grain and that kind of puts a wildness on you. Yeah. Which is something we're gonna explore later on in the season. but something that definitely put this in my mind, I took a postmodern theology class at BYU. It was my, one of my capstone classes. Uh, and I wrote a paper about Aslan. It was my, it was my final paper because Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia is, uh, described as not being tame. He's not a, he's not a tame lion, he's wild. And so I wrote an entire paper on what it means for God to be wild. Uh, so I've just ever since then just kind of been enamored by this idea of spiritual wildness.

So let's, let's jump into– let's, let's start with just a working definition of wildness or wilderness. Um, wilderness is kind of a construct it's kind of unconstructed idea, right? Can you talk about that?

Abigail:

That? Yeah. I, I mean, I think there are quite a few authors, uh, one of which to name few or, I mean, just to name one: Thomas Barry talks a little bit about it, Norman Werzba, Wendel Berry talks about it, but I, it, it's kind of this interesting notion. And we've mentioned it here before, too, the idea that wilderness simply by naming it or separating it such, becomes this idea of something that we are separate from. Uh, and, and by, you know, again kind of naming it or setting it apart as this pristine landscape, uh, it becomes almost impossible for us to think of ourselves as being a

part of it. Also kind of along the lines of that is, like I said, that idea of it being a very pristine preservation without humans, you know, regardless of how long they've lived there or how peaceably they've coexisted.

I mean, even if we look at National Parks, which have a very fraught history of, of both humans and kind of this, this need to preserve landscape, they had people living there. Some of the things that we preserve as part of those National Parks are human relics from, you know, ancient, uh, civilizations that lived there. And so I think it's important to remember that, you know, we need to be careful before we separate wilderness simply from ourselves. And I think that's part of the construct is this idea that we've put it on a pedestal as if it exists wholly in and of itself. And that if humans were to leave it or to not exist, this is what would be, you know, part of the, the, the world, you know, this is what the world would look like. And the fact of the matter is, you know, we, as humans are just as much part of the earth, uh, as you know, the dust of the ground from which were made, but also, you know, all the, the creeping things that, that, , are upon it. And so I think that's something that just becomes a little bit disconnected because we have created such a vast separation between, you know, the physical things that construct and the wilderness in what wilderness, in which we live.

Madison:

Yeah. No, I think an important point that you, you mentioned is we, we wanna be careful, we don't pedestalize wilderness, right. Because, like John Muir we all love John Muir, but he's kind of the grandfather of conservation America, the, you know, one of the founders of the Sierra Club, however, , in the, their quest for these developing of the national parks in California, they actually kicked out Indigenous peoples, right. From these areas that they were, that they were peaceably living in right, in their quest for this idea of pristine nature outside of humans. And so we wanna be careful that we don't reenact act that on a smaller scale here where, where we, we don't wanna talk about wilderness as though it is, it is some power apart from

Abigail:

Right. Or, or kind of like even furthering that idea that we almost commodify it in the way that we talk about it, that like we have to go to wilderness to like, have this in nature, which again, we've talked about on the podcast already. I love this idea from Norman Werzba who says “the paradox of the romantic view of wilderness is that it results in a view of nature in which people are welcome only as tourists and in which they cannot make a durable home by sequestering nature to that realm apart from culture, people give themselves an excuse to be inattentive to and irresponsible with the urban and suburban areas in which they live and the farm fields from which they draw their daily sustenance.” So it's just this idea that it exists almost as like a

nebulous form of beauty separate from what we can kind of achieve with it, I guess. You know, it's like separate not with.

Madison:

With yeah. I mean, there is some tension here, right. Because I think the way that we've constructed our modern world, there is kind of a separation, right? You know, and that we depend on these quote unquote wild sections of the planet to like sequester carbon. Or to create oxygen for us, you know, through the, through algae and through trees. That there are wild portions of the planet that we haven't really touched that literally are the salvation of us, because otherwise, if we, if it weren't for them, we wouldn't be able to go on existing.

Abigail:

Right. Eugene Odom, talks about that about the, the city as being a parasite, essentially to the rest of, to the rest of nature or, or to the rest of like landscape, because he says, you know, people drive through these, these vast landscapes, , across the us or other parts of the world and say, this is all wasted space. Or, you know, we should be utilizing this space, but he, he kind of goes through this whole idea of, without that space, the urban spaces aren't possible because those urban spaces are, like you said, you know, relying on that carbon sequestration, or, you know, like all of these different facets that, that must go on as life giving systems there that then, you know, make possible the, the life in those cities, whether it's through farming or just, you know, land itself that, that, you know, we are kind of a parasite to that untouched land too- especially if we don't think about it.

Madison:

Yeah. So I think we definitely need to honor that tension because I, I definitely agree with the idea that like wilderness is a construction mm-hmm and we don't wanna pedestalize it and like, say that it's something separate from us. But the way that we've constructed our world makes it so that there are these places that we call wilderness that are different from everything that we live in. And they actually do kind of buoy up the whole rest of our civilization. Right. , so I think, , a good, a good example of this. So this is from the Wilderness Act passed by Congress, and this is how, so there, there are, like you, you already mention National Parks and there's National Monuments, and there are recreation areas in state parks. Another designation that can be put on land is Wilderness Areas. And so that's part of what my organization SUWA does is we try and get as much wilderness land designated in Utah. But the Wilderness Act reads, this is how it defines wilderness. It says "a wilderness in contrast with those areas where man in his works dominate the landscape is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life

are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this act, an area of undeveloped federal land, retaining its primeval character and its influence without permanent improvements or human habitations, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions in which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature and the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable has outstanding opportunities for a solitude or primitive or undefined types of recreation has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unpaired condition and also may contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, education, scenic, or historic value.”

So that's how the government defines wilderness. Which there's some beauty in there. There's also some complication in there, because it talks about how it's hereby recognized as an area where the community of life are untrammelled by man and where man is a visitor. However, many of the, the wilderness areas in Utah, there are cliff dwellings, that's just ancestral sites, right. That some of these people, like some of the Navajo or Dine people or the Ute people still consider these lands as their active ancestral sites.

Abigail:

Yeah. I think one way to maybe look at it too, that maybe allows for a more flexible definition than maybe the two that we've provided maybe John Muir and the Wilderness Act... I think another option is Wendell Barry's kind of distinction between the path and the road, where he talks about a path as being kind of a one that requires knowledge of a certain place. It meanders a little bit takes form kind of as one moves across the landscape, but a road is, is very indicative of resistance of the landscape because it doesn't take into account the knowledge that may be required to move about it and it very much represents haste, because it just kind of bullies right through whatever landscape it goes across. So I think one might say, you know, maybe we adopt this mentality of the path as opposed to the road where we take a little bit more knowledge from the landscape itself and let that indicate our movement through it or our interaction of it. But that doesn't mean, you know, that we can't move through it or something, right. No, I like that. But, but it's hard. Like, I, I think the reason that that Wilderness Act distinction exists is because of the damage that we've seen yeah. To other landscapes. And so it kind of comes as a almost reaction to the fear of losing these vital landscapes we have gotten rid of, or are destroyed.

Madison:

It's like, we need to put something really far out. We need a draw line really far out that says, this is what wilderness is. Right. Or else we risk losing everything.

Abigail:

Yeah. And I think we have not historically reflected a good balance or like a path mentality, and so it's almost like we can't trust ourselves to be responsible, so we need to kind of go to another extreme in order to like prevent us from even having that be a possibility.

Madison:

Yeah. I think there is another aspect of wilderness that we see wilderness as being, adversarial to us, to the development of, of man or, uh, you know, it's almost to be wild is a pejorative. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Abigail:

Yeah, I think something that we often do you is like, well, even the idea of like a "wild child" or we we're always referring to things as like a wild garden where you're like, oh, it's untamed, it's unkempt, it's maybe a little bit unruly. And so wildness kind of takes on this bad connotation within, not only our language, but also kind of our attitude towards things that are perceived as wild. And, and so I think in that way, it becomes kind of this adversarial notion, I guess.

Madison:

Yeah. And I think this can be definitely seen in our, uh, kind of our battles with walls over the years. There have been so many extermination orders for wolves and we've tried to drive Yellowstone. Yeah. We've tried to drive them to extinction in many, many places. Wolves are kind of the symbol of the wilderness. And they, uh, kind of represent the wilderness is pushing back on us because wolves pick off our sheep, our flocks, whatever. Right. But we, you know, we have seen now in these, in the modern world where if we've removed wolves, we've just destroyed an ecosystem. Mm-hmm right. And like, Yellowstone, like can't be Yellowstone without having the wolves there. And, uh, and you know, in another, another sense, like, especially in kind of the Mormon, you know, sagebrush kind of region is this idea that we're gonna make the desert blossom as a rose. We're gonna tame the desert, And, uh, that, that idea itself is, you know, as we've talked about before that maybe that's not the best idea for us to do that. Maybe taming something, maybe there's something that we will lose if we tame something.

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance:

Hey all– thanks for joining us around the Fireside to talk about things big and small. An important part of Bristlecone Firesides is putting our faith and spirituality in contact with the Earth that unites us. So, we'd love to keep in touch with you in the future... whether it's to share a simple call to action, send an occasional, exclusive behind-the-scenes update, or ask you for your input on the future direction of Bristlecone Firesides.

To stay in the loop, text us the phrase "FIRESIDEUTAH" to 52886. We won't fill up your messages. But when we do send you something, we promise it's gonna be good. That's F-I-R-E-S-I-D-E UTAH to 52886. We're looking forward to keeping in touch with you as a member of this incredible community.

Madison:

Okay, well, let's move into talking about wilderness and wildness as a spiritual aspect, rather than just a physical aspect. Something in my is that I've kind of seen that wildness is really related to agency. It's really related to our capacity of choice. It's really related to freedom and our interconnectedness with all things. And so I kind of have begun to understand spirit spiritual wildness as having spiritual freedom, so I guess, what is spiritual freedom?

Abigail:

Well, what, what about wildness indicates spiritual freedom? I think that, you know, maybe you could talk a little bit more about that. Yeah. That connection that you've drawn.

Madison:

Yeah, so I guess when we were talking about, you know, wilderness, as we define it in, you know, our modern world, there is something uncontrollable. Like we just were saying that there, the pejorative idea of wilderness is something that is beyond control that, oh, our, my garden has gone wild because I haven't touched it. Right. It's just doing what it does it's is doing what it does naturally, which is growing things every which way and going crazy. But I think that there's, there's a, a beauty and a truth inside of that, that we need to reclaim, that there is a wildness is what happens when things are made free. Right. And like, wildness is a word that I think, I think over the course of the season, we're going to deconstruct a lot of the baggage that is inside of that word and to try and kind of breathe a new life into it, trying to breathe kind of a spiritual life into that word.

But like we can't, we can't get away from the fact that figures in our own scriptures were we're are described as wild and that they were the best of us, right. That John,

the Baptist was described as being, you know, one of the best, he was second best of Jesus or whatever. Right. That's very hierarchical kind of language, but we can't get away from the fact that there is a, there is a, uh, a spiritual value to being wild to some degree. And I think that, you know, my exposure to children, to my nieces and nephews is, you know, the, the process of aging seems to be kind of beating some of this stuff or– beating that's a hard word– but to trying to make us unlearn some of the spontaneity that just kind of grows out of us naturally. And to try and like, just obey and like to, to just like be good cogs in the machine of society.

Abigail:

That makes sense. I guess I'm thinking of it too. Just like the more we are talking about this and, and like in a spiritual or maybe, uh, like scriptural context to, , kind of the, the limitations or maybe not limitations, but some of the difficulties that are imposed by wilderness, I think of Lehigh and his sons in the wilderness obviously after they leave and being there kind of in a context unknown in which they have to understand the wilderness a little bit more than maybe they had to understand live being within a community context, if that makes sense.

Madison:

Yeah. Well, I feel like there's, there's two different kinds so that like there's wilderness, which is something, some kind of liminal space that you enter into. Right. Which is something external to you that you go into and it reveals a lot about you. It reveals a lot about God, especially if we're talking sacred text. And it's, you know, kind of this middle space, like a Shakespearean, like midsummer night stream kind of stuff, right. Yeah. Where you go in and all the rules of the society are turned upside down so that you can reorganize and restructure your approach to life. And so I think there is, there is wilderness, the spiritual wilderness is in that respect, which yet we are going to discuss at length in this, in this season. But there's also the wild in terms of like, self-expression of our own behavior, our own actions, right. That there's wilderness that exists on the outside of us and there's wilderness on the inside of us and people who listening, can't see my arms, but I'm gesturing on the, the outside of me. And then I'm touching my heart, which is like on the inside of me.

Abigail:

So you're specifically talking about adopting more of like a wild, uh, not mindset, but like spirituality in which you allow yourself to be wild in your thought, like, let those thoughts grow uncontrollably, let them kind of blossom and flourish as they will, as opposed to kind of harnessing them

Madison:

In, in terms of like, because I think something, we, we talked a lot about in season one was being separate and being in control mm-hmm right. And that, those, those things are ultimately spiritual hindrances for us. And there's something about wildness that reminds me of, section 121 of the Doctrine of the Covenant, Section 121 Versus 45-46, where it says, "let thy boughs also be full of charity towards all men into the household of faith and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unseasonably, and then Shalli confidence, wax strong in the presence of God. And the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon my soul as the dew from heaven, that verse is full of passive language. Like, be full of charity, which is something that you're allowing to happen to you. It's not something that you are controlling. It's not something that you're musing through. Let virtue garnish, I thoughts, which is something, again, that's happening to you or it's coming out of you naturally. It's not something that you are just, you're trying to like control and muscle, and it talks about how the, the doctrine in the priesthood will distill upon your soul as the dew from heaven. Like dew, isn't something that you can like paint on a grass. It just slowly accumulates, and it's not something that you can control, and so there's something in that language that makes me think of wildness, wildness has freedom as a, as a surrendering of troll as an allowing, and allowing of, and allowing both of myself and allowing of God, it's a surrendering surrendering, let me back up in terms of spiritual freedom.

I think that there's three, there's three freedoms that we need to learn how to preserve. We need to learn how to preserve God's freedom. We need to learn how to preserve our freedom, and we need to learn how to preserve the universe's freedom. And I know we've, we've kind of touched on this in the hope of nature, which is George Hanley's book, right? That he talks about the economy of creation, , that we live in a universe where God is an actor. We are an actor and the universe is an actor. , and I think that the path to wisdom and the path to, , the path to spiritual healing is learning how to be free within that system. Learning how, where God's freedom exists in that system and learning where the universe is, freedom is in that system and trying to maintain all those, those freedoms separately. Right. So that we can allow God to be wild. We can allow us to be wild and the universe naturally to be wild. Does that make, am I, am I making it any clearer or...?

Abigail:

Oh, you definitely are. I just wanted to make sure I understood that distinction between the two, because in some ways it feels like wilderness as like an entity or at least perceived in, in these kind of scriptural texts could also be something that feels very sequestering or could of stifling almost in some sense, but also requires kind of a, a, a creativity, a spiritual creativity, or like a very literal creativity making bows and whatnot. But yeah, like I think it's interesting that it can be kind of applied in those

two different ways or, or more than two, but just like, at least here in the context that we're trying to understand it.

Madison:

Yeah. That there's an external wilderness that we might, you know, whether it's physical wilderness in the actual world that we're going into, or whether it's a spiritual wilderness, you know, where we're kind of processing to some degree or we deconstructing. , but then I think that there's a behavioral wildness. Yeah. Right. So I don't know if you've read the book "How to do Nothing" by Jenny Odell and it's, uh, this book where she talks about how we live in a world that is obsessed with productivity and commodification. And doing nothing is itself an act of resistance to the way that the world is. And I think, you know, if, if there's a, a kind of a tension in the idea of wilderness of well, what, isn't, what being wild, right?

It's being compelled it's compulsion, right. It's being compelled to obey or compelled to a certain kind of lifestyle or the opposite of that, which is you are, are a, you're a slave to impulses. You're a slave to chaos, to randomness and to meaninglessness. Right. Right. Those, those two ideas stand on either end of the spectrum. And I see wildness as kind of something in between mm-hmm, where it borrows the best of both. And it kind of combines them while honoring both of them in their own spheres. Right. And so this idea of how to do nothing is how can I participate in a refusal kind of way where I can retain my own agency still.

Abigail:

Yeah. So in that sense, wilderness becomes in essence, like you said, a form of freedom where we're neither an agent of chaos nor one of strict obedience in which we can't make decisions for ourselves. We're simply just following blindly or doing what we're told.

Madison:

Yeah. We are, we become agents unto ourselves.

Abigail:

So then how do we become wild? How do we, reestablish this idea of wildness within us?

Madison:

That is the question. That is the question that I think we're gonna spend the work of the season unpacking. But I, uh, just like in the last season, I think a lot of what we're gonna be touching on is we're gonna, we're gonna be talking about wisdom practices. We're gonna be talking about mysticism, which is experiencing, uh, or going off of our own experience of, of the divine rather than externalized experiences, and we're gonna be talking about the ego. We're gonna be trying to learn how to surrender control, , and, uh, to be wild, I think, to learn how to be wild, you need to learn how to surrender. Yeah. You need to learn how to lose. You need to learn how to give up . Yeah. Which is kind of really counterintuitive, but, uh, the ego, the, the ego, so an ego is simply your story about yourself, right?

It's, it's, uh, my story about how reality ought to be and how I ought to act in reality. And I build that up with a lot of different stories and ideas about myself and about how the world works. And what the ego wants is the ego wants to be superior. Mm-hmm the ego wants separation and the ego wants control. And so if we can act against those three impulses, I think we will learn what it means to be wild, that obviously like superior. I mean, I think we talked a lot about this in season one, which was the separation in the control and the superiority. And, uh, you, even in that last episode, we did with about talking about the wild geese, that there's an aspect of us that we want to try and learn how to control God with our obedience. And I think that's what a lot of our relationship is with the divine is I'm gonna put in my obedience in one, in the, the quarter slot, and I'm gonna get out of the cosmic bending machine blessings.

Abigail:

I wanna touch on this idea of separation again, mm-hmm, , Ethan though, you know, it's something I'm very passionate about. Obviously, I feel like it's all I talk about. There's an eco critic, Greg Gerard, and he talks about this idea of like hyper separation where there's often like a denial even of the relationship between the superior and inferior and that like all that's left that exists are those who are superior AKA humans in this context. But I I've been thinking about this a lot too, just, you know, in relation to the pandemic and, and some other ideas as I've been reading about the interdependency, uh, of, of humans on their environment. And of course, you know, all these different cycles that naturally take place on earth, the carbon cycle, all these different things. And just that, you know, what, what we don't understand when we separate ourselves is how dependent upon the earth we are for our own lives. And then furthermore, you know, when we alienate others, we further separate ourselves from our communities. We exist and we flourish, you know, on the backs of our communities. And I think one thing that's been misunderstood, often is the idea of like natural selection, uh, that we often think like, uh, do or die, or like, you know, the, the weak fall. And, but I think like, yes, maybe in some instances, obviously that's true that like, there are maybe some things that are naturally through

evolution kind of weeded out over time through natural selection, but what you don't remember is that natural selection also takes place in ecosystems where there's still a community aspect. There's still interdependence on other species, you know, be it through predation or kind of symbiosis, you know, all of these things are still interacting through a system, and I think if we continue to further this idea of superiority or separation, we're gonna become like isolated beings, uh, that, you know, in doing so we sacrifice all of our freedom in the name of freedom for ourselves.

Madison:

Which is almost something that we are seeing actively in the world today through masking our vaccination or whatever, that our own quest in our own, like almost our own libertarian quest for our own personal freedom, our own personal wildness, we end up losing the whole thing. And so, like, I think that's something worth pointing out that when we're talking about spiritual wildness, we, I, we are not talking about spiritual hyper individualization. Spiritual wildness is found in a community of people who are free. Yeah. Right. And whose freedoms interact and are interdependent upon each other.

That dovetails really nicely into, uh, you know, wild communities, are communities who, where everyone is free and knitted together in love. Because I think love is ultimately, you know, in the Gospel of John, John says, "love will set you free." And so there's something about our relationship to love that makes us wild, makes us into wild creatures. And, uh, I think that over the course of the season, what we'll learn, how to see is that God's love is freely and wildly and blessedly out of our control, , that, you know, when Jesus says, "be therefore perfect, even as my father in heaven is perfect" you know, he's not talking about some behavioral perfection. He, you know, the, the example he gives is he says, as my father in heaven is perfect, who sends the reign and the sunshine on the just, and the unjust, which means the God's perfection is defined as drawing the circle large enough to include every, and that God sense his love on people who don't. So God, God is not concerned with this idea of deservedness right? And we, we as humans tend to be very preoccupied with the idea of deservedness and that if I think that the path to wildness the path to wisdom, the path to freedom means surrendering, that it means letting go of that idea of, of deserve- that we deserve anything at all. And it, and it's kind of shifting over into this gifted mindset.

Abigail:

Yes. I agree. , well, if we're going back to, uh, I mean, if we're, if we touch on the person that we started with Aldo Leopold, he said, "if a person acts out of love and respect, then a decision is more likely to be responsible one."

Madison:

Ooh, that is really good.

Abigail:

I think that's really true too. I mean, if, if we're completely objective, it becomes really difficult to make a decision, like, I think sometimes emotions factor in mm-hmm where you make kind of faulty decisions. But a, I think in some ways, love becomes a really good indicator of, of like what's right. , and that we're acting, not out of self-interest if we're truly showing love for others and respect for others.

Madison:

Yeah. Here, I'm gonna try and find a quote from Richard Rohr. My favorite person, who of course, will be joining us in season two, maybe not in person, but anyways, he says, uh, this is from his book, uh, "From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality". He says, "perfect freedom is the very nature of true love without freedom. There is no love, only duty in obligation. God does not love us because God has to, God loves us because God wants to, God does not love us because we are good. God loves us because God is good. Why can't we surrender to that?" I think that there's something about love that allows that if, you know, I love something I'm allowing that thing to be fully what it is. I'm not putting, I'm not, I'm surrendering my stories about that thing and I'm allowing it to be fully what it is. Right. Yeah. And I think that's the freedom that God gives us by loving us. He allows us to, to, to make good choices. He allows us to make bad choices, that there's a radical, there's kind of a radical risk taking on God's part. You know his gamble with reality of is allowing the universe and allowing us to be kind of these free creatures. Yeah. There's kind of a riskiness in that. It's kind of exciting.

Abigail:

Yeah. I think it is risky. And I think, I'm also thinking now my favorite person , I shouldn't say that I talk a lot about Wendell Berry, but also Norman Werzba, of brings up a similar idea that like, by tending to the earth, we're also tending to our destiny, which indicates our freedom and, and then our hope, so our hope in the future. Right. And that, you know, by, living in communion with the earth are kind of respecting or understanding those aspects of, of will, I guess, then we're kind of acknowledging nature's power, , with what he says, humility and grace is a practice of spiritual mindfulness that heals and restores. So I think like, just like freedom almost becomes this like healing and restorative power when we do it mindfully or, or like when we respect the earth and when we're showing that love for, you know, the earth or fellow members of our community.

Madison:

Well, because I think freedom can only be real freedom when it's operated in a community that loves each other. Because if you become a free radical in that community and you just start behaving as though you're an individual mm-hmm, , you're gonna get kicked outta that community pretty quickly. Like that's what we see in evolutionary biology. Yeah. Is that, that end any creature that evolves to the, to the point where they become a, they, they endanger the rest of the ecosystem evolution kind of weeds that out. And so evolution itself is pressure has like, there's some evolutionary pressure towards cohesive community building. And which is kind of like unique, it's kind of weird. There's this evolutionary pressure towards like, like cohesive community building. It's really funny.

So I guess we'll, uh, let's draw this, uh, we're going to be exploring all of these ideas throughout the course of the season, but there's a few kind of ideas or questions that I wanna leave our audience with.

Ultimately free is what we're after: spiritual freedom. That's what wildness is. Freedom to do what? What are we gonna do with our wildness? What are we gonna do with our freedom? Right. There's that Mary Oliver poem that kind of ends with, well, "what are you gonna do now with your one wild life?" And, uh, there's something, I had a conversation with a friend this summer where we were talking about, you know, I asked her, "do you feel free?" And her honest response was, "no, I don't feel free." And then, you know, we talked about love. We talked about, you know, God's response to us. Uh, and that, that we, we have it in our minds that we need to like purchase divine favor through our obedience. And there's a compulsion in that. That's, that's very, like, there's an obligation in there that is very kind of, I, I think it's very spiritually dampening, but I asked her like, well, what, what would you do if you already knew that you had God's love secured, right? Like how would you live your life? If you already knew that heaven was yours? Like how would that free you to live your life? Right. And I think that, I think that what that allows us to do is over the course of the season, we're gonna see that God's love enables us to, to behave, to, to participate in goodness as, as a free expression of who we are, rather than this moral obligation to earn something.

So those, those are the questions that I want to kind of leave the audience with is what would you, how would you live your life if you already knew that heaven was secured or that if you already knew you had God's love?

Abigail:

Spoiler alert, we should know that we already have God's love.

Madison:

Spoiler alert. [laughter]

Yes. So, now that we have kind of popped the bubble and we, you know, we're gonna be talking about wilderness. I just wanted to preview some of the topics that we're gonna be covering this season. We're gonna be talking about Job Woohoo, and the comforting wild, or the, uh, yeah Job in the comforting wild. There's a book by Bill McKibbin called Job in the comforting whirlwind. That I'm pretty sure both of us read for a class with George and because Job himself is a, that's a really unique book in the old Testament. And a really unique perspective on creation too. We're gonna be talking about Jacob five and the parable of the olive tree in the book of Mormon, , because, you know, on a reread of that, it's the wild branches that save the vineyard, right. And there's power there's, Salic salvation power and wild things. And so we're gonna be, we're gonna have an episode on that. We're gonna have an episode on queerness and the wild earth. So we're gonna be talking, , kind of about, you know, queerness, as it relates to Mormonism, as it relates to spirituality, as it relates to earthy things, which I think will be a really exciting episode, especially given the, the state of Mormonism today. we're gonna have on, Katherine Knight Sontag again, who will be a recurring guest. Uh, we're gonna talk about the wild woman archetype with her and kind of wild wisdom, maybe talk a little bit about witchiness, which is fun. Cause we all love our crystals these days and our incense. We're gonna have on Adam Miller, who we've talked about before in previous episodes, we're gonna have on Steve Peck, who we've also talked about in previous episodes and Bob Reese, who is the director, uh, of The Grand Theological Union, and we're gonna have on many other people.

Abigail:

Grand, or Graduate?

Madison:

What did it, what did I say? It's Grand, is it not Grand?

Abigail:

I think it's The Graduate.

Madison:

Oh, really? I've been saying it wrong for years. Graduate. No, you're 100%, right. I'm wrong. Yeah. Anyways, he's really cool. He's a fun guy. We're friends. We're gonna have

on a number of other people. Uh, we're gonna hold on to some names for surprises. Uh, we're gonna be talking to, uh, poets, artists, activists, recreation... or, people who go have fun out in the wild. Yeah. So I'm excited to do season two.

Thank you for joining us in the spiritual wilds on this episode of Bristlecone Firesides.

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Madison:

This season's beautiful cover art was provided by Ash Rowan designs and, and our fresh new music was composed by Brenton Jackson.

Abigail:

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