

For Those Who Wonder

Managing Religious Questions and Doubts

D. Jeff Burton

Fourth Edition

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Other books and materials available at this website include *Progression*, a novel based on LDS afterlife folklore, *Wormwood among the Mormons*, a fictional look at Satan's work along the Wasatch Front, and many "Borderlands" columns. See Chapter 12 for more information.

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Foreword

Lowell L. Bennion

Life on the planet Earth is wonderfully complex. From the dawn of consciousness, human beings have tried to understand it. But they have also gone further by trying to understand it in absolute terms. They have sought to know the truth.

Yet truth is not part of the reality we are trying to understand. Truth exists in the minds of persons—of Deity and human beings. The earth, for example, is what it is. To the degree that our ideas about the earth correspond to or agree with what the earth really is, to that extent we have the truth about the earth. Or to take another example, God is what he is. To the extent that our ideas about God correspond to what he really is, to that extent we have the truth about God. It is obvious that we do not have the whole truth about God.

Human beings have developed several different ways of knowing reality, of finding the truth: (1) by thinking, or rationalism; (2) by experience, or empiricism; (3) by revelation from Deity; and (4) by intuition. Sometimes revelation may come as a form of intuition.

These different ways of knowing have developed symbolic systems of thought and feeling—philosophy, science, religion, the arts, and so forth. It is natural for these different ways of knowing to produce different views of the same reality and to be critical of one another's conclusions. For centuries there has been tension between faith (religion) and reason (philosophy and science).

These differing points of view have sometimes caused bright and thoughtful people to question their faith and to doubt something they have been taught in the church. The author of this work, D. Jeff Burton, has rich and extensive experience counseling people who are troubled because their thinking has led them to question and even doubt some things they have learned in a religious setting.

When conflict develops between a man's (or woman's) faith and his thinking, one of three things can happen. He can quit thinking and hold fast to faith. Or, he can put trust in reason and reject faith. A third, and for me a better solution, is to recognize the important roles both thinking and faith play in life and to try to understand and respect the role of each one.

Burton has brought together a collection of his stories and essays dealing with problems of faith and knowledge. By using both fiction and reasoned discourse, he is recognizing and appealing to more than one of

the ways by which we seek understanding. In an annotated bibliographic essay, he quotes thoughtful Mormon writers: Joseph Smith, Orson Pratt, James E. Talmage, Richard Poll, and Jan Stout. He also quotes from some well respected non-Mormon writers: William James, Bertrand Russell, Eric Hoffer, Paul Tillich, Francisco Jose Moreno, and James Fowler. All are deep thinkers. Their writings stimulate thought rather than draw definite conclusions. This collection of stories and essays does the same. It will appeal to those who think and question; it may even disturb comfortable believers; but it will teach them new ways of thinking as they find limitations in the old ways.

Chapter 1, "Helping Those with Religious Doubts and Questions," is replete with constructive suggestions on how to cope with doubt.

A poem by Margaret Rampton Munk to me expresses the author's purpose better than I.

A Skeptic's Prayer

Is it true
Thou lovest best
Thy meek, unasking children?

Thou has made us
So diverse, so various,
Yet in the image of a Sire
Who filled the universe
With His creative fire.

What father has supposed
His child would grow to manhood
Only hearing and affirming?
What man could honor such a son?

How could a mind that,
Like a Sponge,
Absorbs but never questions,
Doubts, or wonders why
Be offspring and apprentice
To a God?

It may be, Lord,
Thou canst never love me.
With the calm relief
a father feels
For his obedient child--
The one who's never any trouble.

But use me
As a bridge
To those more wayward still
Than I.

I cannot give them all the answers;
But they will not ask
The ones who think they can.

Let me speak
To Thy lost sheep
As one who,
Understanding how they went
astray,
Still loves the Shepherd.

—Margaret Rampton Munk*

* *So Far* (n.p.: privately printed 1986), p. 59. Used by permission.

Introduction to the Fourth Edition

The success of three editions (seven printings in twenty-five years plus thousands downloaded from the web) has prompted me to revise the book again and issue a fourth edition print version. (A free pdf copy can be downloaded from www.forthosewhowonder.com.)

The book is intended for members of the Mormon Church who are questioning their religious life and also for their friends and relatives who would like to understand better what they are experiencing.

It is thought that five to ten percent of *active* members actually disbelieve important tenets of our unique religion and that another twenty-five to thirty percent have quiet but ever-present questions, doubts, uncertainties and insecurities. (Among inactive members the numbers are much higher.)

Finally, many firm believers experience temporary episodes of doubting and questioning—“trials of their faith.” This book can help during those trying times. Questioning and wondering are normally healthy—they can motivate us to action and study. Unfortunately, many of us suffer unnecessarily from feelings of guilt, inadequacy, depression, and estrangement. Some feel so estranged that they leave the Church.

The book is written to console, hearten, and ease the pain for those who wonder. It will help questioners continue their participation and feel comfortable as a continuing and important part of the Church. It should also make it easier to *ask questions* when necessary.

Some have wondered if the book is “acceptable” for mainstream Latter-day Saints to read. The answer is yes. It was carried on the shelves of Deseret Book for many years. It may not be strictly “testimony building” in the common LDS sense, but it certainly is faith promoting.

The book’s format encourages browsing. Many readers prefer essays while others enjoy fiction. Some concepts are handled best through analysis and rational argument while a human predicament will cut to the heart of still other issues. Because each essay and story stands by itself, you can begin anywhere, but I suggest you read from the front.

If you enjoy intellectual pursuits, you will want to read “Wonderful Wondering” (Chapter 2) and “A Bibliographic Essay” (Chapter 3).

Chapter 1, “Helping those with Religious Questions and Doubts,” is useful if you’re dealing with a friend or loved one experiencing a crisis of testimony or faith. If you like fiction, the story “A 2020 Call” (Chapter 8) explores what might trigger a crisis for some.

The sixth chapter, “The Phenomenon of the Faithful Doubter,” describes one approach to dealing with doubt. Chapter 4 can help you evaluate your own belief systems. If you want as little disruption in your life as possible, read “How to Manage the Loss of Belief,” and “Developing a Church-compatible Model for Life” (Chapters 7 and 9).

My favorite is Chapter 5, “Mouth of Dark Canyon,” a partially fictionalized story of my own experience as a young man.

I consider my writing to be a dialogue. You have an open invitation to make it a real one by sharing with me your thoughts and experiences: jeff@eburton.com.

Chapter 1

Helping Those With Religious Questions and Doubts

To some it is given to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful. — D&C 46:13-14

Note: Versions of this essay have appeared in the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP) Journal; in the book Counseling – A Guide to Helping Others, Volume 2, edited by R. Lanier Britsch and Terrance D. Olson (SLC, Deseret Book, 1985); Exponent II; and This People magazine (SLC, Summer 1991).

The Church is known, among other things, for its emphasis on personal conviction and strong testimony. Members are generally expected to receive a manifestation or confirmation that the essentials of the gospel are true. Partly because of this expectation, Latter-day Saints with unresolved religious questions and uncertainties may experience agonizing introspection, emotional difficulties, and even self-imposed alienation.

One aspect of the problem is what LDS psychologist Frances Lee Menlove described as the Unruffled Mormon Syndrome. The unruffled LDS person is an ideal: A completely fulfilled and integrated Latter-day Saint, untroubled by doubts and questions which afflict others. Oblivious to the pain and probing of other truth-seekers, this member is secure in his or her ability to understand all religious issues. (See *Dialogue* 1:1, 1967)

Although many LDS people live comfortably close to the unruffled ideal, others have found themselves unable to achieve this serenity. Attempts to fit into this mold frequently create a number of problems. For example, those who repress their natural urge to question so they can maintain an unruffled image may settle for the appearance of belief in place of actual conviction. Over a period of time, such self-deception can create emotional conflict and foster feelings of guilt and hypocrisy. They may confide: "I'm living a lie." "What's wrong with me? I can't live up to the expectations of others." "I feel so guilty—the Lord must hate me."

Latter-day Saints struggling for conviction are often caught in an endless cycle of attempts and failures to achieve the perceived perfection

of the unruffled state. These defeats can result in feelings of frustration, discouragement, unworthiness, or low self-esteem: “I’ve prayed and fasted but I still have questions. Why don’t I get the same answers as others?” “I just can’t accept a calling (go to the temple, etc.) while I have these nagging doubts.” “I don’t deserve blessings because I have uncertainties and questions inside.” “I can’t answer the temple recommend questions.”

Latter-day Saints desiring to discuss their questions and doubts often find communication difficult or impossible. With no chance to talk, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth are often stunted. Without meaningful discussion with fellow members, a person can feel alienated from the religious community, either through emotional withdrawal or loss of Church activity: “If I can’t have the same assurance as others, I don’t want to participate.” “I can’t talk to anybody about this.” “If it weren’t for the kids (my parents, my wife, my husband), I’d just quit it all.”

Persons with unresolved doubts may experience marital conflicts, denial of reality, reduced ability to deal with feelings and emotions, reduced motivation to learn, and feelings of disorientation: “My wife keeps saying, ‘Why can’t you just believe? Why do you have to question everything?’ She thinks I’m not trying, that I’m somehow unworthy of the blessings of a sure knowledge. Why can’t she just understand that’s the way I am?” “I’m a basket case. I can’t get on with anything.”

Religious doubt may arise at any age, but it is more typically seen during the years of intellectual maturation. Those desiring to help should be particularly sensitive to this problem among young adults and especially among college students.

Many of the problems associated with religious questions and doubt grow out of misconceptions concerning the relationship of knowledge to faith and belief and their roles in our lives. I have found eleven perspectives on the nature of religious conviction and commitment helpful to me as I have talked with those struggling with their testimonies. These perspectives can help people to see their circumstances in a more positive light and to pave the way to personal growth and emotional satisfaction.

1. The LDS culture and society assign different meanings to the words *faith* and *belief*.

LDS people often see belief and faith as synonymous, both being the natural result of learning truth. The scriptures often use the two words interchangeably. However, in our present-day society, particularly in the sciences, the terms *belief* and *faith* have distinct, mutually exclusive meanings.

In the contemporary sense, belief is a mental state that tells us something is true because of experience, information, evidence, or authority. For example, if we flip a coin fifty times and tabulate the numbers of heads and tails, we are likely to believe from the evidence that each comes up about equally.

Of course, no one person's interpretation of the evidence will prove satisfactory to everyone. A mother looks at a newborn baby and has sufficient evidence to believe in the existence of God. A biochemist looking at the same child may marvel at the power of evolution.

Faith, on the other hand, refers to a feeling, a trust in "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Belief is learned; faith is evidence yet to be learned. Belief is what we really think; faith is what we are willing to accept in the absence of evidence.

The acceptance embodied in faith implies an active personal commitment. Thus, under these definitions, it is possible to question aspects of our religion, yet live the gospel by faith.

Helping Suggestion: Accept the possibility that you both may be operating under different definitions as you discuss belief and faith. Define your terms to assure clear communication.

2. Doubting is not necessarily a rejection of God or the church.

Again, it is important to recognize the multiple meanings of doubt. In its modern, constructive sense, it means to be unsettled in belief or opinion, to be uncertain or undecided. It implies a lack of information or evidence upon which to base a belief. Doubt, according to this usage, is an inevitable consequence of a maturing, inquiring mind and should be managed, not denied.

In contrast, the more traditional meaning of doubt is the notion of distrust or disloyalty. In a religious context, doubt is often associated with a rejection of God and a thankless denial of his goodness. Naturally, in this context, it has a negative connotation.

Helping Suggestion: Point out that those who are aware of differences of meaning can avoid being hurt (or avoid offending others) by choosing their words carefully and defining any likely-to-be misunderstood expressions.

3. Some are given to know; others, to believe.

The quotation from the Doctrine and Covenants which opens this chapter tells us that some are *given* to know and that others are *given* to believe on their words (i.e., to live by faith). We have no way of discerning in advance who will know and who will live by faith; nor do we know why the Lord has established such a system. We don't even know which of the two is more blessed. (Some actually prefer not to be given to know.) But we are told that those who are given the gift to live by faith will receive eternal life.

Another interpretation of the latter half of this scripture is that it is actually a gift *not to know*. (More thoughts on this strange idea are found in Chapter 9.

There are some benefits to having curiosity, questions and wonderment.)

Helping Suggestion: Suggest that a current lack of complete understanding and knowledge, or the absence of a witness, does not mean that God is ignoring the person, but may have given him/her the gift to live by faith.

4. “It is not permitted to know everything.” —Horace.

We in the church often use the words, “I know” to describe our testimonies. (“I know the Church is true.”) This use of *know* usually means a strong belief or intense faith. (“I intensely believe the Church is true,” or “My faith is strong that the Church is true.”)

“To know,” in its modern, technological sense, is to have a clear understanding, or to be significantly sure, based on evidence and facts. But in modern mortality nothing can be known with *perfection*, only in degrees of confidence. While science and statistics have developed elaborate methods for testing, verifying, and strengthening the evidence upon which beliefs and knowledge are based, no test produces *perfect* knowledge. Furthermore, scientists themselves use faith when they rely on their own methods or unproven assumptions, or when confidence limits exist, however small.

Helping Suggestion: Show that since no one can claim perfect knowledge, it is only reasonable to expect a degree of uncertainty in this mortal life. Discuss the different uses of the words “knowledge” and “to know.”

5. Most LDS people wonder about religious things.

Wondering is a common and natural reaction to all but the most commonplace information. What LDS person, for example, hasn’t had one or more of the following thoughts cross his or her mind at some time?

- Why would God command Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Nephi to kill Laban? Joseph Smith to practice polygamy?
- Did Joseph Smith actually translate gold plates and papyri? Did he find the Garden of Eden?
- Is my bishop (father, husband, stake president, leader) really inspired in this call (decision, release, judgment)?

A popular but misguided approach to dealing with such wondering is to blame Satan or the weakness of the questioner.

Helping Suggestion: Point out that wondering is natural and that unless sin is clearly involved, guilt and repression are unnecessary and only serve to cause pain or to divert attention away from the real issues.

6. Everyone is a believer to some degree; our uncertainties vary in strength.

Latter-day Saints who are uncertain about particular tenets of the religion should not be hasty in applying negative labels to themselves. In time, such negative self-labeling will undermine self-esteem. Alma was right—a little belief is like a seed. Nourishment and care may produce a tall, strong Tree of Knowledge. But that takes faith, time, and work.

Helping Suggestion: Point out that varying strengths of belief in different facets of the gospel are not uncommon and are not the same as unbelief; indeed, it is highly unlikely that any two people will share exactly the same convictions on all issues. Help the person to see that he or she is an integral part of a diverse Church, rather than an outsider. Suggest prioritizing concerns about particular beliefs and faith. (“Which is a more important consideration, that Jesus gave us correct principles of living, or, that coffee is included in the Word of Wisdom?”)

7. Properly approached, questioning is a vital part of the learning process.

Having questions implies a desire to expand the information upon which beliefs are based. Traditional “Mormonism” has always celebrated intelligence as “the glory of God” (D&C 93:36) and proclaims that we are saved no faster than we gain knowledge. Obviously, such commitment to learning cannot be served by suppressing inquiries about the kingdoms of heaven and earth.

On the other hand, questions asked to challenge or accuse are not part of sincere inquiry. Suppose a Church member has trouble understanding why the Lord would command Nephi to kill Laban. How does he or she seek information and express true feelings without sounding distrustful, negative, or dissenting? Such threatening overtones can frequently be avoided by prefacing questions with honest statements of feelings: “I’m troubled by. . . .” “It bothers me greatly, but I am skeptical of...” “My heart tells me. . . .” “I feel anguish when I think about...” “Please don’t misunderstand me; I am a committed, faithful member of the Church, but I have a question I’d like your opinion on...” “This is a question that has caused me a lot of turmoil. I want to talk to you because I respect you. I wonder if you could tell me what you think about (know about)...?” “I wonder if you’ve ever had the same question that’s been running through my mind:...” “I haven’t enough information yet to have a perfect knowledge of the issue, but here’s what I believe (here’s the evidence upon which I base my belief....)”

Helping Suggestion: Show that the pursuit of truth is rarely harmed by sincere questions made in the spirit of humble curiosity. Review with the person nonthreatening ways of asking questions. Encourage the person to be honest about his or her feelings.

8. The blessings of the gospel come through faithfulness and obedience; particular beliefs may vary within certain bounds.

Some LDS people assume that there is only one way to believe in Church teachings. On the contrary, a great deal of freedom exists on matters of belief in religious concerns. Joseph Smith reportedly said, “The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members of the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist” (HC 5:215).

Similarly, President Joseph F. Smith testified before the Congress of the United States that Latter-day Saints “are given the largest possible latitude of their convictions, and if a man rejects a message that I may give to him but is still moral and believes in the main principles of the gospel and desires to continue in his membership in the Church, he is permitted to remain.” In the same setting, he observed:

Members of the Mormon church are not all united on every principle. Every man is entitled to his own opinion and his own views and his own conceptions of right and wrong so long as they do not come in conflict with the standard principles of the Church. If a man assumes to deny God and to become an infidel we withdraw fellowship from him. But so long as a man believes in God and has a little faith in the Church organization, we nurture and aid that person to continue faithfully as a member of the Church though he may not believe all that is revealed. (See the Reed Smoot Hearings record, pp 97-98.)

Helping Suggestion: Show that questions and uncertainties concerning religion should not keep a person from participating in all facets of the Church and need not prevent the person from full enjoyment of gospel blessings. A personal religion compatible with the LDS religion can be established. (Please see Chapter 9.)

9. Not all information is correct; no one source of information is complete.

No single source of information can exhaust the facts concerning any gospel issue. Furthermore, some sources are wrong and others are written to deceive. Still others are well-intentioned but misleading. Historical studies, for example, are subject to many limitations because they involve both the difficult acquisition of factual information and the dubious process of correctly interpreting that information.

Helping Suggestion: Caution the person against jumping to conclusions based on inevitably inadequate information. Reemphasize the need for faith during the information-gathering and knowledge-development phases.

10. An individual can control his or her personal responses to questions and doubts.

Our basic emotions are largely unavoidable: we cannot avoid feelings of sadness when a friend dies; we cannot avoid feelings of joy when we are blessed; and we cannot avoid feeling troubled when we do not understand something important. On the other hand, we can control our reactions to our emotions, and we can manage our behavior. Control and positive management of difficult emotions are always helped by understanding the emotion—its origin, its reason for being, and its potential solutions.

A man's troubled response to doubt and questioning may result in part from the way he was reared. Suppose, for example, as a young boy he innocently asked, "Did Joseph really see God?" If his parent or teacher responded with panic, "Of course he did! How could you ask such a thing?" the child may have concluded that questions are unimportant or bad. As he grew to adulthood, he may have come to see skepticism and curiosity as defects. Personal doubts may have been seen as inappropriate temptations rather than challenges to be explored and investigated. Thus, leaders, teachers, and parents may have unwittingly planted the seeds of trouble years ago.

The person may also be influenced by local responses to perceived skepticism. The local community may foster guilt as a response to doubt and inculcate the notion that questioning is a sign of sin, slothfulness, or error. Such negative reactions represent the fears and weakness of individuals and are not part of the gospel.

Helping Suggestion: Help the person to understand his or her feelings and the local environment. Urge him or her to accept these conditions with patience and love while learning new ways to manage emotions associated with questions and doubts.

11. Religion has a spiritual component that is essential to the process of learning spiritual truths.

Religion has a spiritual dimension, sometimes called the supernatural or metaphysical, which cannot be explained by contemporary empirical methods. And we believe that a person's spirit and mind can be taught truths which cannot be learned otherwise. But such experiences require good works, faith, and a sincere heart. (But there are no guarantees.)

A story is told about a man who wanted desperately to have a witness of the Book of Mormon. He implored God to give him a sign—by winning the Idaho lottery. For years he prayed and fasted to achieve this sign, but to no avail. Finally, in anger, he raised his face to the sky and demanded to know why God had forsaken him. Suddenly he heard a booming voice coming out of the clouds: "Why don't you meet us half way?"

Falling to his knees, the man asked sheepishly, "How?"

The voice thundered out of the cloud again: "By buying a lottery ticket!"

Helping Suggestion: Explore the possibilities of giving the spiritual side of life a better chance to succeed. Investigate the possibility that the person's attitude or approach may be blocking spiritual learning methods. Suggest the person try to meet God half way. (But avoid giving guarantees—some are given *not* to know.)

As in all helping activities, you need to show concern, non-judgement, and understanding for the pain and difficulty the religious doubter may be experiencing. In addition, there are a number of practical suggestions (or challenges) you can offer the person:

- Look within, analyze feelings, and determine your true beliefs; don't be afraid of what you find. Be honest with yourself.
- Recognize that some people may never "know." (D&C 46-13-14)
- Work to be worthy of building faith through prayer, study, and good works.
- Establish personal study programs to expand the information and evidence upon which your beliefs and knowledge are built.
- Give spiritual methods a chance.
- Seek help when needed and admit fallibility. Repent if sin is genuinely involved.
- Talk about questions and doubts in tactful, nonthreatening ways. Be willing to listen to the insights of others. Don't forget to express positive beliefs and levels of faith, too.

Finally, you should leave your friend or loved one with hope. James Francis Cooke said it best: "The most welcomed people of the world are never those who look back upon the bitter frustrations of yesterday, but those who cast their eyes forward with faith, hope, courage, and happy curiosity."

Chapter 2

Wonderful Wondering: Understanding Faith and Belief, Reason and Revelation

Note: I first gave this talk at a Regional Young Adult Fireside in 1983 and have since presented the material in many other settings. My objectives are (1) to encourage more precise communications and intellectual honesty when dealing with religious questions and doubts, and (2) to describe modern differences between faith and belief, distrust and doubt, reason and revelation.

It may help you to know that my official calling in the Church [was at one time] to sojourn with troubled people. Some call it lay counseling, although my mentor at LDS Family Services preferred “ministering.” I am often immersed with people swimming against various emotional tides. Clear communication and honest understanding are two effective life preservers we use to reach calmer waters. Unfortunately, these two lifesavers seem out of reach—or unreal—for some LDS people struggling in the deep waters of our religion.

Many of us have difficulty communicating, both to ourselves and to others, about things that disturb us in our innermost and personal lives. And many of us are embarrassed or uneasy when listening to others with such problems. Many of you have had thoughts or questions like the following. Which would you feel free to verbalize in church? Which have you heard others talking about openly?

- “Would God command (Nephi to murder Laban, Joseph Smith to practice polygamy, the Stake President to excommunicate [a friend or relative])?”
- “Is my (bishop, father, husband, stake president, leader) really inspired in this (decision, call, release, judgment)?”
- “I don’t really know whether or not the (Church, prophet, gospel, Word of Wisdom) is true.”

These are tough issues. Simply mentioning them will cause some listeners to react with uneasiness. Those among us who are unable to resolve such critical personal issues are likely either to drift into the lonely backwaters of closet doubting or to crawl out of the water onto the rocky shores of inactivity.

In thinking about this problem, I have come to the conclusion that our difficulty with communication and understanding stems partly from the blurred and imprecise usage of the most basic terms of the gospel—faith and belief—with their opposites distrust and doubt. We must also understand how they relate to knowledge and reason. Therefore, I want to explore the meanings of these terms with you and discuss how they may be used—and misused—in our personal lives.

*What are the Origins of Our Ideas?
Our Beliefs?*

What is the origin of an individual's ideas and beliefs and where does our knowledge begin? (1) Are these mental conditions born with us? (2) Do we get them only through sensory experiences? (3) Does God reveal them to us naturally (e.g., through the radio or TV)? Are they revealed supernaturally (e.g., through revelation, inspiration, or intuition)?

I think if we opened up the discussion now, we'd find that most of us vaguely believe that all four sources contribute to our knowledge in varying degrees. Certainly, LDS doctrine does not give us specific answers to these questions.

Ask yourself: Where did you get the idea that there is a God? Where did you get the belief that if you pray, God will provide an answer? How do you know the Church is true? Where did such beliefs and knowledge come from? Solid agreement and consistent answers would be highly improbable.

We might agree that everyone thinks. We think and form beliefs about the things around us. We make inferences from our experiences and draw conclusions which govern our actions. And our beliefs are often formed by what we want and what we need.

When the alarm clock rings, we have confidence that morning has arrived. (Yet I still look closely at the alarm clock, then at my watch—thus betraying an unconscious skepticism.) Inserting our key in the lock, we believe the door will open. In fact, our experience with keys is so successful that we “know” the door will open. Stepping on the brake will stop the car. We know it will. We put a lot of trust—a lot of faith—in those brakes. The point is, our lives are literally run by the beliefs developed through our sensory experiences.

But to what extent do beliefs and knowledge come from sources other than experience? And where does reason enter? In many early cultures, people unhesitatingly described the origin of their ideas as the spirits and gods which surrounded them at all times and in all places. Gods were the sources of good ideas and beliefs, devils the sources of wrong or wicked ideas.

Early Greek philosophers suggested that ideas and beliefs originate in sense perceptions and are refined and put to use through reason but that

knowledge depended entirely upon the individual knower: “Your ideas and beliefs are yours, and mine are mine.” Identical sense perception led to different, individual ideas and beliefs. For example, when we hear a Church leader talking about the need for more unquestioning obedience, it sounds very reasonable to some, suspect to others.

Socrates made great contributions to determining and acquiring beliefs and knowledge by developing a system of logical reasoning. Logic is either inductive (starting with facts and generalizing) or deductive (starting with a general principle and applying it to particulars.) Socrates’ major contribution was his suggestion that sense perception is not an infallible approach to obtaining genuine, true knowledge. Our experience can deceive us.

Plato suggested that the soul came to the world already equipped with certain knowledge, a suggestion many of us today find harmonious with our belief in a premortal existence. The role of genetic factors and inherited knowledge is not clear.

During the early Christian era, Augustine added a third level. He taught that human beings received natural ideas through sense perception, and discovered others through reason but also received knowledge through revelation. Revealed knowledge was necessary for higher forms of living, granted as a gift through faith. This led to two levels of truth: that which was substantiated by perceptive, objective reasoning, and that which was substantiated by faith and the authority of the church.

For hundreds of years, this philosophy was used to protect faith in God and, in my opinion, misused to protect religious dogmas, particularly in cases of conflict between doctrines and rational, logical thinking. This approach allowed the dominant church to have a definition of knowledge that extended far beyond that of sense perception and direct, logical experience. When people reached the limits of logically derived knowledge, they were able to accept the doctrines of the church through the divine method of knowledge generation. And it was commonly assumed that divine knowledge was superior to senses-derived and reason-derived knowledge. (Although I’ve described these levels as progressing from lower to higher, it is more likely that they co-existed simultaneously, with different realms for their domain. For example, sensory experience would easily teach a family that the Black Death could kill, and reason would urge them to avoid those who were already plague victims, but “divine” knowledge, as authoritatively pronounced by ecclesiastical leaders, would identify the origin of the plague, not as rat-borne microbes, but as God’s displeasure with human sin.)

Thus, it is easy to see how the dominant church, in addition to supplying answers to ultimate questions about the purpose of life, found itself correcting reason when ideas and beliefs generated through experience, study, and thinking contradicted religious authority. The well-known story of Galileo demonstrates the church’s power to suppress natural knowledge (e.g., a solar system with the sun at its center) to protect “revealed” knowledge (e.g., that the earth on which Adam and Eve were created constituted the center of God’s creations).

Contradictions of authoritarian knowledge did, in fact, bring charges of heresy which lead to excommunication, banishment, and even death in some cases; but despite imbalances of power, revealed knowledge and knowledge based on observation and experimentation, the foundation of today's scientific method, have never been able to supplant each other completely.

Today, as at the beginning of recorded history, religion does not supply certain answer about the specific origins, use, or development of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge. Modern science, however, has adopted an almost total reliance on inductive reasoning based upon experimentation, observation, and testing. If a phenomenon cannot be studied by this method, it is usually considered an improper subject for scientific inquiry. This reliance has been felt strongly in our culture during the past eighty-five years. Indeed it has affected every facet of life, including religion. We expect proof; we are skeptical; we tend to disbelieve any claim made without evidence. How many TV advertisements can you believe, for example? Those who habitually believe are called "gullible."

Most importantly, the scientific era has produced new terms like statistical confidence and normal distribution, and has created new meanings for old terms like belief, knowledge, doubt, faith, and reason.

Defining our Terms. Now we return to the problem I introduced at the beginning. Many of us haven't yet come to terms with the confused and overlapping meanings assigned by science and religion to the same words. Little wonder we have trouble communicating!

To believe. When I say belief, I mean *personal belief*. I will not be referring to belief as a creed, as a list of doctrines, or as a particular church or religious group.

Henry Eyring, at one time the best-known Mormon scientist, made an interesting observation about personal belief: "In this Church we don't have to believe anything that isn't true." This is a wonderful statement, but we need to be careful in our definitions of "believe" and "true." If we don't, we invite trouble into our lives.

In its modern, science-influenced sense, *to believe* is to accept or conclude something from a solid data base. For example, if we flip a coin fifty times and tabulate the results of heads versus tails, we are likely to believe from the evidence that each comes up about equally, although we can't guarantee anything on a single trial.

Personal belief, in this narrow sense, implies a conscious mental acceptance of something as true based on reason, experience, information, evidence, prejudice, or the authority of the thing's source. Unfortunately, as the Greeks suggested, each person's interpretation of the evidence will vary:

- A mother looks at a newborn baby and sees evidence of the existence of God. A biochemist looks at a newborn baby and marvels at the power of evolution.
- A poet looks at a law-abiding universe as sufficient evidence to prove the existence of a creator. An astronomer looks at the universe and believes it to be only a great ordered randomness.

- One university student says her education caused her to lose her religious beliefs; another says an identical education has strengthened her's.
- One person believes in Joseph Smith because of the authority of those who claim his prophethood; another rejects Joseph Smith on the authority of those who deny his work.

Personal beliefs can be modified, verified, strengthened, weakened, and tested by the day-to-day experiences and information supplied to the mind. The strength of beliefs can be measured. The figure on the next page lets you test your beliefs. The scale is calibrated from 0 to 10; 5 represents no belief, opinion, or knowledge, 10 represents positive knowledge ("I know it is correct."), and 0 represents negative knowledge ("I know it is not correct.") Numbers in between represent strengths of belief or doubt.

Where does your belief fall for each statement?

Test of Intellectual Belief

<— Increasing No Opinion Increasing
 Doubt No Belief Belief —>
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. Six divided by zero is zero.
2. The integral of 2 is $2X+c$.
3. Joseph Smith lived.
4. Joseph Smith was a prophet.
5. Joseph Smith's death was part of God's plan.

[See Answers below.]

There are four lessons to be learned from this little quiz. First, belief is not necessarily perfect knowledge. (Were all of your answers "10"?) Second, one may not have sufficient experience or information to have any belief or, at best, have only weak belief. (Could you answer Question 2?). Third, one's beliefs may be in error. (Was your answer to Question 1 correct?) And four, not everyone's answers are the same. (Would your mother's answer to Question 5 be the same as yours?) A more detailed self-assessment instrument appears in Chapter Five, "Personal Beliefs and Church Activity."

How often are our beliefs inaccurate? Unfortunately, more than we might like to admit. At one time the earth was thought to be flat. It looks flat. Our senses tell us it is flat. There are still people who claim to believe in a flat earth. But is it? A stick in water appears bent. We know from the laws of refraction why it seems bent. But at one time in our human history, much effort was made to explain the bending, all futile because the basic belief was in error.

Answers to Test of Intellectual Belief . 1. False. The answer is infinity. 2. True, according to the common rules of integral calculus. 3. The evidence is great that he lived. 4. Your choice. 5. Ditto.

To have faith. Note that the word *faith* has not yet entered into our discussion.

Faith has many meanings, and again, I want to look at a narrow definition related to personal faith. I will not be using faith as a religion, faith as honesty, faith as being staunch, or faith as a religious community, as in “the faithful.”

“Having faith” in something—for example, having a personal faith in the Book of Mormon—implies making a bridge between what we know, or believe, about the book and what the book claims to be. Faith implies assent, acceptance, and a willingness to follow the book’s teachings.

Righteousness and the ability to have faith seem to be related. Job, a righteous man and perhaps the most faithful of all men says, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Peter says, quoting Habakkuk, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

I have a personal belief that faith is a gift from God. I reason that it comes as the result of prayer and fasting. It may be earned. It may wax and wane as a function of righteousness. Faith may come through inspiration and revelation. I may be wrong, but I believe God’s answer to a request for knowledge may often be given as the strength to have faith.

Note that I said *I believe* these things about faith. My thoughts about faith can be changed and expanded upon. On the belief scale shown on page 17, I would place my personal beliefs about faith at about “8.”

There is no stigma attached to simply believing, and conversely, no disgrace attached to saying “I don’t know for sure.”

Faith and belief. Faith and belief are often regarded in religion and philosophy as synonymous. Most dictionaries define one by the other. The scriptures often use them interchangeably. However, let us borrow from the rational vocabulary of science to make a distinction between the two that I think is useful.

Belief implies intellectual assent, while faith implies confidence, trust, and conviction. Belief is passive—an agreement with or acceptance of an existing proposition when it is offered. Faith is active—a reliance and trust which impels one to action. Belief is a product of the mind, faith a product of the heart.

In Matthew 17:18-21, Christ tells the apostles why they were unable to cast out a devil. The seventeenth-century King James version reads: “And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove....”

However, the twentieth-century Revised Standard Version reads: “He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain....’”

Notice that “unbelief” becomes “little faith” in the modern translation. There is an interesting problem related to the word faith: it has no verb form. There are verbs for belief, trust, doubt, knowledge, and reason, that is to believe, to trust, to doubt, to know, to reason. If we need to express faith as action, as a verb, we must use other words: “I believe,” or “I accept,” or “I trust,” or “I have faith in....”

Doctrine and Covenants 49:12 contains the commandment: “Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Ordering someone to believe is like

commanding someone to understand. Can it be done simply as an act of will? Usually not. The commandment seems irrational unless we see the verb “to believe” as synonymous with active faith. God can, in fact, command us to “be faithful.” But if we interpret belief as faith, we should not confuse the opposite of belief (doubt) with the opposite of faith (distrust, nihilism).

When an emotionally distraught person says, “I doubt (and I feel guilty about doubting),” we talk about living by faith. Doubt and faith go together like hunger and food. Hunger drives the search for food and doubt can drive the search for new understanding.

To doubt. Doubt, in the modern sense, means to be unsettled in belief or opinion, to be uncertain or undecided. It means not having sufficient information or evidence upon which to build belief, or having negative evidence. Suppose a scientist administers a particular dose of promising medicine to six diseased rats. They all die. The scientist must conclude that there is not enough evidence to justify belief that the medicine can be effective. Additional trials with other dosages will be necessary before conclusions can be drawn.

The older, religious meanings for doubt are *distrust*, and *to reject*. We are commanded to “doubt not.” In its broad, historical sense, doubt is associated with the most negative of human traits—the absence of trust in God and the rejection of his existence and goodness. Little wonder that doubt still has such a strong negative connotation, even today when skepticism and questioning are taught as highly desirable consumer skills.

Almost every LDS person is prey to religious uncertainties, questions, and doubts of varying intensities. Free agency requires us to make continual choices. The veil ensures that we will never have complete information to be certain that any given choice is correct. A person who fails to tune into his or her awareness, and who represses the natural urge to question to maintain an image of absolute certainty may settle for the appearance of being a believer rather than for its actuality. In those unable to acknowledge and manage doubts, individual conscience and the weight of authority join battle. Eventually, one or the other must be denied for the sake of emotional stability. Unfortunately, the denial of either is not desirable. Denial of conscience creates unthinking robots. Denial of authority results in inactivity and the loss of blessings.

To Question. Questioning is the delightful offspring of doubting. Having questions implies a desire to expand the data base upon which beliefs are built. Questions represent the opportunity to exercise faith.

Unfortunately, questioning is often considered to be a negative activity. Suppose an Elder questions the standard interpretation of why Nephi is justified in killing Laban. It just doesn’t seem to fit the gospel as he understands it. Why would the Lord command one man to kill another? he wonders. How does he seek information and express his true feelings without sounding distrustful, negative, or non-supportive? Which of the following honest statements would not sound threatening in some priesthood classes:

“I am skeptical of...,” “I doubt...,” “My mind says it couldn’t be true that...,” “I have a real question about the interpretation...,” “My understanding of the gospel makes it difficult for me to believe that.”

Such statements might be interpreted by others in the quorum as betrayal, faithlessness, slothfulness, contentiousness, and not being “one with the Brethren.” Such unfortunate interpretations are, however, cultural. They were learned. They can be unlearned.

To know. In a modern, personal, and intellectual sense “to know” is to have a clear understanding, to be relatively sure, to gain intellectual understanding as a result of study, experience, reasoning, or evidence. *Knowledge* is familiarity with, or awareness of, facts and evidence. But in this life nothing can be known with perfection, only with degrees of confidence. Neither science nor earthly religion claims perfect knowledge. Thus, all knowledge is not without reservation. For example, at three o’clock I believe the mail has arrived because it usually comes by then; I am more sure when I look out the window and see an envelope in the mailbox; I know it is there when I go to the box and grasp the envelope; but I am dismayed when I see that the envelope is a flyer put there by the corner gas station. Now I believe the mail is late; I am again surprised to learn that my daughter retrieved the mail at two o’clock and that it is on my desk.

We approach perfect knowledge asymptotically. Science and statistics have developed elaborate methods for testing, verifying, and strengthening the evidence upon which beliefs and knowledge are based. But no test produces perfect knowledge. For example, to determine the toxicity of a chemical, studies may be conducted with mice. Varying amounts of the chemical may be injected to determine the LD-50 (the lethal dose for 50 percent of the mouse sample.) The results suggest the toxicity of the chemical, but few would claim perfect knowledge. In this modern sense, *knowledge* can be thought of as near-perfect or almost infinite belief.

But again, in traditional and religious usage, knowing and knowledge have meanings related to belief. Testimonies often contain statements of “knowing.” This type of knowing has its origins in feelings, emotions, and metaphysical experiences—sources of evidence not generally acceptable to measurement and verification. At some point belief becomes strong enough to be thought of as knowledge. For example, suppose we enter a room, find the light switch, and flip the switch. The light “always” comes on, and we assume to “know” it will always come on, yet we are always startled by a burned-out bulb.

Another source of “knowledge” is the voice of authority. The missionaries, our teachers, or our parents may have told us that God would answer our prayers. The authority of the source was strong enough for us to believe that it could happen. When we prayed, most of us received additional evidence, however subjective, of the truth. Many of us “know” by this method that God answers prayer.

For some, a little evidence is sufficient to graduate a “belief” to “knowledge.” For others a great deal of evidence is required. Suppose a person is phoning a friend. After three rings one person may hang up, “knowing” that the friend is out. Another person may wait ten rings before hanging up. Still another may wait twenty rings “to be sure.” Still, we can never have absolute knowledge that the friend was not home.

Perhaps he or she was in the shower. Perhaps the friend would have picked up the phone on the twenty-first ring.

We all “know” that Joseph Smith lived. At least we’re pretty sure. No one living today has seen him but the circumstantial evidence is excellent. Our confidence in that “knowledge” is high. But was he a prophet? Did God appear to him? Here there is evidence, too. But most of us must be satisfied with subjective evidence—inspiration, feelings, emotions. Our answers to those questions involve faith, making inevitable the emergence of doubts and questions.

Many of us have religious questions and doubts, but they do not mean we distrust God or reject his goodness in our lives. It is okay to have questions. It is okay to ask them.

What can we do when we have questions about our religion? The modern answer is to increase the evidence, to build a stronger data base upon which to believe. (The evidence may be either temporal or spiritual.) This means studying, praying, and working for it. But this is fun and exciting! It makes life fuller. It adds the strength of intelligence to the power of our feelings.

In the meantime, while the evidence is building, we must rely on faith to bridge the gap.

Chapter 3

Bibliographic Essay: What Some Great Thinkers Have Said

Note: In this chapter I list and briefly discuss books and articles on the subjects of faith, belief, doubt, reason, and knowledge that have been helpful to me. The list is not all inclusive, nor is it intended to represent the only important works.

In each commentary, I have tried to represent not only the author's views but also the spirit with which he writes. I lean toward the views and styles of Fowler and Moreno, and perhaps some of that bias will show. In any event, I hope you feel the urge to obtain and read these works and others of more recent vintage. Here are some general conclusions:

— Thinkers on contrasting sides of the spectrum (e.g., Tillich and Talmage, Russell and Pratt) say a lot of the same things and often use the same arguments to prove widely different conclusions.

— The most vigorous critics of faith acknowledge its usefulness and often become its defenders. Similarly, the most vigorous critics of reason depend on reason to make their points.

— All authors write with admirable conviction; many use the universal "we," assuming that every person thinks, acts, and feels as they do.

— Those who defend faith assume God is on their side. Those who defend reason assume God desires human beings to liberate, use, and depend on reason.

— Those who use reason and rational thought to evaluate the human condition eventually increase the number of possible conclusions, never create certainty, and inevitably produce doubt. In doing so, they create the need for faith.

The very need to argue the benefits of faith vs. reason points up our inability to reconcile the two; uncertainty is the only outcome. Each person is then left to choose the amount of reason and faith appropriate for his or her needs.

The following commentaries are listed in approximate chronological order of publication.

Joseph Smith

From the *Doctrine and Covenants; The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (HC, 7 vols.); *Lectures on Faith*, comp. Neal B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City; Bookcraft); and Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft for BYU Religious Study Center, 1980)

Joseph Smith, first prophet and president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was a prolific writer/speaker, and much of his most important work is found in modern-day LDS scripture. Surprisingly, non-scriptural sources attributed to him mention little on the subjects of faith and belief, more on knowledge, and very little on doubt, skepticism, or reason. Perhaps as a dynamic leader, Joseph was more interested in the day-to-day management of the Church, in obtaining and explaining doctrine and gospel applications, and in encouraging knowing over believing. Perhaps as a result of his personal experiences, Joseph believed a person could come to a knowledge of almost anything through study and personal revelation from God.

Faith. In March 1842, Joseph wrote to an editor, John Wentworth, describing the young LDS Church. In the letter he included a thirteen-part statement of the doctrines of the Church—the “Articles of Faith.” The fourth article states that the first four principles of the gospel are “faith in Jesus Christ, . . . repentance, baptism, and . . . the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Personal faith, according to teachings attributed to Joseph Smith, comes by hearing the word of God and through the testimony of the servants of God (HC 3:379). He saw a spectrum of faith among people: “If a man has not faith to do one thing, he may do another; if he cannot remove a Mountain, he may heal the sick” (Ehat and Cook 1980, p. 191).

Faith, for Joseph, was not only a gift of God, but the source of God’s gifts, the very reason for the existence of the gospel’s fruits: “Because faith is wanting, the fruits are. No man has had faith without having some gift along with it. The ancients quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, women received their dead, etc. A man who has none of the gifts has no faith. Faith has been wanting . . . so that tongues, healings, prophecy, and all the gifts and blessings have been wanting” (HC 5:218).

Faith and the physical body. Joseph Smith, in an experience attributed to him, spoke of an act of faith as one which can literally tire the body. “A man who exercises great faith in administering to the sick, blessing little children, or confirming, is liable to become weakened. Elder Grant inquired of me the cause of my turning pale and losing strength last night while blessing children. I told him . . . I strove with all the faith and spirit that would secure their lives upon the earth; and so much virtue went out of me . . . that I became weak, from which I have not yet recovered” (HC 5:303).

Belief. Joseph Smith encouraged a diversity of intellectual beliefs. He once corrected the high council for calling up a man for erring in doctrine. Joseph wrote that he did not like the concept of a creed, which a man must believe or be asked out of the Church. “I want the liberty of

believing as I please, it feels good not be to trammelled. It don't prove that a man is not a good man, because he errs in doctrine" (Ehat and Cook 1980, pp. 183-84).

Knowledge. Joseph Smith was the champion of knowledge: "In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because he has greater Knowledge, and hence he knows how to subject all other beings to him" (Ehat and Cook 1980, pp. 183). Joseph repeatedly taught that knowledge saves, and that no one can be exalted except by knowledge, but knowledge is only given as people are prepared for it. "The Lord deals with this people as a tender parent with a child, communicating light and intelligence and the knowledge of His ways as they can bear it."

In Joseph's scriptures (the Doctrine and Covenants), faith and belief are mentioned at least twenty times, primarily as they relate to faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel. Doubt and disbelief are mentioned seven times, light and knowledge, forty-five times—almost always exhorting the reader to obtain or receive knowledge.

For me, Joseph Smith emerges as a strong leader urging his followers to be believers, to be faithful, and above all, to be knowledgeable. This is a prophet of God who taught that the glory of God is intelligence; and he put his faith in a knowledgeable body of followers.

Orson Pratt

"True Faith," in *Lectures on Faith*, comp. by Neal B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft)

A review of Orson Pratt's essay, "True Faith," the second part of the book *Lectures on Faith*, is included here as an interesting counterpoint to *The Will to Doubt* by Bertrand Russell. Each man represents opposing sides of the faith/reason spectrum—and yet they exhibit curious similarities. Pratt's essay is presented in a forceful, scholarly, and reasoned format, not unlike Russell's. Each uses similar arguments to prove different points about faith

Faith, Pratt asserts, is not an abstract principle, separate and distinct from the mind, but is a definite state of the mind itself. "When the mind believes any subject, or statement, or proposition, whether correct or incorrect, it is then in possession of faith. To have faith is simply to believe" (p. 70). For Pratt, belief and faith are synonymous, often interchangeable in theory and usage.

Faith requires evidence, and Pratt says that without such evidence one cannot believe or have faith in anything. He acknowledges only two types of faith: true faith based on true evidence and *false* faith. A false faith originates when one believes in false evidence.

Fortunately, "faith in every word of God, whether ancient or modern, is always produced by evidence that is true, and calculated to give the greatest assurance to the mind" (p. 71). Since faith is based on evidence, faith's strength varies with the weight of evidence. Where evidence is doubtful, faith will be weak; where evidence is strong, faith will be strong; where there is no evidence to the contrary, then again faith should be

strong. However, an exception to these rules can be found in minds where “judgement becomes so weak and beclouded . . . and in minds so impaired or vitiated that the evidence . . . produces no sensible impression on the mind” (p. 71). Pratt continues on for several long paragraphs describing various deceptive and false evidences, and the causes of impaired minds—false religious teachings.

Orson Pratt, following Joseph Smith’s lead, says that faith is the source of action. Faithful acts or works parallel a person’s faith. Idolatrous faith produces idolatrous works; faith in false doctrines leads to wicked practices; and “faith in a divine message or new revelation will lead to works in accordance with the requirements contained therein” (p. 73). The effect of a true and correct faith is a sincere and thorough repentance followed by baptism and confirmation by the Holy Ghost.

Faith alone, however, will not save men or women. Even faith and works are not enough unless they are of the “proper” kinds. Pratt proceeds, with admirable vigor, to explain the restoration and its place in assuring proper faith and works. (A single paragraph continues for over two pages. It’s like listening to an excited man who never takes a breath, and it requires great courage on the part of the reader to begin the long journey.)

Like others, Pratt believes faith to be a gift of God. But God will not bestow this gift, even though “purchased for the man not by his own works, but by the blood of Christ” (p. 82). It, as well as other heavenly gifts, cannot be bestowed without works— “...before he can receive and enjoy them he must exercise his agency, and accept them, ...and then only in God’s own appointed way” (pp. 82-83). Pratt concludes his spirited explanation by describing the gift of faith as strictly contingent upon obedience to latter-day gospel laws, ordinances, and principles.

Pratt was probably writing to investigators of the Church, because much of the essay is typical of arguments probably encountered at early missionary meetings: “Reader, are you a believer or an unbeliever? Do signs follow you, according to the promise of Jesus? Have you ever cast out devils? Have you ever had faith to prevail against deadly poisons? If not, then you are not a gospel believer, and are included in the class which Jesus says shall be damned. Your condition is a fearful one, without the true faith, without hope, without salvation, exposed to the wrath which must fall upon unbelievers” (p. 92).

William James

The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York, Mentor, 1958).

William James is widely recognized as one of the great modern philosophical minds. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a compilation of lectures presented at the University of Edinburgh in 1902, has become a major contribution to religious literature.

Jacques Barzun, in a foreword written for the 1958 edition, suggests that “the reader will not find James a conventional scientist who used the facts of physiology or psychology to explain away the facts of religious

life . . . As a student of religion he has illuminated a wonderful variety of recorded experiences by grouping, comparing, and analyzing them.”

William James lived and wrote in an era pre-dating modern statistical methods. His findings, as such, are based on anecdotal evidence and represent the conclusions of a single brilliant mind. However, I suspect he might, even today, use the same nonscientific methods because his major conclusion is that religion is ultimately a personal and metaphysical phenomenon, and thus is not easily studied through scientific, systematic methods.

James confines himself to the study of personal religion: “I . . . ignore the institutional branch entirely, to say nothing of the ecclesiastical organization, consider as little as possible the systematic theology and ideas about the gods themselves, and confine myself to personal religion pure and simple” (p. 41). Personal religion proves itself more fundamental than any other approach: “Churches, when once established, live at second-hand upon tradition; but the founders of every church owed their power originally to their direct personal communion with the divine” (p. 42). James defines personal religion as the feelings, the acts, and the experiences of individuals alone as they understand themselves and their relationship to God.

As for belief and faith in such a personal religion, James has a number of observations.

Belief and happiness. Personally experiencing religion produces “wonderful inner paths to a supernatural kind of happiness.” This happiness seems proof to believers of the truth of their personal religion. When a belief makes a person feel happy, the person will inevitably adopt it, or acknowledge its veracity, or at least suggest that it ought to be true. And because it ought to be true, then it is true—such is the inferential logic used by the true believer. (See pp. 77-79)

Faith. James suggests that a broad definition of a religious life consists of faith in an unseen order, and the consequent adjusting of oneself to this order. This “religious attitude,” cannot be readily understood. He repeats Immanuel Kant’s theory that such things are not objects of knowledge and that they cannot be understood with the intellect. And yet, they can have deep meaning for the practice of religion. “We can act as if there were a God; lay plans as if we were immortal, and find a genuine difference in our moral life. Faith that these things actually exist allows us to act as if we knew what they might be, should we be allowed to conceive them. Thus we have a mind believing in the reality of a set of things of which the mind can form no real notion.” Personal religion, for James, is an affair of faith, based either on vague sentiment (which is a dishonest religion), or upon a vivid sense of the reality of things unseen. Neither science nor philosophy can explain it—faith is only explainable by the fact of personal experience. (See pp. 58-60, 329, 346-347)

James E. Talmage

A Study of the Articles of Faith (1899; Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1982 printing)

The *Articles of Faith* is a compilation of Talmage's many lectures delivered at "the Church University and other schools." Talmage's stated purpose was to provide "an incentive and serviceable guide to earnest investigation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Preface to 12th Edition).

Talmage takes as his subject the list of *Articles of Faith of the Church*, adopted in 1890 as "a guide in faith and conduct." The *Articles of Faith* present important doctrines but do not necessarily represent a complete exposition of LDS belief since the Church teaches the principle of continuing revelation.

The nature of faith. Talmage often quotes scripture to explain faith, e.g., Paul's "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Talmage then proceeds to define the correct meaning of the quoted scripture, e.g., Paul's word "substance" means "confidence or assurance", and "evidence" means "the demonstration of proof." Talmage addresses faith only as it pertains to the "full confidence and trust in the being, words, and objectives of God and Christ" (p. 96). And full confidence and trust remove all doubt concerning the things of God.

The personal faith Talmage describes may exist in persons in varying degrees—"Faith may manifest itself from the incipient state which is little more than feeble belief, scarcely free from hesitation and fear, to the strength of abiding confidence that sets doubt and sophistry at defiance" (p. 97).

Faith, belief, and knowledge. Each term has a specific meaning to Talmage, although in scriptural usage little distinction is recognized and noted. Belief, however, is for Talmage "passive, an agreement or acceptance only; faith is active and positive, embracing such reliance and confidence as will lead to works" (p. 97).

Faith in Christ is belief in Christ coupled with trust. For Talmage, one cannot have faith without some belief. Indeed, faith is vitalized living belief. Furthermore, faith is a prerequisite to salvation, a saving power.

Knowledge is described as superior belief, neither of which is sufficient to provide salvation. Having knowledge does not assure a better life or more understanding. Knowledge is to wisdom what belief is to faith—the former are abstract, the latter living applications.

How to build faith. Unlike many other writers, Talmage suggests ways to develop faith. The major requirement is "acceptance of God's will as our law, and of his words as our guide" (p. 100). Every being is blessed with some measure of faith—"One's faith may be weak and imperfect, for his ability to recognize the evidence upon which belief in God depends may be small. From trustworthy evidence, rightly interpreted, true faith will spring" (p. 100).

Faith, based upon evidence and rightful conclusions, is strengthened largely by the number of credible witnesses. "However improbable a

declaration may appear to us, if the truth of it be affirmed by witnesses in whom we have confidence, we are led to admit the statement, at least provisionally, is true” (p. 101). For example, how does one who has never been to Washington know of the city, of the President, or of the authority of government? He will hear the testimony of those who have been there, see the pictures and books describing the place, and will learn of the laws emanating from the place. Inferences and evidence mount and develop into conviction. He acquires faith in the existence of a center of national government. This approach leads to the inevitable comparison to the question of the existence and authority of God. Holy men and women in ancient and modern times testify of him and teach his ways. Thus the foundation of faith in God is the belief and knowledge of him as “sustained” by holy testimony and authoritative declarations.

Faith as power. For Talmage faith is power. It is the very motive force by which people act. Students would not study if they had no faith in the possibility of success following study; farmers would not plant without the faith of a harvest. “Remove man’s faith in the possibility of any desired success and you rob him of the incentive to strive. Faith is the secret of ambition, the soul of heroism, the motive power of effort” (p. 103).

Faith is conditional. A conscious effort to live in accordance with the laws of God is essential to exercising a personal faith in God. If a man knows he is sinning, he will deprive himself of faith and estranges himself from God. Furthermore, without faith, an essential to salvation, it is impossible to please God. “Christ’s words on the matter are conclusive: ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but that believeth not shall be damned’” (p. 106). Talmage adds that faith is a gift of God, but “it is given only to those who show by their sincerity that they are worthy of it, and who give promise of abiding by its dictates” (p. 107). And without works, faith will die as expressed by James in the New Testament.

Talmage closes by denying the Protestant claim to salvation by grace. “Yet in spite of the plain word of God, dogmas of men have been promulgated to the effect that by faith alone may salvation be attained, and that a wordy profession of belief shall open the doors of heaven to the sinner. The scriptures cited and man’s inherent sense of justice furnish a sufficient refutation of these false assertions” (p. 108).

Of interest is Talmage’s quote (in the appendix) from a letter from J. M. Sjordahl, co-author of *The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, related to the use of the nouns faith and belief, and the verb “to believe” in the Bible. “The Greek word ‘pistis’ has been translated ‘faith’ 235 times and ‘belief’ once. We have no English verb for faith, but use ‘to believe’ which by derivation means ‘to live.’ In our language ‘to believe’ certainly admits of degrees of assurance, (from the slightest perception to the fullest assurance) . . . but that is not the way it is used in the Bible by the original authors. In their vocabulary ‘belief’ is full assurance and ‘to believe’ is ‘to live’ accordingly” (p. 479).

Bertrand Russell

The Will to Doubt (New York, Philosophical Library, 1958)

In this 125-page collection of essays, Bertrand Russell pits his skeptical nature against all obstacles to a reasoned and rational way of life. His wrath is kindled against the orthodox, the powerful, the unthinking, the rich, those who rely on feelings over intellect, and anyone he feels stands in the way of reason.

Origins of belief. Russell is the champion of rational thinking, which he defines as the “habit of taking account of all relevant evidence in arriving at a belief. Where certainty is unattainable, a rational man will give weight to the most probable opinion, while retaining others, which have an appreciable probability, in his mind as hypotheses which subsequent evidence may show to be preferable” (pp. 9-10).

For those who have read the summary of Orson Pratt’s “True Faith,” this call for evidence will sound familiar. Yet I see these two men as opposites. What then of their similar demand for evidence to establish truth? In Pratt’s case, acceptable evidence includes all sources: desire, tradition, testimony, feelings, intellectual conclusion, sensory input, revelation, inspiration, and the voice of authority, among others. Russell rejects all sources of evidence which are not rational, objective, scientific, or observable with the physical senses: “It is this kind of objective truth—a mundane and pedestrian affair—that is sought in science. It is this kind also that is sought in religion so long as people hope to find it. It is only when people have given up the hope of proving that religion is true in a straight-forward sense that they set to work to prove that it is “true” in some [other] sense. It may be laid down broadly that irrationalism, i.e., disbelief in objective fact, arises almost always from the desire to assert something for which there is no evidence, or to deny something for which there is good evidence” (p. 11). Russell suggests that many religious beliefs are often contrary to fact and based on wishes, prejudice, fear, or traditions.

Russell does not hide his disdain for religions and religious faith. “I am myself a dissenter from all known religions, and I hope that every kind of religious belief will die out. I do not believe that, on balance, religious belief has been a force for good” (p. 18). He believes that religions belong to the infancy of human reason and that they will eventually die out. He states that religions not only promulgate erroneous beliefs but that they stifle free thinking and the free exchange of ideas. He champions the right for “free competition” between differing beliefs; he defends the right for one to state his beliefs with no penalty for differing from others.

Doubt. William James coined the phrase, “will to believe.” Russell supports and urges the “will to doubt.” He observes that those not in power, not rich, and not in the group “dare not be frank in their beliefs” (p. 21). As for certainty, no one’s beliefs are quite true; no one can know of a surety that they are. All have at least a shade of vagueness or the slight possibility of error. “The methods of increasing the degree of truth in our beliefs are well known; they consist of hearing all sides, trying to ascertain all the relevant facts, controlling our own bias by discussion with

people who have the opposite bias, and cultivating a readiness to discard any hypothesis which has proved inadequate" (p. 22). He notes that in the scientific method, where something approximating genuine knowledge can be found, scientists' attitudes remain tentative and questioning.

Russell asks, "If it can be admitted that a condition of rational doubt would be desirable, why is there so much irrational certainty in the world?" (p. 23). He assigns the blame to human nature, credulity, state-or church-supported education, propaganda, and economic pressure. Education is indicted because it teaches facts, not ideas; ways of doing, not ways of thinking; and falsehoods, not truth (e.g., in faith-promoting and patriotism-promoting history, truth is not always the primary concern). Russell suggests that education should "have two objects: first to give definite knowledge, and second, to create mental habits which allow people to make sound judgments for themselves. [But today] it is not desired that people should think for themselves, because it is felt that people who think for themselves are awkward to manage and cause administrative difficulties. Only the guardians, in Plato's language, are to think; the rest are to obey, or to follow the leaders like sheep" (pp. 26-28).

Propaganda stifles rational thought because its appeal is usually to irrational causes of belief rather than to serious arguments of both sides of an issue. It also gives an advantage to those who can afford it—the rich and powerful. If rational thought is to have a chance, if there is to be any freedom of thought, then equality of opportunity among opinions is essential. Russell strongly (but naively) believes that people will choose the right, given all the facts in an unemotional atmosphere.

The other hinderance, economic pressure, is again a weapon waged by the powerful and rich against the poor and weak. It is necessary for the average person, if he or she wants to make a living, to avoid incurring the hostility of certain powerful individuals. Likewise, one can only remain a member of a group, social or economic, if he or she adheres to the group rules, rules which are laid down by the strongest of the group.

Russell takes pains to disengage himself from scientific findings only, I feel, and to associate himself with the scientific method. "My plea is for the spread of the scientific temper, which is different from the knowledge of scientific results. The scientific temper is capable of regenerating mankind" (p. 36).

He proposes only one "doctrine": *It is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no evidence whatever for supposing it is true* (p. 38). This seems reasonable enough, but we must remember that Russell rejects all evidence except that which is objective, repeatable, sensible, and scientific. Strangely, he again makes a statement almost identical to James E. Talmage's suggestion that the testimony of reliable witnesses should take precedence, and almost in the same words—" . . . the opinion of experts, when it is unanimous, must be accepted by non-experts as more likely right than the opposite opinion" (p. 39). And he suggests three rules to live by— "(1) . . . when the experts are agreed, then the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain; (2) when they are agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert; and (3) when they all hold that no evidence for a positive opinion exists, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgement" (p. 39).

His distrust of non-objective, emotions-derived evidence is heavy. “The opinions that are held with passion are always those for which no good ground exists; indeed the passion is the measure of the holder’s lack of rational conviction. Opinions in religion are almost always held passionately. [And] people hate skeptics far more than they hate the passionate advocates of opinions hostile to their own” (p. 40).

Beliefs as a source of action. Russell suggests that most of life is driven by habit and instinct but that the most important decisions are based on belief—a man marries a woman believing she is something special; a woman invests in a stock believing that the company is sound and that the investment will pay off; a man supports a religious tenet believing it to be true. He further suggests that many of our beliefs are based on insufficient objective evidence—particularly as they relate to marriage, investments, religion, and other important personal activities.

Faith and belief. Russell mixes his usage of faith and belief. He suggests that modern faith is not of “the same intensity of belief as was possible for St. Thomas Aquinas.” This reduction of “faith intensity” is attributed to the greater intellectual influences on life, to the increase of objective evidence about the reality of nature, and to the present-day concern about the effects of religion in the world as opposed to concern about the after-life. “By subordinating God to the needs of this sublunary life, [people] cast suspicion upon the genuineness of their faith. They think that God, like the Sabbath, was made for man.” (p. 53) Belief and personal faith are seldom determined by rational motives, and the same is true of disbelief and nihilism, though religious skeptics often overlook this aspect.

Russell questions the validity of personal beliefs and suggests that people’s conscious beliefs (or faith) are not consistent with their unconscious beliefs. He uses death as an example, stating that the belief that death is a gateway to a better life ought logically to prevent us from feeling the fear of death. But to the contrary, believers in an after-life are no less afraid of death or more courageous than those who hold no such belief or faith. The discrepancy seems to be that religious beliefs are held in the conscious mind, and they have not been able to alter the true beliefs of the unconscious mind.

Truth and knowledge. Russell relates that truth was absolute in his youth. He accepted that view and went about searching for “the truth” with gusto. Unfortunately, he says, his search was ruined by psychology, pragmatism, behavioral sciences, and Einstein’s relativity physics. In the old days the body was known to be matter, the spirit (or mind) immaterial and eternal. Everybody knew that—it was obvious to any rational man. Now along comes science which says that matter is really empty space, made up of unknown particles floating in a void, particles which will probably turn out to be simply energy. And the seemingly eternal mind turns out to be bio-chemical in nature, subject to the laws of chemistry. Can memory survive death when all the memory-retaining chemistry disappears at death?

As for knowledge, it is “coming to be regarded not as a good in itself, or as a means of creating a broad and humane outlook on life in general, but as merely an ingredient in technical skill (p. 72). “Useless” knowledge, which is driven by curiosity and knowledge that is not directly related to

job or skill, when successfully integrated into the personality, forms a person's character, thought processes, and desires, and makes it possible for him to be of use socially. "Perhaps the most important advantage of 'useless' knowledge is that it promotes a contemplative habit of mind" (p. 77). "Curious learning not only makes unpleasant things less unpleasant, but also makes pleasant things more pleasant" (p. 78). Curious learning and useless knowledge are also the keys to enhancing productive doubting.

Paul Tillich

Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper and Row, 1957)

Dynamics of Faith represents one of the major works on the defense of faith written the past century. Tillich's stated purpose is to reinterpret the confusing and multitudinous meanings attached by centuries of tradition to the simple act of personal faith: "There is hardly a word in the language which is subject to more misunderstandings, distortions, and questionable definitions than the word 'faith.' Today the word is more productive of disease than of health. It confuses, misleads, creates alternately skepticism and fanaticism, intellectual resistance and emotional surrender, rejection of religion and subjection to substitutes" (Introductory remarks).

Personal faith. Tillich suggests that personal faith should be considered as one's *ultimate concern*. If all other concerns are subject to this ultimate concern, then this type of faith promises total fulfillment. A good example of this is the ultimate concern of many LDS—God the Father. He (God) is the One in whose name the great commandment is given: "Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength." These words describe the character of Tillich's faith—the demand of total surrender to the subject of ultimate concern. There can be no faith without a content to which it is directed—faith must always have a purpose. Unfortunately, some put their ultimate concern in money, power, status, people, sex, etc.

This approach may, on first reading, seem narrow, cold, methodical, and inflexible. But Tillich proceeds throughout the rest of the book to soften, humanize, enliven, enrich, and personalize his definition of faith. For Tillich, faith as ultimate concern is the commitment of the total person—the emotional, the intellectual, and the physical. The ultimate concern becomes the center of life and includes all life's elements. Faith thus becomes the most personal and intimate of all personal acts, unconscious and conscious, and freely performed. However, "faith is not a creature of the will. In the ecstasy of faith the will to accept and to surrender is an element, but not the cause. And this is true also of feeling. Faith is not an emotional outburst; certainly faith is in it, as in every act of spiritual life, but emotion does not produce faith" (pp. 1-10). The ultimate concern gives depth, direction, and unity to all other concerns, and to the personality of the person.

Faith and doubt. The act of faith is the finite turning to the infinite. Faith may be certain at the finite level but must be uncertain at the infinite level. The element of uncertainty in faith is unremovable and must be accepted as part of any act of faith. It takes courage to accept uncertainty. But

where there is courage, there is the potential for failure. In every act of faith, this risk of failure must be taken (with possibly devastating results if the faith act fails). The courage of faith is made possible because people “are never able to bridge the infinite distance between the infinite and the finite from the side of the finite” (p. 105). But we are willing to take the risk of a faith act because even failure cannot separate us from our ultimate concern.

All this suggests the relation of faith to doubt: “If faith is understood as belief that something is true, doubt is incompatible with the act of faith. If faith is understood as being ultimately concerned, doubt is a necessary element in it. It is a consequence of the risk of faith. [But] the doubt which is implicit in faith is not a doubt about facts or conclusions. It is not the same as doubt which is the life blood of scientific research” (pp. 18-19). The doubt Tillich defines is neither one of skepticism nor one of rejection. Rather, it is the doubt associated with risk. “It is not the permanent doubt of the scientist, and not the transitory doubt of the skeptic, but it is the doubt of him who is ultimately concerned . . . the existential doubt. [Faithful doubt] does not question whether a proposition is true or false. It does not reject truth, but is aware of the element of insecurity in truth. At the same time, the doubt of faith accepts this insecurity and takes it into itself in an act of courage” (p. 20).

Tillich’s insight on doubt has a practical significance for LDS people who doubt. Many feel unwarranted guilt, anxiety, and despair about what they perceive as “a loss of faith.” Better understood, doubt is a confirmation of faith, suggesting the unconditional nature of the ultimate concern.

Some have suggested that there is a quiet certainty associated with faith that results in a lack of doubt. And one finds in the faithful a serenity of life. But among those for whom such a state has been achieved—saints and others firm in their faith—an element of undeniable doubt still remains.

Tillich asks an important question for members of the Church: “Can a community of faith, e.g., a church, accept a faith which includes doubt as an intrinsic element and calls the seriousness of doubt an expression of faith? And even if it could allow such an attitude in its ordinary members, could it permit the same in its leaders?” (p. 23). Such an attitude would be foreign to LDS tradition in the 21st century.

Faith and knowledge. Tillich suggests that faith is regularly misinterpreted as “knowledge that has a low degree of evidence.” (In this definition, faith is mistaken for belief.) “Knowledge is a matter of inquiry by ourselves or those we trust. Almost all the struggles between faith and knowledge are rooted in the wrong understanding of faith as a type of knowledge which has a low degree of evidence but is supported by religious authority” (p. 33).

Faith and belief. Belief is related more to knowledge than to faith. Tillich writes, “No command to believe and no will to believe can create faith. This is important for religious education. One should never convey the impression that faith is a demand made upon them, the rejection of which is lack of good will. Finite man cannot produce infinite concern. Our will cannot produce the certainty which belongs to faith. Neither arguments

for belief nor the will to believe can create faith” (pp. 36-38).

Unfortunately, Tillich offers no sure method for creating faith.

Faith and reason. For Tillich, reason and faith (as ultimate concern) do not conflict because reason supplies the tools for controlling reality, and faith supplies the direction in which control may be exercised: “. . . reason is identical with the humanity of man. It is the basis of language, freedom, and creativity. It is involved in the search for knowledge, the experience of art, and it makes a centered personal life possible. If faith were the opposite of reason, it would tend to dehumanize man. A faith which destroys reason destroys itself and the humanity of man, for a being of reason is able to be ultimately concerned . . .” (pp. 74-77). As such, reason is the precursor to faith, and faith is the extension of reason beyond its achievable bounds.

Faith and action. The actions of faith—its “dynamics”—are found in the tensions between participation and separation of the faithful person and his or her ultimate concern. But without participation, one cannot be concerned about it. Likewise, the faithful person must be separated from the objects of his or her faith. Otherwise, it would be a matter of certainty, not of faith. Participation encourages the coming of certainty; separation engenders doubt.

Faith also affects life’s action by uniting the mental life and by giving it a dominating center. It becomes the discipline which regulates daily life; it encourages contemplation and thinking; it enables one to concentrate on ordinary work or on other human beings; it supports love and its activities.

Faith is concerned with the desires and activities of love; it is the object of unconditional love; it fuels the love of God and man. Faith is “love in a sense of the desire for reunion with that to which one belongs. Love and action are . . . not external to faith [as it would be if faith were less than ultimate concern] but are elements of the concern itself. The separation of faith and love is always the consequence of the deterioration of religion” (pp. 99-115).

For Tillich, love is action just as faith is action; faith implies love; and the expression of love is action. The real link between faith and works is love.

Eric Hoffer

The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row, 1951)

Hoffer’s first successful book, *The True Believer*, is about fanatics in mass movements. I include a comment or two here for the purpose of distinguishing the religious believer—the type we are interested in—from the fanatical adherent to a mass movement who is prepared to die for the cause. These latter True Believers are prepared to accept unquestioning blind faith as the entrance fee to the group.

There is, of course, a certain similarity between types of faith, types of dedication to a cause, types of self-sacrifice, and types of acceptance. But there are differences, too, and these predominate. Hoffer’s true believer has fanatical faith, is ready to sacrifice life for a holy cause, and is

frustrated to extremes with life as it is. The religious believer is one tuned in to himself and to his relationship to God and humanity. Religious belief coupled with faith brings independence, an independence which frees the person to do good and love others. Hoffer's true believer loses his independence in the corporateness of the mass movement and finds only the freedom to hate, bully, torture, murder, and lie—all without guilt or remorse.

We occasionally spot Hoffer-brand True Believers involved in the Church, but they normally find themselves un-welcome and alienated from the main stream.

Richard C. Poll

"What the Church Means to People Like Me," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 2 (Winter 1968): 107-117; "Liahona and Iron Rod Revisited," *Dialogue*, Vol. 18 (Spring 1985): 69-78.

Richard Poll, a retired BYU professor of history, presented his original 1968 essay at a Palo Alto ward sacrament meeting. This seminal paper has also appeared in the RLDS *Saints' Herald* and over 2,500 re-prints have been distributed. Poll's metaphors for LDS faithful—Iron Rods and Liahonas—have become well-worn terms among Latter-day Saints. His 1985 essay offers additional insights.

In the earlier essay, Poll suggested that there are two different types of active "Mormons," both of whom are dedicated and faithful to the gospel. Unfortunately, each is skeptical about and suspicious of the other's dedication and commitment to the Church.

Poll states that his purpose in writing is to help move both kinds of LDS people toward a "unity of faith." In the later essay, he says his purpose in writing is to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

The metaphor for one type is the Iron Rod from Lehi's dream; the second derives from the same—the Liahona. The Iron Rod is the sure word of God, while the Liahona was a guiding compass. Both describe ways of approaching the gospel.

For the Iron Rod person, each step along the journey of life is facilitated by keeping his or her hand on the rod; he or she has only to hold on. The way is not easy, but it is clear. For the Liahona, life's direction is not so clear. The Liahona points in the right direction, but the clarity of the path varies with the person's vision and understanding. These questions illuminate the difference: Do the revelations of God provide a handrail or a compass? Is the gospel prescriptive or suggestive?

Poll says that Iron Rod members do not look for questions but for answers. And the gospel has all the answers. Liahona members, on the other hand, are preoccupied with questions and are skeptical of pat answers. They don't see all the answers but accept those they find. They find enough to motivate and give direction to their lives. The problem arises because Iron Rod members see a questioning attitude as an imperfect faith and commitment; Liahona members see an unquestioning spirit as naive and dangerous, particularly if an erroneous belief is accepted as fact.

Poll offers no convincing explanation as to why or how these two types evolve. He suggests that conversion processes, education, upbringing, parents, the preexistence, and life's experiences may all influence the outcome. And no one selects the type he or she will be; it just happens. However, Poll observes that people may move from one extreme to the other, more commonly from Iron Rod to Liahona. He also acknowledges that a continuum exists—people don't fit simply into only one of the two extremes. He also suggests that a person may be an Iron Rod in some respects and a Liahona in others.

Confronted with matters of faith and belief, Iron Rod members pray for answers and frequently get them. Liahona members pray for strength to cope with uncertainty and for understanding, and they frequently have those prayers answered. Iron Rod members pray for knowledge; Liahonas pray for faith.

The Iron Rod member is convinced that the "mind and will of the Lord may be obtained" on any subject through scripture, authority, and the Holy Spirit (p. 110, 1968). The Liahona, lacking this confidence, is skeptical of the three sources: Scriptures are not always inspired and may contain mistakes. Authorities differ and make mistakes. Blindly following anything as subjective as "the burning in the bosom" is fraught with danger.

Iron Rod members consequently may develop answers where none exist. This confidence in personal insights may make them dogmatic, impatient, and inflexible—even in the face of new revelation. Liahonas, on the other hand, are often led to broaden their questioning and doubting until "even the most clearly defined Church doctrines and policies are included" (p. 112, 1968). They may be drawn into carping criticism of Church leaders, and their ties to the Church may become nebulous and meaningless. They may become hypocritical in their own eyes, and their testimonies may become so selective that they serve only as an emotional defense.

It is Poll's hopeful observations that both types serve the Church, that both hold positions of responsibility, and both find programs and policies they can identify with. It is not a question of black hats vs. white hats. Virtue and vice can be found in individuals in both groups. In matters of doctrinal opinion, "the distinction is discernible in responses to the question: Is the more reliable test of the validity of a statement its substance or its source?" (p. 72, 1985). Iron Rod members see authorities and scripture as the more important; Liahonas see the substance of the proposition as more important—Is it reasonable? Is it true? Is it useful? Is there something better?

In his 1985 essay, Poll suggests that whether a person identifies with either group is not particularly critical. Indeed, the need may never arise, because "a typical LDS commitment is not to a set of rigorously examined truth propositions, but to a collection of activities, values, attitudes, hopes, customs, emotions, support systems, and verbal and visual symbols" (p. 73, 1985). Sharing many of these components of testimony, Latter-day Saints who see themselves as Iron Rod members or Liahona members "can abide each other without difficulty as long as they have the spirit of Christ" (p. 78, 1985).

Francisco Jose Moreno

Between Faith and Reason: Basic Fear and the Human Condition (New York: Harper/Colophon Books, 1977).

The subtitle of this 130-page book is drawn from Moreno's observation that much of human activity and thought is generated by what he calls basic fear. With basic fear, it is difficult to identify the threat; not knowing causes the fear. For example, fear of darkness is not the same as fear in an impending auto crash where we know the source and the outcome of the tragedy; we perceive the threat and it is a real threat. Feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and insecurity are caused by basic fear. Reasoning and thinking about the unknown arouse basic fear because reason asks questions which may have no rational, observable answers. Thus "basic fear results from our humanness" because humans alone can reason (p. 7).

A common reaction to basic fear is to repress or avoid the unknown, or to deny the associated feelings. We may move the painful and troublesome emotions from the conscious mind to the unconscious. We may try to find comfort in answers that are not based on reason, i.e., we find answers in faith and in the voices of authority found in religion. We are willing to accept "non-rational" answers. (Moreno uses "non-rational" in the place of "irrational" because he wants to disassociate his meaning from the connotations of incoherence and absurdity which "irrational" has acquired. Non-rational means that the answer is not founded on modern rules of reason and scientific inquiry.)

Beliefs. All religions have formed around a list of beliefs (a creed) and a group of ceremonies. Moreno defines creed as a list of answers to the unknowable questions: What is the purpose of life? Where did we come from and where will we go after death? Why must we die? General principles ("God exists") Moreno calls values; specific points of doctrine ("God has a body") he calls beliefs. The distinction is not always clear, but the basic difference is that values do not change, while beliefs may vary without overturning values. ("God could exist outside his body.") Creeds vary with the times and seasons.

And so we see religions being formed to answer rational questions which cannot satisfactorily be explained through reason and objective evidence. "The question as to who made the universe is the result of a rational process. In our experience we see things being created and we observe a certain logical sequence from their beginning to their end. We apply rational logic to our experience and observations and ask who or what created us. A religious answer to the question can be accepted only by the suspension of rational logic. 'God created the universe' is a non-rational answer because the acceptance of this answer depends on faith and trust rather than on any logically demonstrated proof. A nonrational answer to a rational question is thus produced in order to satisfy our emotional need for security. The religious answer is accepted through an inner intuitive perception which does not depend on the rational process. In other words, the validity of the answer does not rely on whether or not we can find out if the universe was actually created by God, but on

whether we believe it to be so. As those in religion never tire of saying, the truth is not acquired through reason, but through faith” (p. 85).

Faith and reason. Faith, for Moreno, is the suspension of our rational abilities and the acceptance of non-rational answers to our unanswerable questions. One can exercise faith in areas other than religion. Falling in love is an act of faith, for example. Moreno acknowledges the confusing multiplicity of meanings for faith, but states that his work is restricted to personal faith, “a phenomenon that takes place in the individual mind. Even when faith is expressed collectively, its essence remains individual” (p. 86). Moreno describes faith as the bridge between a rational question and a non-rational answer.

Although we may be willing to suspend the rational as an integral part of an act of faith, this does not mean that we completely lose our ability to reason. In fact, once we have established faith, we use reason to defend and explain it. “We use reason to defend what we believe in, but not to question the validity of the act of faith itself” (p. 88). Unfortunately, reasoning and thinking about the unanswerable questions raise basic fear. Therefore, we use faith to defend against basic fear. Each person develops a strategy for coping with the insecurity. “The development of this strategy is not a conscious act on our part, and it is affected by the historical, social, and cultural circumstances of our birth, as well as by our own individual circumstances. This strategy consists of placing our faith in certain ideas, objects, or people so that we can rely on them—unthinkingly—to give a purpose, meaning, and justification to our lives” (p. 89). This strategy is not dependent upon a single article of faith or limited to a single part of life. We organize our objects of faith. We are also careful to leave an escape route. If one source of security comes under attack, we replace it with others. “Someone whose dependence upon religion is undermined, for example, might react by trying to increase the security he gets from children, job, politics, or something else” (p. 91). The alternative to finding a substitute is an undesirable increase of basic fear and its pain. Thus, according to Moreno, we are likely to adhere to the ways of faith, even though we may alter the articles of faith.

Reason and faith are somewhat incompatible, although reason may be used to justify already determined beliefs. But reason introduces a dilemma: the more reason we use and the more rational we are, the more difficult it becomes to apply faith. This increases basic fear, which in turn urges us back to faith and away from reason. People move back and forth, making forays into the unknown of reason for a season, only to scurry back to the comfort of faith. The crisis generated by reason is softened, giving us strength to explore the frontier again. This cycle has powerful reinforcements at each end, and each healthy person achieves a balance, in accordance with his or her experience, education, and so forth.

It is Moreno’s feeling that as much as we would like to, we cannot give up reasoning altogether. If we could, life might be easier, but much duller.

James W. Fowler

Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (New York: Harper and Row, 1981)

James W. Fowler has written a monumental and enlightening book on the subject of faith—must reading for all who are curious about religion.

This is the golden age of classification. LDS people are often classified, for example, as active, less-active, non-active, full or part-tithe payers, recommend holders, closet doubters, and so forth. James Fowler has attempted the ultimate—classifying the mystifying miracle of personal faith as practiced by the world's diverse faithful.

Building upon the ideas of pioneers James, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Kohlberg, and based on his own studies since 1972, Fowler suggests it is possible to assign the faithful to one of six groups, or faith stages, through which people move as they mature.

Through hundreds of interviews, Fowler has tentatively validated the first four stages. However, he found that faith is a continuum, stretching like a series of slopes and plateaus from sea level to misty heights of the tallest mountains, with six grand steppes where people tend to congregate. Fowler has found few real people inhabiting the final two stages, the last of which he assigns such persons as Gandhi and Mother Teresa. However, Fowler's first four stages are crowded. LDS people of all shades will recognize themselves and others on one of the plateaus, or struggling up the rocky trail between stages. Those interested in Iron Rods, Liahonas, closet doubters, conversion mechanics, and other mysteries of personal faith will be interested in this book.

Fowler devotes the first 116 pages of the book to narrowing and precisely defining faith in a personal sense (as opposed to such uses as faith as a religion, faith as a system of beliefs, faith as honesty, and so forth). Fowler identifies personal faith with trust, hope, and fidelity. According to Fowler, Western culture has managed over the centuries to obscure the simplicity of personal faith, resulting in much misunderstanding, heartache, and personal guilt.

The six stages. The final 207 pages of the book are devoted to describing Fowler's six stages of faith. Stage One faith is a fantasy-filled, initiating phase, usually experienced only in childhood, where a person is permanently influenced by the examples, moods, stories, and symbols of visible belief systems. Here are formed the taboos, the participatory habits, the cultural expectations, and the symbolisms of the religion. Fowler's description of an adult in Stage One faith will be recognized by many LDS people (but with uneasiness): "For every child whose significant others shared religion in ways that proved life-opening and sustaining of love, faith, and courage, there is another for whom the introduction of religion gave rise to fear, rigidity, and the brutalization of souls. This often results in the emergence of an adult with a very rigid, brittle and authoritarian personality" (p. 132, condensed).

In Stage Two, a person moves away from fantasizing, but appropriates stories, beliefs, morals, and symbols in a one-dimensional, literal way. Persons in Stage Two see the world as based only on

reciprocal fairness and justice: blessings are predicated on obedience, misfortunes derive from sin, life is a formula. Fowler's discussion of an adult Stage Two person will be familiar: The limitations of literalness and excessive reliance upon reciprocity as a principle for constructing an ultimate environment can result either in an overcontrolling, stilted perfectionism, or in their opposite, an abasing sense of badness embraced because of mistreatment, neglect, or the apparent disfavor of significant others (p. 150, condensed).

Stage Three is characteristic of many LDS people. Its structure is influenced strongly by interpersonal relationships. It is conformist in that the person is acutely tuned into the expectations and judgements of others. The Stage Three person has adopted a cluster of beliefs and values, but rarely reflects on or examines them systematically. Authority rests in worthy others. Faith has provided a comfortable basis for outlook and personal identity.

Stage Four faith is characterized by the tensions of: (1) group definition vs. individuality; (2) subjectivity and unexamined feelings vs. objectivity and critical self-reflection; (3) living for others vs. self-fulfillment; and (4) the importance of absolutes vs. relatives. For Stage Four persons, religious symbols lose their literalness and are translated into conceptual meanings. The self, no longer sustained mostly by others, adopts an independence in reactions, interpretations, and judgements of external and internal events. Authority and responsibility pass from others to self. Stage Four people feel conflict, see irony in life, and experience the pulls and tensions of different points of view.

Stages Five and Six are reserved for the few, the mature, the saintly. Fowler uses such idealistic Stage Five descriptors as, "alive to the paradox and truth of contradictions . . . unifies opposites in mind and experience . . . commitment to justice is freed from the confines of class, nation, religion, and community" (pp. 197-198) Stage Six is said to be characterized by "perfect love, lack of division, universalizing faith, being heedless of threats to self," and other idealizations.

Fowler has reasonably described stages or classes of faith and has demonstrated the existence of persons at least compatible with the first four stages. Unfortunately, he has largely failed in his second task, that of explaining the personal development of faith. Three burning questions remain to be answered: (1) Why does one person sojourn in Stage Two or Three while another moves on to Stage Four without any apparent effort or intention to do so? (2) How do we motivate ourselves and others to progress from one stage to another? (3) Should we?

R. Jan Stout

"The Spectrum of Religious Beliefs and Behaviors in the Mormon Community," essay written in August 1983.

The problem of anxiety. According to Stout, anxiety can be divided into three basic forms: separation anxiety, castration anxiety, and existential anxiety. Studies have suggested that each form plays a significant role in

the development of our minds. Each form is intertwined with basic religious questions: How do we explain and cope with life and death?

Separation anxiety is the most fundamental of the tension-producing mental states. An infant encounters this anxiety when mother does not respond when he or she cries or calls. The child feels alone, vulnerable, and abandoned. This separation must be endured repeatedly, and eventually numbed through denial and repression. We must struggle to acquire defenses.

Castration anxiety does not mean specific dismemberment. Rather, it is an anxiety that accompanies the fear of punishment and retribution. We become aware of our lack of power and our need to seek support. We may have transgressed against an authority figure and desperately want to escape the wrath of his or her judgement. One solution may be to join a group for collective protection.

Existential anxiety arises when we confront the terror and uncertainty of a universe that seems awesome and unknowable. We see beyond the safety of our family a world full of risks, dangers, and unknowns. When we experience existential anxiety, we have looked beyond the predicable to a new and challenging frontier.

The development of religious types. Stout suggests that we can identify four groups of LDS people who seem to have arrived at their religious positions from the complex interplay of anxiety, social forces, and life experiences. The four types are (simplified):

- submissive and dependant (S&D)
- social and organizational (S&O)
- skeptic and individualistic (S&I)
- selfless and universal (S&U)

Each group determines, to a great extent, the way its members view God and the universe, and contributes to expectations of rewards, judgement, and exaltation.

We may assign a person to a single group, but some traits of each group can be found in every person. The remainder of Stout's essay examines these four groups and the role anxiety plays in their development.

Submissive and Dependent (S&D) traits arise in response to separation anxiety. These people retain the basic orientation learned as children. They have a strong need to please, submit, and obey to avoid the fear of abandonment. S&Ds are adept at scanning the horizon for cues that keep them safely in the center. Belief can become subservient to personal comfort. They live with their childhood habits, never asking significant questions; or they argue that God exists and religious activity is important, feeling that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by believing. Among S&Ds there is a strong desire for unconditional love, and great emphasis is placed on "people-pleasing."

Stout suggests we should not take the separation anxiety too lightly or view it simply as infantile. Such anxiety is not reserved for S&D people only. Such feelings for God may be essential and appropriate. Certainly, overcoming separation is the central message of the Atonement. However, to remain only child-like and dependent is to deny the personal responsibility we all share to mature spiritually.

Social and Organizational (S&O) people value the group and their membership above all else. These LDS people find security and structure for their lives in Church organizations. They move towards authority figures and often like positions of power themselves. They fear losing control and dealing with powerful emotions. They are what Maslow calls “non-peakers” and “religious bureaucrats.” Love may be considered conditional. God is perceived as a loving father who rewards his children only when they have been dutiful, obedient, and faithful to the end.

For S&Os, the core anxiety revolves around punishment, loss of power, and impotence—the “castration” anxiety. Obedience to a strong authority can help relieve this anxiety. Religious rituals and order become important, and attention to detail (proficiency in scriptural recall, for example) is highly coveted. These people play an important role in the organizational structure of the Church and, through their hard work, loyalty, and obedience, often rise to levels of considerable authority.

Skeptic and Individualistic (S&I) people have had to learn to deal with existential anxiety. Formulas that seemed to work in childhood for answering the religious questions of life begin to falter. As one surveys the complexities of life and numerous uncertainties, doubts arise. Does God really intervene and answer prayers? What about God’s other children who live in abject poverty or suffer miserable life situations? These types of questions gnaw at his or her conscience and generate even further questions and doubts.

For the S&I person there is a growing sense of individual responsibility rather than a reliance on the Church to answer all questions. For some this may be a time of rebellion against authority or against one’s own submissive past.

Skepticism may appear in early life; it may be brief, or it may last a lifetime. Some LDS people successfully separate their religious life from their worldly life. They may develop powerful intellectual insights and technical knowledge, yet stay safely in one of the former two groups for their religion. For a few people, sudden personal tragedies or events (the unexplained death of a loved one, or reading and believing an anti-Mormon publication, for example) may catapult the person into the S&I group. The outcome is bewilderment, disillusionment, and feelings of betrayal. This may lead to “falling away,” cynicism, or anti-Mormon behavior. Some may quietly abandon cherished spiritual rituals; others may evolve into closet doubters.

For S&I people, there can be an exhilarating sense of freedom in learning to live with doubt, uncertainty, and questions. There can be growth, courage, and the daring to explore new horizons. And yet, the danger of slipping into cynicism and the rejection of God is always there. For this reason, they may envy the certainty and security enjoyed by unquestioning Mormons. They may look back with nostalgia to a time when life was more predictable and secure.

The Selfless and Universal (S&U) person is not found in large numbers. While many may have had brief membership in this group, it is an elusive stage and difficult to maintain. The first three groups are characterized by individual self-awareness and self-consciousness, concern with personal salvation, preservation of power, and awareness of their own intellectual

life. S&U people have been able to move beyond these concerns. They become aware of feelings of wholeness and comprehend the unity of all things. Their concern for their fellows overcomes their own narrow self-interests. They understand how to integrate all moral values into their lives, which become full of love and virtue. Anxieties are quieted and the person comes to terms with life, even though not all the answers are in.

Many LDS people can identify Church leaders and General Authorities who personify the S&U person. These leaders inspire and touch lives in deep and significant ways. They recognize the traits of all groups within themselves and can therefore love and accept the broad spectrum of LDS people.

Conclusion. Stout concludes that there is, and should be, ample room in the LDS Church for all of stages, groups, and types of people desiring fellowship. Such diversity makes for a vigorous community. In accepting such conclusions, we can learn unity with all our fellow travelers on this planet, and we can experience the selfless and universalizing phenomenon more often.

Related thoughts

You call for faith: I show you doubt,
To prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt,
the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt.
—Robert Browning

We are born believing. A man bears
beliefs, as a tree bears apples.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

All men naturally desire knowledge.
—Aristotle

The majority of mankind is lazy-
minded, incurious...and tepid in
emotion, and is therefore incapable of
either much doubt or much faith.
—T.S. Eliot

Hope is the parent of faith.
—Cyprus A. Bartol

An appeal to reason has never been
known to fail in the long run.
—James Russel Lowell

Skepticism is the chastity of the
intellect. —George Santayana

If the work of God could be
comprehended by reason, it would be
no longer wonderful, and faith would
have not merit if reason provided proof.
—St. Gregory

Reason is one thing and faith is another,
and reason can as little be made a
substitute for faith, as faith can be made
a substitute for reason.
—Unknown

It is always easier to believe than to
deny. Our minds are naturally
affirmative.
—M. de Montaigne

Most of our so-called reasoning
consists of finding arguments for going
on believing as we already do.
—James Robinson

In all things it is better to hope than to
despair.
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Truth above all, even when it upsets and
overwhelms us.
—Henri Amiel

One person with a belief is equal to a
force of 99 who have only interests.
—John Stuart Mill

Chapter 4

Personal Beliefs and Church Activity: a Self-Assessment

In the mid-1980s, the Church (through its Correlation Department) conducted an extensive survey among a group of LDS people called the *Survey of Religion and Life*. This lengthy survey probed many facets of LDS life, including levels of belief and activity. The results have not been published, as far as I know, but I was given the opportunity to see some of the results related to personal belief and activity.

I have prepared a related but much abbreviated questionnaire. I think you will find it fun and informative.

A word of caution. Things in print take on a validity that may not be warranted. I've used this survey informally at firesides, in Sunday School classes, etc., and people seem to think it gives okay information. However it has not been scientifically developed or tested. It may not function well for the elderly, teenagers, the infirm or handicapped, the ill, the poor, or for those not living in close proximity to an active LDS community—in other words, for those who do not share most of the characteristics of a mainstream Mormon.

This self-administered questionnaire is intended to probe your personal beliefs and compare them to your Church activity. To understand the terms I am using, please read the essay “Wonderful Wondering,” in Chapter 3. The questionnaire asks you to share private feelings and thoughts. It touches on items that are normally confidential and sensitive. You will need to be thoughtful and honest as you answer.

Section One. Measures of Participation and Activity in Standard Church Programs

1. How often do you attend the temple?

(Use this first set if you live near a temple, e.g., within a 2-hour drive.)

- 0 () No temple recommend; no attendance in one year
- 1 () No temple recommend now, but had one last year
- 2 () 1-2 times per year
- 3 () 3-4 times per year
- 4 () 5-10 times per year
- 5 () Once per month, or more

(Use this set if you live far—more than a 2-hour drive.)

- 0 () No temple recommend
- 1 () No temple recommend now, but had one last year
- 2 () Once per year
- 3 () Once or twice per year
- 4 () Two times per year
- 5 () Three or more times per year

2. How much of the Word of Wisdom do you follow?

- 0 () I ignore the Word of Wisdom
- 1 () Not very much
- 2 () I abstain from alcohol and tobacco, most of the time
- 3 () I abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea almost always
- 4 () All of above, all the time
- 5 () All of above plus caffeine drinks, chocolate, and/or meat in winter

3. If you should receive a church calling from your bishop, you would:

- 0 () Never accept
- 1 () Rarely accept
- 2 () Accept only if convenient and desirable for me
- 3 () Accept if certain conditions are met
- 4 () Accept after discussion and prayer
- 5 () Always accept without question

4. Describe your attendance at regular meetings (e.g., Sunday School, priesthood meeting, or Relief Society, sacrament meeting, Mutual, as applicable)

- 0 () Never attend
- 1 () Rarely attend, e.g., one meeting per month, any church meeting.
- 2 () Occasionally (less than 40%)
- 3 () Quite often (40-75%)
- 4 () Regularly (more than 75%)
- 5 () Never miss any meetings

5. During an average week, how many hours do you spend in church-related activities? (Attendance at all Church meetings, socials, lesson preparation, home/visiting teaching, etc.)

- 0 () 0
- 1 () 1
- 2 () 2
- 3 () 3-4
- 4 () 5-6
- 5 () 7 or more

6. Describe your actual donations to the Church during the past few years.

- 0 () No donations to Church
- 1 () Irregular donations only, and only if asked
- 2 () Occasional donations
- 3 () Part tithe payer plus occasional other donations
- 4 () Usually full tithe payer plus other offerings
- 5 () Full tithe payer plus all other offerings

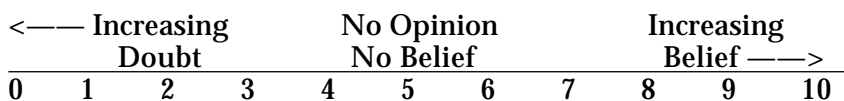
Scoring. The above questions are a rough measure of your activity and participation in traditional church programs. Count the scores based on your answers. The following results are not definitive but suggest trends:

- 22-30 Very active; high participation
- 15-21 Moderately active
- 7-14 Moderately non-active
- 0-6 Very non-active; little participation

We will use these results in **Section Three**. If you scored 15 or higher, consider yourself “Active.” If you scored 14 or less, consider yourself “Non-active.”

Section Two. Measures of Belief (parts A and B, below)

In this section we ask you to describe your real, personal thoughts and conclusions about the statements shown on the next two pages. Answer honestly, not as you think you should. Please see the scale below.



Examples—

- (10) Two plus two equals four.
- (3) A Democrat will be elected president in the next election.
- (5) James Quentin Smith is a parliamentarian in New Zealand.

Zero (“0”) represents negative knowledge—“I know the statement isn’t correct; I know it isn’t true.” Numbers four to one represent increasing doubt— “I don’t know for sure, but I doubt it is correct; I don’t think the statement is true.”

Number five (“5”) represents lack of information and lack of belief one way or the other— “I don’t know; I have no opinion; I have no thoughts one way or the other.”

Ten (“10”) represents positive knowledge— “I know the statement is correct; I know it is true beyond any doubt.” Numbers between six and nine represent increasingly strong belief— “I don’t know for sure, but I believe the statement is true;” “I think it is correct.”

Part A. Beliefs about the Church and its Unique Doctrines

The following statements represent common doctrines and teachings which set the LDS religion apart from other religious creeds and organizations. Please indicate your level of belief in the following statements.

Remember, record what you truly think, not what you’re supposed to think, and not what you are willing to accept by faith.

1. () The LDS Church is the one and only true church.
2. () It is God’s wish that we avoid alcohol and tobacco.
3. () Both God and Jesus came to a grove of trees in which Joseph Smith was praying.
4. () The Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates which the angel Moroni gave Joseph Smith.
5. () LDS scriptures (e.g., Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price) are the word of God.
6. () God directs Church leaders in their work for the Church.
7. () The temple ceremony was written under the inspiration of God.
8. () Christ’s gospel is being correctly taught by the Church.
9. () The afterlife consists of three kingdoms (e.g., Celestial Kingdom, etc.).
10. () It is important to gain a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

The above statements attempt to measure your personal beliefs about the Church’s unique teachings and doctrines. Add and score your answers as follows:

75-100 points— Strong belief and acceptance of Church’s unique teachings

50-75 points— Moderate belief and acceptance

25-49 points — More doubt than belief

0-25 points — Serious doubts about the Church’s unique teachings

We will be using these results in **Section Three**.

Count yourself a “Believer in Unique Church Teachings” if you scored 50-100 points.

Count yourself a “Disbeliever in Unique Church Teachings” if you scored less than 50 points.

Part B. Beliefs about your personal relationship to God and your feelings about Christ and his teachings.

This section tries to measure your thoughts and conclusions about your relationship to God and about your personal beliefs about Jesus Christ and his teachings.

Please rank your beliefs, as above (0-10). (Remember to record what you truly think, not what you're supposed to believe, or what you are willing to accept on faith.)

1. () God exists.
2. () Christ was crucified for my sins.
3. () God often answers my prayers, directly or indirectly.
4. () The gospel of Jesus Christ is very important to me.
5. () I have been personally blessed by God.
6. () I feel close to God; I feel that Christ is my brother.
7. () Baptism and the taking of the sacrament provide for the forgiveness of sin.
8. () Christ's teachings are a blueprint for life and behavior.
9. () It is important to gain a testimony that Christ is the Savior of the world.
10. () The Bible is the word of God.

The above statements attempt to measure your personal beliefs about your relationship to God and Jesus Christ, and your thoughts about Christ's teachings in your life. Score your answers as follows:

76-100 points — Strong personal beliefs in God and Jesus Christ; positive relationship with God.

50-75 points — Moderate personal belief in God and Jesus Christ; a developing relationship with God.

25-49 points — Moderate personal disbelief in God and Jesus Christ; weak personal relationship with God.

0-24 points — Serious doubts about God, Jesus Christ, and His teachings; little personal relationship with God.

Please count yourself a "Personal Believer in God and Jesus" if you scored 50-100 points in this part.

Count yourself a "Personal Disbeliever in God and Jesus" if you scored less than 50 points.

Section Three. Results and Discussion

Based on the above exercises, you will find yourself in one each of the following sections. (Check one from each section.)

Section One: Active ()
 Non-active ()

Section Two-A: Believer in unique Church teachings ... ()
 Disbeliever in unique Church teachings . ()

Section Two-B: Personal believer in God and Jesus ... ()
 Personal disbeliever in God and Jesus .. ()

The figure below shows three 2x2 matrices. Note that your results in the above three sections will place you in three of the squares. For example, if you were “Active” in Section One, a “Believer in Unique Church teachings” in Section Two-A, and a “Personal Believer in God and Jesus,” you would mark blocks 1, 5, and 9.

Please mark the three blocks which pertain to you.

First Matrix	Active	Inactive
Believer in Unique Church Teachings	1	2
Disbeliever in Unique Church Teachings	3	4

Second Matrix	Active	Inactive
Personal believer in God and Jesus	5	6
Personal disbeliever in God and Jesus	7	8

Third Matrix	Believer in Unique Church Teachings	Disbeliever in Unique Church Teachings
Personal believer in God and Jesus	9	10
Personal disbeliever in God and Jesus	11	12

Please proceed to the discussion on the next page.

Discussion. As you have experienced, it is difficult to measure something as complex as personal belief. It is certainly difficult to interpret any such results accurately. Therefore, you should take the following interpretations (and any personal conclusions) with a grain of salt. If the outcome disturbs you, you might want to discuss it with your bishop or other trusted person.

Mark in Block No.	Possible Interpretation
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- 1 This block represents both positive beliefs and activity in the Church, the predominant situation found among active LDS people.
- 2 This block indicates a belief in Church claims but little activity in Church programs. A person in this block does not have the level of activity of others with similar beliefs. There could be any number of reasons: poor health, estrangement, feelings of rejection, hurt feelings, habit, habitual sin, and so forth. I would expect some people in this block to be suffering emotional trauma because of the apparent conflict in beliefs and actions.
- 3 A mark in this block indicates activity accompanied by disbelief in the Church and its unique teachings. This person falls into a group known as “active doubters,” “faithful doubters,” or “closet doubters.” The study mentioned at the beginning of this article (conducted by the Church Correlation Evaluation Department) suggested that some active LDS people may fall in this category. Such persons remain active for a number of reasons, some of which are described in the essay, “The Phenomenon of the Faithful Doubter.” See Chapter 7.
- 4 This block indicates weak activity and disbelief in Church teachings, a condition we would not find unusual among non-active and former LDS people.
- 5 This block represents both positive beliefs in Jesus and God, and activity in the Church—again, the predominant situation found among most active LDS people.
- 6 This block indicates a belief in God and Jesus but little activity in Church programs. A person in this block might have rejected the Church or might be non-active for any number of reasons.
- 7 A mark in this block indicates activity, but disbelief in God and Jesus. Again, this person may fall into the group known as “active doubters.”
- 8 This block indicates weak activity and disbelief in God and Jesus, a condition we would not find unusual among non-active and former LDS people.

- 9 This block represents a person who believes in the Church and has positive personal beliefs in and ties to God and Jesus Christ. Again, this would be a common occurrence among active LDS people.
- 10 This block presents an anomaly (at least for LDS people): the person believes in God and Jesus but disbelieves unique Church teachings. This person has accepted God and Jesus, but does not accept claims of the Church.
- 11 This block represents another anomaly, that of belief in the Church and its teachings but a lack of personal belief in God and Jesus. This person might be caught up in the organization and programs of the Church, but has not yet developed a personal religion.
- 12 This block represents persons who disbelieve both the Church and Christ and who have not developed a personal relationship with God. This would probably be common among non-active or former LDS people who have rejected both the Church and Christ.

Discussion

As I have administered this questionnaire to members at firesides, quorum meetings, etc., I have observed mostly positive levels of both belief and activity among those who participated—with exceptions, of course. I have also noticed the ever-present problem of word definition. Many people simply cannot separate faith and intellectual belief. This works to the benefit of some (those who live by faith) and to the detriment of others (those who see lack of belief as lack of faith.)

Remember, the self-assessment is intended to compare intellectual beliefs with activity, not faithfulness with activity.

Chapter 5

The Mouth of Dark Canyon

To have doubted one's own first principles is the mark of a civilized man. — Oliver Wendall Holmes

Have you ever thought you *definitely* heard someone—only to turn and see no one there? Or seen something (a burglar) that turned out to be something else (a shadow)? Our senses often disappoint us. On the other hand, our senses can also be unexpected pathways to deep and hidden knowledge. In fact, what is the limit of our vision? Our listening ability? Our ability to feel? What is required to enjoy their full potential? And where do our sensory abilities end and our extra-sensory gifts begin?

I found some answers during a week-long spring break in 1958, when my best high school buddy Jim Madsen and I explored Dark Canyon, a little known desert side canyon of the Colorado River in southeastern Utah. No good maps were available in those days, but uranium hunters and cowpunchers knew something about the area, and Jim's dad told us it was worth seeing and gave us a crude map.

It was a clear, blue, and cold Sunday afternoon when Jim and I climbed out of his dusty '47 jeep at the headwaters of Woodenshoe Canyon, an upper drainage into Dark Canyon. Hiking north and west forty-five miles would bring us to the mouth of Dark Canyon in the cataracts of the Colorado River. We would meet my brother Tom rafting down the river on the following Saturday and float to Hite Ferry.

Our trek began at 8,700 feet. An icy stream of melted snow led through sparse pine, still-barren oak brush, and new spring grass poking up through last year's matted, gray grass. We followed animal tracks where possible, but mostly we broke trail as we went. To be precise, Jim broke trail and I followed. Tough, big, the son of a rancher raised for his first twelve years in nearby Blanding, Jim had a pleasant but no-nonsense outlook on life and felt completely at home in the wilderness.

This trip was different than any I had ever been on. I had been a kid city-slicker, a spectator most of my young life, reading about nature but never really immersing myself in it, dreaming adventure but content to

watch it on TV, occasionally thinking deep thoughts about life, death, and God, but generally accepting what I read and heard from others. I was unsure of my place in life—but I knew I was a Mormon and had been told that I had access to “all the answers.” And from my early teen years I had known what I wanted: college, mission, become an engineer, a home, a family, and a sure testimony of the gospel, something that had eluded me so far. In junior high school I had begun to notice—without realizing its true impact on my life—that curiosity and an innate skepticism were also a part of my life.

As we hiked down the canyon that first full day, I suddenly realized there were absolutely no signs of human life—no footprints, old cans, or paper; no old fire pits; no roads or trails. There was nothing to indicate any prior human presence. Except, of course, for the Ancient Ones—the Anasazi. The side canyons were filled with silent windswept cliff dwellings, vivid reminders that this had been their land hundreds of years ago.

On the second day we found and visited several still-intact cliff dwellings. I knew they had been vacant for centuries, but the pottery shards, the corn cobs, the manos and matates, the hardened handprints in the mud—all these spoke plainly of Indian life as it might have been. After the climb up the cliff, while Jim looked around, I would rest in the shade of a dwelling, rubbing my hands gently across 700-year old palm prints, sensing a connection with something exciting and mysterious. I would sit quietly, conjuring up visions of what life must have been like for the Anasazi. I could see men and women cooking, eating, talking, working, and playing with children. After a while, Jim would come and sit with me. Our visits always closed on the (for me) unanswerable questions: What did these ancient people think about? Did they love each other? What were their laws? What did they say to each other? Why were they here? What did they believe? Who was their God? Their prophets? Did God answer their prayers? Where did they fit in the Plan of Salvation? Were they direct descendants of Lehi? What did their lives have to do with mine? Jim had answers, and they fit nicely with our LDS religion, but I invariably grew tense and uneasy in a way I couldn't quite comprehend.

After several days of hiking and dropping deeper into the canyon, I watched steep red cliffs rise high into the sky above us, literally confining us to the canyon-bottom. I felt that we were totally isolated from the world and its people. It felt good, but it made me nervous, too. I had always relied on others. Relying on myself was scary.

On Tuesday evening, our third night in the canyon, we sat quietly watching our moon shadows. Jim asked me if I was homesick. I didn't really know what to say. It was a sensitive, personal question and I hated to appear weak. Jim seemed so sure, so strong.

“No, not homesick, and not lonely either. You're here, and a great guy to be with,” I offered. “But I'm feeling ‘alone.’ The peace, the lack of people, the quiet—these are all making me think and ask questions about the way I really feel about myself, and about life, and my place in it. I've been kind of quiet. Sorry.”

Dark Canyon was the ultimate trip into aloneness. Jim and I enjoyed each other's company, but I found myself fascinated by solitude, and by

the chance to wander about in the brushy bottom land, alone, in the midnight-like quiet. In modern life, background noises never cease their intrusion on our ears and minds. When we manage to get into a quiet place, we hear a buzzing in our ears—warning signs of overuse, even abuse, of our senses. It took a couple of days for my young ears to adjust to the quiet. In Dark Canyon, we heard nothing but ourselves and natural sounds. By Tuesday, both of us noticed a new ability to hear with greater sensitivity. I could easily hear the call of a jay miles away and the sound of a cliff swallow's wings beating against the air as it flew the high cliffs above. Hearing the unheard, I seemed to fly with it. I marveled at the sound of the breeze in the canyon far ahead—its source endless and eternal. The nighttime howl of a coyote somewhere far away seemed oddly familiar. My senses were making connections with nature that I had never experienced before—the clear, clean air made seeing more precise and my sense of smell seemed heightened, too.

When Jim and I were separated, I could track him by his noise—cracking branches, footfalls, and his quiet humming and whistling. Our noise seemed occasionally a sacrilege. How long had it been since clumsy human sounds had violated the sanctity of Dark Canyon? Yet, in spite of my awareness of myself as an intruder, I felt something in the canyon welcoming me.

On Thursday night, we camped in a lonely glen at the mouth of Lost Canyon, a deep and desolate side canyon running to the south. The afternoon sky was overcast, the birds strangely quiet. A soft cold breeze fluttered the blue-green leaves of a large old cottonwood which lay across the now-widened stream bed. I wondered if the ancient tree had seen any humans before. John Wesley Powell might have passed this tree less than a hundred years before our visit. But of course the Anasazi left the area more than 700 years ago, long before the cottonwood sprouted in the sandy bank.

After dinner, we decided to explore the mouth of Lost Canyon. In no hurry, we wandered up the canyon, enjoying the sparse desert sweet peas, snake grass, prickly pear cactus flowers, the on-again, off-again stream, red and tan cliff colors, jutting rocks, the strange calls and echoes of solitary frogs, and of course the quiet of twilight. Far up the canyon, we could see rain clouds and darkness.

“Do you think it will rain?” Jim asked quietly.

I looked at him, instantly aware of a subtle apprehension. “Flash floods don't occur in the Spring, do they?”

“Not usually,” he said.

Before long, the canyon sloped up abruptly. We scrambled up a rocky slide that ended at a fifteen foot sandstone cliff, which stretched in a semicircle across the canyon. At its center, a small crack in the rock allowed us to chimney up. Jim went first and I followed. He was just about to the top when an awesome roaring noise cascaded down the canyon above us.

“Flash flood!” Jim yelled. Panic and the awful feeling of complete helplessness hit me. My mind was a firestorm. My eyes darted here and there down the rocky slope. Suddenly, I saw, for an instant, a short dark man. He was standing at the bottom of the slope, arms folded.

Amazingly the noise died away.

"It was thunder, I guess," Jim said, his voice high pitched. We chimneyed on up and sat down to think about the experience.

I kept looking down the slope, searching for the man I had seen. No one was there. "Did you see anyone . . . down there just a moment ago?" I asked. The words sounded utterly ridiculous.

"What?" Jim was confused. "No, did you?"

"I don't know. I thought so. My senses must be tricking me."

The rain reached us during the night. In my tent I watched drop after drop run down the outer nylon, and my mind went over the evening's experience. I struggled for more details about the man—but they wouldn't come. Just a man standing at the bottom of the slope, arms folded. Finally, I concluded the thunder must have set off a short-circuit in my mind. Rain drops followed each other hypnotically, running down the slope of the tent, one chasing the other, until sleep intervened.

Before noon on Friday, we reached the mouth of Dark Canyon. My brother wasn't due until Saturday. Jim and I spent a lazy afternoon washing, eating, swimming, and sun worshipping. At an elevation of 4,700 feet, the weather was much warmer. We had dropped almost 4,000 feet and now we were at least sixty miles from the nearest human settlement. It was almost over, but the trip seemed somehow incomplete. Questions about myself and life had come out of the cliffs and were hanging about like hungry dogs.

After dinner I left Jim by the fire and headed up a steep little side canyon to the southwest. It had no name that we knew of and didn't go far. In about half a mile, it narrowed to a small, sandy circular box, about thirty yards across. The solid cliffs on three sides stretched into the sky like the walls of a tall temple. I stretched out on the soft sand and stared up at the clouds moving from left to right across the sky. The movement made me dizzy. I closed my eyes to restore my equilibrium, feeling peaceful and drowsy.

Then I heard footsteps somewhere down the canyon. Jim must be feeling lonely, I thought, propping myself up on an elbows. "Hey! I thought you weren't coming," I called out, anticipating the pleasure of sharing the amphitheater with him.

Around the canyon wall stepped a dark short man—the same man I had seen last night in Lost Canyon! Startled, I sat straight up. Who was it? Why was he following us? I felt for the knife in my pocket.

"Howdy," I said nervously. "It's strange to see anyone up here."

"Yes," he said. "It is."

I didn't recognize his accent. "We haven't seen anybody all week," I said. "Did you come up from the Colorado River?"

"No, not this time," he said.

"I saw you last night—up Lost Canyon. That was you, right?" I asked, now looking past him for a possible path of flight.

"Yes, it was I," he replied. He squatted in the sand in front of me, about twelve feet away. We said nothing for a moment. Then in one relaxed movement, he stretched out on the sand, hands behind his head, his gaze on the sky. He was wearing khaki pants and shirt, brown leather

boots, and a hemp belt. I guessed him to be about 5 feet tall, 110 pounds, and 30 years old. His eyes were brown, his hair black, and his skin dark. His black beard was several days old and sparse like mine. Brown spots with long hairs blemished his cheek and forehead. I noticed his teeth were quite worn and several were missing. He carried nothing—no pack, no water, no walking stick, and no obvious weapons. He seemed to be waiting for me to relax.

“What are you doing in the canyon . . . camping?” I asked.

“No, I live here,” he said, shifting to turn directly toward me.

“Really!” I said, genuinely surprised. “Living where? We’ve seen no signs of anyone living along the canyon. Do you have a boat down on the river?”

“No, no boat. I live back in the place you call Young’s Canyon.”

“Right. The side canyon. We explored it Wednesday. That’s a beautiful place. I’d live there, too, if I had to live in the canyons. But, we saw nothing—just the springs, the stand of tress, the waterfall, and a few cliff dwellings. Are you way up near the headwaters? And what do you do there, anyway?”

“I live with my family. My home is about 30 minutes up Young’s, in the four room dwelling on the north face by the waterfall. We just live there, that’s all. You came to our house.”

“What!? But how? There’s no food...and....” Fright pushed me to my feet. I looked down at him. His eyes seemed friendly and warm.

“You’re Indian, right?” I blurted out.

“Yes, I am.” He sat up, looking squarely in my eyes. “But I’m from another time and place. An older, different place. I want to answer a few questions for you.”

I stood still thinking frantic thoughts.

“I’m not crazy,” he said softly, almost tenderly. “And neither are you. Go ahead, ask your questions.”

I sat again, plopping heavily into the sand, unable to speak. My God, I thought, is this a religious experience? A dream? An hallucination? One of Jim’s pranks?

He spoke again with a serene quality of love in his voice. “Please, ask your questions.”

The man’s kindness, his sincerity, his simpleness, and his care calmed me at once. Suddenly it seemed that I had known him all my life. “Okay,” I said with a veneer of doubt. “But I think . . . this is weird, isn’t it?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, okay. Aah... what do you think I should know?”

He smiled. “That’s a good question. First, you must know that God has the answers to your questions. Another is to know that you can find the answers yourself.”

“What? How do I find these answers?”

“By doing what you have been doing all week—removing the world, stretching your senses, looking at your thoughts, motivations, and the origins of your feelings, and thinking about what you really believe and want to do.”

I leaned back a little and looked at the cliffs and the sky. The shadows of the westward cliffs had climbed high on the east walls. Already, the cliff

swallows had returned to their nests. It would be dark in a few more minutes. Suddenly I struggled with a deepening darkness inside.

He looked at me with kindness.

"I hope you won't mind. It seems so hard. I don't normally talk about these things." I looked around nervously and picked up some sand. "I'm frightened by what I've seen in myself this week. I see weakness, hypocrisy, opposition, cowardice, and more. I'm starting to get doubts and evil questions." I wondered why I was telling this stranger all this. I certainly wouldn't have told Jim, my best friend.

"No question is evil," he said. "And you may think you see all those things in yourself, but they are not the real you. Those things are only surface smudges which will eventually be wiped away. You are the creation of God, created through his love. As such you are eternal, immortal, and ultimately a perfect creation. Look deeper."

My mouth went dry, as if suddenly filled with sand. "There is so much anxiety in these thoughts...and feelings." I stopped, my voice cracking.

"As you probe deeper into your feelings and motivations, and as you discover their origins and remove those which scar the soul, you will have peace. As you move towards personal honesty, you will acquire understanding, and that will bring tranquility," he said.

I looked closely at this Indian. A soft silence filled the little canyon. "Who are you?" I finally managed.

"I am a friend...and a messenger," he said. "Please believe." His face seemed completely open. I could not look away from his dark, clear eyes. "Please, ask your questions—the ones you've been asking up there in the cliffs," he said, pointing high to the top of the sandstone pillars.

I managed to look down at my hands all red, sweaty, and spotted with sand. "Well, what about God? Does he really exist? Does he communicate with us? Is he a man?"

"Yes, he exists and he communicates. He can appear in any form he wants—a man, a woman, a child, a star, the wind, even the river." He gestured in the direction of the Colorado.

"If you are right it means my church is not true," I said. "We believe God is a man."

"Wrong. Your church is true. It is God's creation."

"How can that be?" I asked, confused.

"It is true for all those who have faith that it is," he said. "All God's creations are true."

"What?"

"It doesn't matter. Just accept that your church is God's creation. In that sense, it is true."

"Please, I don't understand," I said, squirming. I felt confused—worse, embarrassed.

"All through history, in all parts of the world, God has established the seeds of truth. The Israelites, the Nephites, the Jaradites, everyone has started with God's truths. But more importantly, religious truths can't flourish unless people have faith in them. President McKay is the Lord's prophet for his people mainly because you have faith that he is."

I felt adrift and grabbed hard for a straight answer. "Hey, look, is the LDS Church the one and only true church upon the face of the earth or

not?" I was talking louder than I meant to and I honestly think any answer would have been sufficient. A simple "no" would have been as good as "yes."

"Yes, for you if you have that faith."

I was strangely comforted despite the further confusion. "I'm unsure of where all this leaves me. What does God expect from me?" I asked.

"Live according to your beliefs. Be faithful to what you believe. Fundamental righteousness is based on adherence to what you know to be right. You have been endowed with fundamental righteous understandings—ideals. Try to live by those ideals." He paused, searching for a final thought. "As God's creation, you have the things you need—right within yourself—to solve the riddles of life."

He stood and looked at the sky for a long moment, and then made a strange broad gesture toward the zenith with his right arm. That must be something *he* believes in doing, I thought. His religion must be different. These thoughts flashing across my mind made me wonder, but they also seemed perfectly acceptable.

He moved forward, leaned down, reached out, and almost touched my cheek with his hand. But he pulled back. "I'd better be on my way," he said. He turned and started down the darkening canyon.

I stared after him for a few seconds. "Hey, wait!" I called. "What about . . ." But he was already well ahead. "Wait a minute!" I struggled up out of the warm sand.

He was out of sight, seemingly weaving in and out of the dark shadows of sandstone. Running, I tried to catch him, but never did. Eventually, I came panting into the mouth of the canyon, where Jim was standing in the flicker of the camp fire.

"What's up?" Jim asked. "Afraid of the dark?"

"No, not that. Did you see a man go by?" I asked.

"Not again?" he laughed, but with kindness.

"I'll tell you about it later," I said turning to my tent.

And later I did.

Author's Endnote: Although the fundamentals of the story are true, the appearance of an Indian messenger is metaphorical. (Some readers have taken the story literally.)

Chapter 6

The Phenomenon of the Faithful Doubter

Note: The following widely-read essay was originally written in 1982 and published as *The Phenomenon of the Closet Doubter*. Since then versions of it have appeared a number of times, e.g., in *The Wilderness of Faith*, 1991. I have modified it to make it reflect my current [2010] thinking.

LDS people pride themselves on being a tight-knit group. But there are subgroups within the group— investigators, believers, nonbelievers, jack-Mormons, the faithful, temple— recommend holders, cultural Mormons, the active, the less-active, and so forth. I would like to add another group to the list—faithful doubters. Other suitable names could include faithful wonderers, active disbelievers, closet doubters, hopeful doubters and “the yet uncertain.”

During my mission to Japan in the 1960’s, I chanced upon a very active but genuine nonbeliever. It was my first encounter with a faithful doubter. She was serving in the young women’s leadership and was extremely active in the Sendai Branch. I had been talking to her about bringing her nonmember friends to Church and, in the course of conversation, learned the secret of her disbelief.

I thought at the time that an active nonbeliever must be a rarity. But it was like learning a new word—what I first thought was rare, I now recognize all around me. Since that day, I have had the opportunity to cautiously identify and speak confidentially with a large number of people who have invisible memberships in this group. And I’ve been asked how I find them. It’s simple. One must ask—tactfully and at the proper time—the generally taboo question, “Are you a true believer?”

So what is a faithful doubter? He or she is, as I choose to define it, an active Latter-day Saint who has secretly rejected—or disbelieves, or seriously questions—one or more of the fundamental tenets upon which the church is based, such as Joseph Smith’s first vision, his divine calling as a prophet of God, the Book of Mormon as an angel-delivered history of early Americans, or the divine origin of Joseph’s later revelations as published in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. But despite this secret disbelief, the faithful doubter continues to be active in the Church. He or she attends meetings, teaches classes, holds a temple recommend, serves in presidencies and bishoprics, and may even be employed by the Church. Outwardly they are little different than other

active believers. Faithful doubters have not lost both belief and activity, nor do they announce their disbelief.

Of those I have known, some trends appear. They are adults—children apparently have neither the experience nor the education necessary to catalyze the complex reactions necessary to become faithful doubters. They tend to be mature, educated and well-read. Most have studied the scriptures and appear knowledgeable about Church history.

Many come from strong Church backgrounds. They are often the offspring of traditional LDS parents, or they have been committed converts. Some have served missions and others have married in the temple. Most have had close and important ties to the Church such as church jobs or church callings.

What do they believe, how did they become “doubters,” and why do they stay active? Personal belief seems to be a continuum and is in a constant state of flux. (Please see Chapters 3-5.) The extremes are represented by “I know (something) is true” and “I know (something) is not true.”

The typical Church member professes a positive belief in the Joseph Smith story. Faithful doubters, by my definition, must admit, to disbelief or negative belief in some important facet of the religion. But most faithful doubters seem to have had some belief before becoming doubters.

Most, although feeling doubt, express commitments to the goals, principles, and practices of today’s LDS church and culture. They often state their reasoning this way: The basic principles of the Church come from the Bible and thus are not the invention of Joseph Smith. Principles of love, caring, sharing, kindness, honesty, integrity, and sacrifice are universal, true, noble, believable, Christian and worthy of support. Programs of education, health, and public service are also worth supporting.

The Church may not be true in the “one and only true church” sense, but there’s nothing better. Few expect to find any “true church,” and, in fact, are not looking. Settled faithful doubters, although not untroubled, seem to be relatively happy, fulfilled people, with little hint of hate or vindictiveness.

This serenity is remarkable, given the anguish most experience during their “deconversion.” Before finally admitting to a lack of belief, many experience an agonizing transition period, usually measured in years and often filled with insecurity, alienation, anger, and confusion. This transition state is accompanied by feelings of guilt (“I mustn’t feel this way,” or “I shouldn’t have felt critical of Brother X,” or “I get upset reading Church history—why do I keep doing it?”), feelings of denial (“Of course I believe,” or “It’s just a test,” or “I’ve got to stop thinking this way”), feelings of shame (“What kind of a sinner must I be?”), feelings of anger (“Why me?”), and feelings of loneliness (“I’m the only one with these thoughts and problems,” or “There is no one who understands”). Given these emotional conflicts, it is not hard to understand why some have sought professional counseling.

After finally facing up to the fact of their disbelief, some say they feel an odd sense of relief and a freedom not felt during the transition. They say things like, “The truth has made me free,” and “Free agency finally means something.” Some feel good in making a free choice to participate,

without the guilt that hovered over them during the transition. Some express an understanding of their circumstances and are able to accept, even to cherish, this understanding. This is not to say that confirmed faithful doubters are free from inner conflict. Far from it. The conflict just takes other forms.

No doubter's motives for continued activity are as pure and idealistic as I have just described. Most doubters are tied to the Church as birds are to mother earth. It might be possible to fly high, but gravity eventually has its way. These gravitational ties include being married to a believing spouse, the desire to give children strong and stable support, family traditions and history (“It would hurt my mother if I went inactive”), job security and pension programs (when employed by the Church or BYU), a social life revolving around friends who are believers (“How do you attend your friend’s temple wedding if you’re inactive?”), and of course fear (“The official Joseph Smith story might be true, after all”).

Some justify their continued activity as contributing to improvements in church practices they consider weak, wrong, or embarrassing. Those often mentioned include the black/priesthood issue (now resolved), the temple ceremony, women’s rights, the stress on unquestioning obedience, and the lack of vertical dialogue from local members to general leaders. Many express feelings of hope—hope that perhaps in the great scheme of things God indeed recognizes and gives special status to the Church; hope that perhaps they can find peace; hope that they can do some good through the programs of the Church; and hope that perhaps they are wrong about their doubts.

Where are they? How many are there? And why do we hear so little about them? I believe they’re everywhere in well-established Church locales, but they’re probably more concentrated in the larger cities, on university campuses, and in the more affluent and educated wards.

What predisposes one to become a faithful doubter? How does one lose long-term beliefs? These are difficult questions and I do not have all the answers. But education seems to be a contributing factor. Recent studies have suggested that humans are genetically predisposed to “believe” (before they begin to examine, question and study the issues).

Other factors might include intellectual liveliness, difficulties with authoritarian leadership and “male-dominated” leadership, knowledge of Church history, and access to anti-Church literature. It is difficult, however, to tell which comes first, the doubts, which lead to search for confirmation, or the detracting literature and experiences, which lead to a loss of belief.

I have noticed that for many people, it is a stepped process: a little doubt supported by a little evidence or justification leading to more doubt, the search for more justification and evidence, and so forth. A few probably never had any beliefs to lose.

What impact do they have on the Church? There is no way of knowing, except to observe that doubters are involved in events at the local level and, because of their education and skills, they often have positions of leadership and influence.

Here are some typical stories you might hear from faithful doubters. (These are drawn from people and composites of people I have known, including from my own experience as a wonderer during my early years.)

From a late-thirties housewife, mother of three, college graduate, and a Relief Society teacher:

By the time I finally recognized my lack of belief, my children were in school. My children don't need any disruptions in their lives at this time. It's hard enough. My husband is a ward leader. What alternatives do I have? If I start talking honestly now, it could hurt his work. I'm not unhappy. I just find it easier to keep quiet about the whole thing. My husband is very good about it, although I don't think he really understands. He thinks I'm going through a stage, a trial of my faith. It's easier for me to let him think that. Anyway, maybe I am. I hope he's right.

This man could be a forty-something high priest, married, two children, and a college graduate:

The big thing left for me now is hope. I hope, I pray that things will turn out right. I hope the Church is true, but I really doubt it. It's worth staying with. Faith and hope. It's all I have, all I need, truly.

What about a mid-thirties salesman, divorced and remarried; has had some college:

My contact with the world started my journey into doubt. I went through terrible years of guilt and hate. I was impossible to live with. I lost my first wife over this, so I find it easier now to keep quiet. It's not my place to be going around destroying others' faith. The Lord showed me the light. Let him show others if that is what the Lord wants for them. Who's to say what the big picture is? I'm the last to say I have all the answers.

Even a member of a bishopric. This man is a husband and father of four children; he has an MBA and works as a business executive:

I have thought of quitting it all. But every time I do, all the positives seem to outweigh the negatives. I can influence things in my ward, but I have to be careful not to do anything to embarrass the bishop. I try to stress the positive aspects of the gospel—sharing, love, giving. You know, those things that people really need. I always keep the Word of Wisdom, pay my tithing—that sort of thing. But I do it because of my position and for my wife and kids. My kids don't know a thing, but my wife knows everything. In a way, she's coming to see things from my point of view...starting to support me in subtle ways.

Words from a twenty-two years old, single, a convert of six years; now serving in a singles' ward activity program; a student of biology:

I joined because of my friends. The only friends I have now are in the Church. If I start causing trouble, I'll lose my friends. I know it sounds childish. But my parents were very upset when I joined. I don't have close ties back at home anymore. I hope to marry a Mormon. And nobody wants an inactive Mormon.

And from a recently returned missionary, presently studying history at a Utah college; partly active with no church calling:

I never did gain that burning testimony everybody kept talking about. In fact, my belief in Joseph Smith disappeared during my mission. It's just too incredible! My mom and dad spent a lot of money . . . most of their savings to send me to England. If they knew . . . well, it would hurt them. I think I'll be pretty active. I'm not searching for a quick fix from anybody. The Church is my life and my guide. I'm just going to be cool and use what's good for me.

Faithful doubters keep their interpretations hidden. Sometimes, even spouses don't know the extent of their doubts. Why the need for secrecy? First, there is the fear of being ostracized, or worse, put in the "handle with care" category reserved for investigators and worse. Mainstream believers often remain aloof and feel uncomfortable around those who ask too many questions or demonstrate a doubting nature. More seriously, believing members often interpret a rejection of their beliefs as a rejection of themselves.

The second reason for secrecy is the fear that their chance for meaningful Church participation might be reduced. More than a few worry that an unsympathetic bishop might deny them a temple recommend, even though several I have talked to have confided in bishops who have been supportive and understanding. Third, the Church has said it can tolerate divergent beliefs as long as those beliefs are held personally and no attempt is made to sway others. This may be interpreted to mean "Please keep your doubts to yourself." Finally, many express the thought that it is not their place to alter the beliefs of others. Coming out of the closet may be too great a shock for those whose testimonies rely on the strength of another's beliefs.

Doubters learn to speak truthfully but discreetly. When asked to bear testimony, they may say something like, "I know the Church teaches correct principles; I know that the Lord answers prayers; He loves every person; We must all work out our own salvation." Can they accept the president of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator? Some say, "Why not? Certainly no one else speaks for God," or "I can accept the possibility that he is a prophet." Others may say, "I accept, with what faith I have."

The need to maintain secrecy, to sometimes practice a subtle dishonesty, isolates the doubter and creates internal conflict. Such conflicts are the successors to those experienced during the often hellish time of transition.

Can faithful doubters maintain this equilibrium in the Church? I believe so. Some I have met over the past forty years appear relatively stable and happy, although many have since become inactive. Many have come out of the closet. Some have experienced a period of inactivity, then returned to activity again, still doubting but with renewed hope and faith. A very few have developed a strong belief again.

As for the future, several scenarios have been suggested to me. The first, somewhat farfetched, proposes that in time some doubters will reach positions of sufficient authority to modify claims made for Joseph Smith.

Another scenario has their numbers and influence growing over the next few generations until the LDS Church somewhat resembles the Catholic Church with a large percentage who do not truly believe all of the official story but who stay and participate because of inertia, culture, tradition, and family. A third pictures the Church inviting and accepting doubters into open, full, and active fellowship. This last option seems to be the best and most hopeful.

I've also noticed that many youthful wonderers now simply skip the closet doubting phase and jump straight to disbeliever status.

The Church's Correlation Department has conducted systematic investigations of belief, faith, and activity among active members. (See a brief discussion of one study in Chapter 4.) The results have not been made available to the general public but the Church is not totally ignoring the problems of skepticism and doubting, or so I hope and believe.

Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen a narrowing of tolerance for diversity at both the general and local levels and an undeniable reversal of the openness of the 1970's and 1980's.

It is my own private sense that the extent of skeptical thinking is expanding, particularly among the youth of the Church. We need to be more attentive to it. As William James put it, "He who acknowledges the imperfections of his instrument, and makes allowance for it, is in a much better position for gaining (and sustaining) truth than if he claimed his instrument to be infallible." (See James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902).

I know it is difficult for faithful doubters to come out of their closets. But I encourage secret doubters to prepare themselves and their families for that eventual step.

My own experience has been positive. I tell the (tactful) truth and often get the response, "Oh, Jeff, you believe more than you think," and so forth. As an open but faithful skeptic, I have moved myself into the LDS Borderlands and have given up any chance of being a bishop, a mission president, or a temple worker, but it really is okay. There are many good ways to serve others.

I recently (2008) was released from a two-year Service Mission with the Church's Risk Management group. (My mission involved environmental work such as controlling mold in church buildings in hot and humid climates.)

The next time you think about getting a temple recommend, accepting a ward calling, or even being called as a missionary, keep my experience in mind. It can be done.

I see other benefits in being faithful—particularly to oneself and to God but also to the church. Our religion expects us to believe—and know—incredible things. But it also provides some wonderful blessings.

Those blessings are available to members who remain faithful to the teachings of Christ, and who continue participation in the church.

The question we may need to ask ourselves is not "is the Church true," but rather, "is the Church good?" Almost invariably the answer to that latter question is "yes."

But, again, activity is a personal decision and everyone must eventually choose the path which makes most sense.

Chapter 7

How to manage the loss of belief

In all things it is better to hope than despair. J. W. van Goethe

Skepticism, riddling the faith of yesterday, prepares the way for the faith of tomorrow. — Romain Rolland

Life is a series of gains and losses. In the Church, if we had a choice, we'd only gain knowledge of the truthfulness of the LDS religion and reach the safety of surety—gaining a *strong testimony* in LDS terms. Unfortunately, some of us lose those very things (or never gain them, a loss of expectation). Our clear understandings become muddled, our grasp of the “truth” seems to loosen, our assurances disappear—along with confidence and comfort. We've experienced a real loss (or so it seems to many of us.)

We know from studies conducted by the Church that about 30-40% of active LDS people have some doubts and questions, and that 5-10% of active LDS people actually disbelieve unique tenets of the Church. If you are reading this chapter, you or a loved one have probably experienced the loss of belief. (I should interject here a distinction between belief and faith. I am not necessarily talking about the loss of faith in this presentation.)

Indeed, faith is one of the coping mechanisms of a loss of belief. I deal here with the loss of *intellectual belief* in unique LDS teachings, such as might be stated as, “I just find myself more and more doubting that the Book of Mormon is an ancient history of the American Indians.”)

In the book *Counseling* (Deseret Book), W. Eugene Gibbons suggests that LDS people experience five major types of loss: the loss of a loved one (through death or divorce, for example), the loss of social role (through being released from an important Church calling, for example), loss of employment, loss of health, and loss of self-esteem. To that list we could add another major category—loss of testimony (or, loss of belief).

It is a major loss for many because of the adverse effects—loss of social role such as church callings, loss of peace of mind, self-esteem, family, friends, and so forth. I have seen people as devastated by the loss of testimony as by the loss of spouse or job. (Not that all have. Some simply seemed relieved.)

How does a person respond to a major loss? Years ago, the counselor Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified phases many people go through when a major loss occurs. These are: (1) shock and denial, (2) anger, (3)

negotiation, (4) depression and sadness, and (5) acceptance of the reality of the situation. A person experiencing a loss of belief will likely go through these phases, and should—as quickly as possible. At the acceptance phase we can deal effectively with the problem. The big questions are: How long will it take to get through to acceptance? How do I get on with the process? and What do I do about it once I get to acceptance? [I present some possible answers to “What to do?” in Chapter 10. (One thing you might do is regain your testimony, for example.) In this chapter, we’ll stick to *How long should it take? How do we get on with the process?*

If you are experiencing a loss of belief, you are on a narrow mountain path trodden by thousands of LDS people before you. Unfortunately, some have found it rocky, very steep, and sometimes even impassable. A few have jumped off the cliff and found themselves wounded and hurt as they fell to the bottom. Let’s try to avoid those experiences.

Incidentally, loss does not always result only in pain and sorrow. There may be a silver lining. For example, the death of an abusive or domineering spouse may result in both sorrow *and* relief. There are potential benefits from the loss of testimony. These include: unclogging channels of curiosity, moving towards a more universalizing type of understanding and love, tuning into Christ with more devotion, taking charge of your life, feeling more freedom, removing guilt as a source of motivation, allowing you to develop a personal religion, and ultimately becoming stronger.

A person experiencing a loss of belief may have negative emotional responses. These vary with the person but may include loneliness, confusion, irritation, and feelings of anger, despair, numbness, low self-esteem, apprehension, anxiety, depression, loss of control, loss of power, and feelings of rejection. Physical responses may include loss of appetite, loss of weight, dependency on medications, impaired health, loss of interest in routine life experiences, alienation from friends and family, turning away from the Church, and in the worst cases, suicide attempts. Again, the intensity of these responses varies from person to person, and from time to time. (Some suffer none of these.)

But, such emotions are normal and often unavoidable. We can manage our emotions, however, and avoid many of the negative physical responses. For example, our sadness (while unavoidable) can be managed so as not to hurt others or to hurt ourselves.

Loss of belief usually takes one of two forms: a sudden loss or a gradual loss. An admittedly rare but traumatic story might help explain the worst outcome of a sudden loss of testimony. (Incidentally, to protect confidentiality, all names are fictional and characters are composites of people I’ve known.) Stan was a convert to the Church who had a sudden loss of belief. He had read some of the Tanner literature and almost overnight lost his testimony. It was like having his mother hit and killed by a car. He was in the depths of a serious crisis.

For a day or two, he was dumbfounded, trying to awake from a bad nightmare. He didn’t go to work; he hardly moved from the house. Then the anger hit hard, and he hit back. Calls to friends, family, and Church leaders were tinged with hate. He threw his scriptures into the trash and

swore he'd never set foot in a warehouse again. Over the next few months he became estranged from his wife and children, upset with them for not "understanding." Eventually, a divorce ensued. If Stan had been able to manage his emotions more carefully during the initial stages of the crisis, he might have survived.

Like Stan, a few people experiencing a loss of belief will experience a *traumatic crisis*. Given about six or eight weeks, the dangerous portion of a crisis is resolved, one way or another. We want to direct the crisis-management so as to minimize the negative impacts and maximize a positive outcome.

Let's look at slow loss of belief. For most LDS people, the loss of belief creeps up like a silent ghost, slowly filling their minds with discomfort, questions, and doubt. As they come to realize that they don't believe, most people move slowly into and through the five Kubler-Ross phases (that is, denial, anger, negotiation, depression, and acceptance).

Each phase may last only a few days or weeks, but months and years is also possible. Some people stop along the way and experience years of difficulty. Faithful wonderers have often stopped in the denial or negotiation phases, for example. Others may feel angry and quit the Church while others carry that anger around for years. Others may stop in depression.

Movement to acceptance is facilitated by management of emotions. Unfortunately, emotional management is not often possible alone. So, whether in a traumatic crisis, or a long-term loss, I think it is wise to get help. LDS counselors are available, as well as thoughtful bishops, understanding friends, and empathetic family members.

It will be counterproductive to approach those who do not understand the phenomenon of the loss of belief, or who are dogmatic and un-Christlike in their personal religions. So seek help, but if you don't find relief, seek help elsewhere. You should feel comfortable and comforted from the very first session in counseling. You should not feel more guilt or sorrow. This is the signal that you have the wrong person helping.

One more thing—the helper should not be encouraging you to leave the Church or to blame someone (for example, your parents or friends). Your problem is not the fault of the institutional Church. In fact, the Church may be very useful in helping you to move through to acceptance. And yes, others like your parents or the missionaries have influenced you and directed your beliefs but usually with good intentions. Counseling often helps people to see that their problems are not all of their own making. But the best counselors help people to move beyond that reality and see that it is useful to understand and forgive others. They help people accept full responsibility for their lives.

The time of passage through the Kubler-Ross phases can be thought of as a function:

Speed of movement = F (honesty, work, outside help)

These are: (1) honesty with yourself and others, (2) working to resolve the problem (as opposed to ignoring it), and (3) letting others help (including God). Again, the right counselor might speed the process by

helping you to understand what is happening, helping you to manage your emotions, allowing you to feel that what has happened is acceptable, and encouraging you to move on to a new, more healthy (yet Church-compatible) personal religion. Let's look at each of these factors in more depth.

1. *Honesty.* Honesty helps you to come to terms with the reality of your experience and your life. It allows you to move on. If you become a closet doubter, which requires some dishonesty, you may have temporary peace, but your movement in the direction of *acceptance* will slow. You will feel like a hypocrite, maybe even a liar, and these emotions may further estrange you from God and the Church.

For a few of you, the lie will become intolerable and your health may suffer, or an explosion may occur, wounding yourself and others around you. Sometimes it is difficult to be honest. Your honesty may disturb people. It may effect others' testimonies. It may cause confusion and consternation among friends, family members, and especially, children. So, care, tact, and timing are important. Consideration for your children and your spouse will require careful management of your honest beliefs, feelings, and desires.

It is an interesting thing to contemplate the following idea: It is difficult for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to be honest about the way they believe if their beliefs do not follow a specific format, or do not support the general leadership of the Church.

Have you ever heard anyone bear a testimony like: "I don't know that Joseph Smith saw God, but I do know that Mormonism is good for me." (?) That kind of testimony is not heard because most members wouldn't feel comfortable saying it, even if it were true. This says something about our LDS religion which we cannot explore here; but for yourself, you should consider the act of dishonesty in light of what Christ has taught us.

Incidentally, being honest does not mean trying to convert others to your way of thinking. Let others have their own beliefs, even when they differ from yours. Support others in their beliefs as long as they don't hurt people. (Someone's belief in lying wouldn't warrant support). Let other people develop and live their own personal religions. (Fifty to sixty percent of LDS people do it just the way the institutional Church suggests—let them do it their way.)

2. *Working.* A person in loss is often helped by setting goals. Attainment of these goals requires work. Goals also help us manage our emotions. They help prevent counterproductive, irrational, and impulsive behavior. Here is my friend "Sara's" experience. Sara found herself doing very little, and was unhappy. What had been a life filled with Church responsibilities—classes and meetings to attend, neighbors to visit, lessons to be prepared, children to be driven, activities to be planned and overseen—became a life filled with boredom and resentment. After a long, slow loss of belief, she had essentially quit going to Church and had slowly given up much of what she assumed were "Church-related" activities (for example, attending her children's functions, studying scripture, holding family home evening, talking about morals, and so forth). In counseling, she discovered that much of what she had been

doing previously was still important, and that she could separate her “Mormonism” and her Christianity from her lost confidence in Joseph Smith and the Church. What seemed like “Church work” was actually very important and worthwhile and had nothing to do with her lost testimony. So she took on some new goals, some of which were (1) to put her family first and to be available to her husband and children in all their activities, including Church activities, (2) to develop a life based on Christ’s principles of living, (3) to better understand her LDS heritage and the worthwhile impact it had on her life, and (4) to see what parts of the Church she could still feel comfortable with. Eventually, she restored much of her Church activity and felt very good about it.

3. *Finding outside help.* You should continue to call upon the resources you have had in your life. If you have found comfort in prayer, then by all means, continue praying. If you’ve had God in your life in the past, and have felt that God was helping you, then that same experience can continue. You may find spiritual gifts (like faith) very helpful during the time you move through to acceptance.

It may be useful to try to separate God’s love from your testimony of unique LDS beliefs. A loss of testimony does not mean the loss of God’s love. A loss of belief in Joseph Smith does not require the loss of belief and faith in God and Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned before, counseling is often helpful, if you have the right counselor. There are self-help books which may be useful. And don’t hesitate to ask *other people* how they managed. You’ll find lots of people just like you if you are honest with what is happening in your life. You’ll get responses like, “Really, you too? I didn’t know. I don’t normally talk about it, but I had an experience just like yours. I found my bishop was really helpful...” Sometimes, once they get started, you can’t get people to stop talking about it.

Sin. If genuine sin is involved in your loss of belief (for example, if you are trying to justify adultery or dishonesty), then you should attempt to resolve that sin as well as your loss of testimony. If holding or losing power and authority were connected to your loss of belief, then you should attempt to resolve those needs as well as your crisis of faith. Genuine sin and the desire to control other people may well be connected to your experience. Resolving one may resolve the other.

On the other hand, and what is more typical, you may feel that your loss of belief is *sin itself*, or that you may have inadvertently sinned, or that God is punishing you, or withholding blessings for such subjective things as not being valiant, not going to church every Sunday, or not being a good steward. Understanding that loss of belief is not sinful can help you move more quickly into acceptance.

One last thought. Testimony and personal religions vary from person to person. Like other facets of life, and contrary to what many people would like to think, there is a great diversity of belief and testimony among LDS people. No one can understand exactly how you feel, or your situation, or your experiences. But the basic principles of loss management—honesty, working on goals, and getting help—may move you in the right direction.

Chapter 8

A 2020 Call

I think we may safely trust a good deal more than we do. — Henry David Thoreau

Note: The original story won a prize in a Utah Arts Council writing contest and was published in *Exponent II*. There is a saying that rich men feel no temptation to steal bread. In a similar way, powerful men often feel no need to question the system which grants them power. This is the story of a man's struggle to maintain his faith at the time of a personal change.

The door opened slowly on the spacious office on the top floor of the Church Administration Building. The security guard waved a farewell. "Nice to have known you folks," he said with a smile. Responding to his visitors' blank looks, he said more seriously, "Men are never the same after they receive a call from the First Floor."

R. Grant Ellison and Sister Ellison stepped hesitantly into the spacious lobby. The deep carpet, rich burgundy-and-white sculptured wool, was still beautiful after many years of use. Well-rubbed walnut trim and hand-painted, off-white wall paper covered the walls, and heavy lace curtains from an earlier era framed large wooden windows overlooking the flower-colored plaza.

Darkened oil paintings of early Church leaders hung heavily on the south wall, while glass cases displayed originals of the Book of Mormon and other early Church documents on the east. Light from the ancient cases cast a warm incandescent yellow glow on the wall behind. The lobby itself had been partially remodeled—ten years ago now—and was presently lit by a blue-white laser chandelier. The new clashed uncomfortably with the old in Ellison's thought: I'll take the traditional any time.

R. Grant Ellison stood quietly, his faithful wife and companion at his side. Tall, handsome, still muscular, graying at the temples, and dressed in a tailored, dark gray suit, he looked much like a bank president or Congressman.

He shifted his weight to his right foot—his left ankle had been bothering him since his thirties, and hurt under a full load. Elevating the foot helped, but that was unthinkable here.

A large double door opened. A woman came through, nodded to the receptionist, then hurried out. Shortly, a gentle elderly man shuffled through the door. Ellison had never been in the man's presence before, but he immediately recognized President Wells, the eighty-six-year-old prophet, seer, and revelator for the LDS Church, now 36 million members strong. Grant legs stiffened and his cheeks flushed. He took Sister Ellison's arm, knowing that she'd be needing support.

Sensing the tension, President Wells spoke in a soft, reassuring tone. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting. I've been looking forward to seeing you. Please, come in." President Wells grasped the arms of the Ellisons, separating them. With his thin hands at their waists, President Wells gently led them into his office toward three high-backed chairs at the side of his large, glass-topped desk. Directly in front of the desk was a dark leather chair obviously used for ordinations and blessings.

Ellison had not spoken a word. What can one say to a Prophet of God, he thought? What kind of small talk wouldn't sound . . . small?

President Wells asked them to turn their chairs so that they sat facing each other. Their knees were only inches apart, their chairs forming a perfectly equal triangle on the gray carpet.

The President smiled. His well-known weathered face and white hair were even more striking in person. "Brother Ellison, we've watched you and Sister Ellison for a number of years now. We know of your accomplishments, your devotion to the gospel, and your unfailing support of the leadership of the Church." President Wells paused. "We have something to suggest to you, and to Sister Wells," he said.

Grant wiped his damp hands together. He was nervous but excited. This has to be a call to be an Authority of some kind, he thought. He had served as a bishop, a stake president, a mission president in Germany, and was now a full-time employee of the Church in England. Anna K. had served faithfully at his side, becoming a recognized leader in her own right. Right now she was serving on the Relief Society General Board, looking after its interests in the British Isles. She had also become a well-known civic worker. Fluent in the major European languages, she was also a national director of the United Nation's Office of International Understanding, a position of considerable influence.

President Wells continued. "Sister Ellison, will you support your husband in any position we may call him to?"

Anna K. Ellison responded without hesitation. "Of course, President Wells." She sat erect in her chair, her smile serene and pleasant. Her hair was immaculate, her British clothes cut just right, and her hands rested calmly in her lap.

"Brother Ellison, will you support your wife in any position we may call her to?"

Ellison suddenly felt the pain in his left ankle. He rubbed it a little and said, "Why. . . ah. . . yes, of course, President."

"Well, I've got quite a proposal for you," President Wells said. "What I tell you now should not leave this room until it is announced in General Conference next week. Last month, while in the temple, it was suggested to us that another person is to be called into the general leadership of the Church. I have discussed this call with the Twelve. They are in harmony

with what we propose to do.” President Wells searched in his coat pocket for a sheet of paper. The old room was strangely quiet. Ellison leaned forward a little in his chair.

President Wells read carefully from the paper. “Anna K. Ellison, it is proposed that we call you to the position of Church Ambassador to Europe. This calling reports directly to the Twelve.” President Wells paused and looked at Grant. “Brother Ellison, it is proposed that you be released from your present position to support Sister Ellison. She’s going to need your strength, your love, your experience, and your priesthood blessings.”

Everyone exchanged glances. Anna K. Ellison, obviously concerned for her husband’s feelings, looked at him. Brother Ellison slumped slightly, and looked blankly at the President.

President Well’s kind voice loosened the tight silence. “No need to answer just yet. You’ll both need to think about it, I’m sure. Perhaps a little background information will help you understand the importance of this call.”

President Wells leaned over to his desk and touched a button. A side door opened and a handsome, well-dressed man appeared. “John, please bring us a pitcher of orange juice and have Lynn Maynard join us,” the President said. Turning to the Ellisons, he continued, “Lynn is one of my personal assistants. I want you to understand how this call came about.”

John returned with a tray bearing linen napkins, four crystal glasses and a large crystal pitcher of fresh orange juice. The President began to pour the juice.

Brother Ellison leaned back, folded his arms on his chest, and choked down a cough. Lifting his left foot onto his right knee, he rubbed the tender ankle. His eyes wandered about the room, finally fixing on an early photograph of President Wells and his wife, Ellen Tanner Wells. She was clinging to his arm, looking lovingly into his face. That’s the way things ought to be, Ellison thought. A woman at the side of her husband, supporting him.

Lynn Maynard, tall and stately, soon appeared with a large black binder. Sister Maynard was all business and obviously well prepared for her presentation, which she supported with graphs and charts in the binder. “As you know,” she began, “things have changed in the world, and in the Church, since the mid-eighties. In just twenty short years, we have sustained a growth of over 26 million new members, 5 million in Europe alone. “We’ve had a good reception in Europe this past decade. But we’ve had a few problems, too. The Church’s increased influence in Europe is being noticed by many ecclesiastical and government leaders, requiring our greater attention....” Lynn Maynard pushed smoothly through her prepared notes.

Ellison was not listening very closely. Why me, Heavenly Father? he prayed silently. He imagined himself following Anna into church and government buildings and being introduced as “Ambassador Ellison’s husband.” He saw himself addressing smiling Church members while they patiently waited for Anna K. Ellison to take the podium. He imagined waiting for her in hotel rooms while she attended important

meetings, and then hearing her say, “I’m sorry, but what we discussed is confidential. . . I can’t say anything just yet.” He choked on that thought.

Where would his career go? It had been years since he had actively worked as an insurance executive. Now his career in the Church, whatever was left of it, would be overshadowed by Anna’s position. He would have to defer to her needs, instead of she to his. His dream of rising to greater and greater service was about to turn into a nightmare—an uncontrollable plummeting into obscurity. He had a fleeting urge to jump up, flee the room, and quit the Church. The sudden thought shook him like blue-sky thunder and his attention flashed back to Sister Maynard.

“ . . . And we’ve found the new Church Ambassadorship an excellent bridge to leaders around the world,” Lynn Maynard continued. “It’s opened many doors and helped us solve many problems. Ambassador Ellison will be the third Ambassador called.”

President Wells smiled and took Anna K. Ellison’s hand. “They haven’t accepted yet.”

President Wells thanked Sister Maynard and invited her to chat for a moment with Sister Ellison. He stood and took Grant by the arm, moving him to the windows overlooking the plaza. Through the imperfect old glass Grant could see people passing just below, some intently heading for the temple, others for the mall, others seemingly with no destination in mind. None knew what was happening only feet above them.

“You’re limping slightly,” the president observed, turning back from the window to face Grant.

“It’s a slight problem with my left ankle.”

“I see. I hope it’s only temporary. Brother Ellison, do you believe that God is making this call?” the President asked.

The question flashed on Grant’s mind like water on a hot griddle. Do I? he wondered. “Yes, sir. . . I . . . guess so.”

“My years of associating with people tell me you’re having a problem, Brother Ellison. Am I right?”

Grant wanted to say, “No, I’m fine. I’d love to support Anna. I’m overjoyed at her call. I’ll do whatever is required to see her succeed.” Those feelings were there, all right, but they were swimming with a lot of other, more negative, selfish, and distrustful feelings. Grant knew how perceptive President Wells was. He would immediately feel Grant’s sincerity. Best to be completely honest, Grant told himself.

“Well, President Wells, it’s not going to be easy, that’s true. It’s such a change. It’s not that I don’t want this for Anna, it’s just that... well, pride is one of my problems...Anna can tell you. It’s going to be rough being in the shadows...out of the decision making..not being ‘number one’...not being in charge...taking direction from a woman... and from my wife, at that. I’m confused. I’ve been secretly hoping for something like this for myself for years...and now...it seems...I just don’t know.”

“Brother Ellison, thank you for being honest with me. This is hard on you, I can tell. You’re not the first to experience these feelings, believe me,” President Wells said with gentleness and love. “You saw the photo of Ellen and me on the desk. I keep that particular picture close to remind me that we are all equal in the sight of God, and that we must trust Him.

“That picture was taken on a Sunday afternoon many years ago. Ellen had just been called to a special committee of the Relief Society General Board, a tremendous opportunity, one requiring a lot of sacrifice on my part. I was then serving as the second counselor in an elders quorum presidency,” he chuckled. “I felt some of the same hard emotions you are probably feeling right now— frustration, doubt, anger, rejection. And it took me months to overcome those feelings. But it’s my testimony that such feelings can be overcome and must be overcome if we are to achieve exaltation.”

Grant nodded, not quite satisfied, not quite understanding, not quite believing. They walked back to the desk.

“Well, now, Sister Anna K. Ellison, will you accept this call from the Lord?”

“I will, with Grant’s blessing.”

“And you, Brother Grant R. Ellison, can you accept a new calling, that of supporting and sustaining Ambassador Anna K. Ellison?”

“I can try.”

“Good. The Lord will help. I’d like you to join me as I set apart Sister Ellison. Then I’d like to lay my hands on your head and give you a special blessing, that you will be able to accept your new role, and to understand its importance to Anna and to yourself.

“Sister Ellison, if you’ll come forward.”

Chapter 9

Developing a Church-Compatible Model for Living

Note: A shortened version of this essay appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *This People* magazine.

Introduction

LDS people sometimes find themselves doubting important aspects of their religion, and questioning their place in it. They have choices: regain their beliefs, keep quiet, try to convince others that they are right, leave the Church, or stay and adapt, among others. I believe it is useful and possible to stay and adapt if reestablishing firm beliefs is impossible (or difficult at the moment). But for this approach to work, it requires acceptance, faith, a continued relationship with God, and the creation of a suitable model for living—a personal religion based on the foundations of Christ's teachings and compatible with LDS expectations. For a religion to be truly personal, we must carefully select the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors appropriate to our needs. It is also important to be honest with ourselves and others as we make changes.

New motivators will have to be found. Existing presenting and hidden motivators will have to be examined and modified, as appropriate and possible. In this chapter, I describe how some skeptical LDS people have coped with the loss of belief by developing a satisfying and acceptable lifestyle compatible with traditional LDS life.

The Approach

It has been over twenty-five years (1982) since I wrote the first draft of *The Phenomenon of the Closet Doubter* (see Chapter 6 for an updated version.) Since that time I have had a considerable number of contacts with doubting LDS people. For example, I was invited to speak at the monthly meeting of the Society of St. Chad. Sponsored by the Episcopal Church in Salt Lake City, the Society is a support group for LDS people who have experienced a crisis of their faith. The meeting began with participants introducing themselves, describing their crises and outlining the solutions they have selected for themselves. As far as I could tell, all had lost their belief and faith in the unique claims of the LDS religion. It obviously had been a wrenching, emotional loss for each of them. Emotions ranged from anger, resentment, and hostility towards the Church, to recognition and acceptance of the reality of their experiences.

Most of the participants had elected to separate themselves from activity in the Church. A few had taken on non-Mormon religious commitments with gusto. Some seemed confused—homeless travelers, wandering alone in a deep forest with no food, shelter, or compass. A few had elected to maintain their memberships and activity in the Church, but in reduced and modified ways. Several reaffirmed their trust in and commitments to Christ.

I presented my ideas to the group:

- It is possible to stay active in the Church, even when troubled by doubts and questions.
- It is possible as an LDS person to have divergent opinions and lifestyles without becoming alienated from the Church or from other LDS people.
- A personal relationship with God and a personal religion can be developed which, while not entirely based on the LDS model, is nevertheless *compatible* with it.
- There is a difference between “Mormonism” and the Church. Certainly, the Church administers the daily affairs of today’s organizational “Mormonism,” but “Mormonism” is also the tradition, the culture, the ethical base, the history, and the society of a people. It is a way of life. It is often the center of our emotional lives and may be deeply engraved on our psyche. It is the primary connection to Christ and God for some. It is a vehicle for delivering and interpreting Christ’s teachings. Leaving the Church may be possible, but leaving behind our “Mormonism” may be impossible. Why not consider trying to stay with the Church as well?

The LDS Model

One’s *life as an LDS person* can be compared to living in a special house. Its foundation, while strong and standing on bedrock, is somewhat hidden in the ground. This foundation consists of Christ’s life and teachings (e.g., honesty, morality, prayer, love, giving, sharing, and faith.) The structure above is well lit, clean, and shiny. It is nicely furnished, with freshly painted walls, squeegeed windows, vacuumed rugs, nice solid appliances, tidy plants, and waxed floors. It has food on the table, soft music on the stereo, and plenty of instructions for operating all the appliances and equipment. Everything is in order, and the radio and television provide constant direction for the occupants’ lives. The above-ground structure represents the Church, its furnishings and floor plan the unique LDS beliefs, lifestyles, activities, and Church organizations.

Life in the house leads to success, happiness, and fulfillment for most who live there. There is plenty to do; and for those who accept and believe, it is a satisfying existence. The house comes with detailed instructions for most aspects of life, and with specific guidelines for developing relationships with God and other people.

The Church encourages members to develop a personal religion and a personal relationship with God—but in accordance with the LDS model.

Generally, occupants of the Church’s house are required to keep the house neat and clean. They do not have permission to change things a lot. The landlord insists that occupants maintain the house and pay regular rent by attending meetings, supporting Church activities, doing temple

work, paying tithes and offerings, and preparing and teaching lessons, among other tasks.

Many occupants accept and enjoy the house as it is. But sometimes, doing the same thing as everyone else, using the same appliances, eating the same food, watching the same TV programs, and listening to the same music day in and day out do not appeal to all occupants. Here is where problems may arise. Results of a study conducted in the mid-1980s by the Church Correlation Evaluation Department, suggest that about 60-70 percent of *active* LDS people live in the house, unruffled and happy in their surroundings. On the other hand, that means that the other 30-40 percent of *active* LDS people experience various levels of discomfort and disagreement in the house. In a paper published in the *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion*, it was reported that for every ten LDS converts, three people simultaneously leave the Church. Reasons for leaving vary, but a significant percentage are related to loss of belief.

Outcomes of Skepticism

Unresolved doubts about (or problems with) the standard LDS model often result in one of six outcomes, or combinations thereof. I have illustrated these particular outcomes with stories created from composites of people I've known (including myself), with names and details changed to protect privacy:

We Reaccept the House as It is. In this approach, we resolve our doubts and again find satisfaction in the house. "Mack" began a journey into doubt when he read some of the Tanner literature. It had been left on his desk by someone in his insurance office. Mack was shocked by the attacks against the Book of Mormon and was swayed to disbelieve its validity. This led to doubting Joseph Smith, the Church, and even Christ and God. Mack was vocal and open about his new disbeliefs to his wife, extended family, and friends. He stopped going to Church almost immediately. His bishop and several close friends met with him. I was asked to talk to him. An unofficial ward fast was organized. All of this support and the love Mack felt from his family and friends had an effect. After several weeks of emotional anguish, he decided that he had been too hasty. He decided to give the Church the benefit of the doubt. He burned the literature in the fireplace during a family home evening, with the family quietly cheering. His return to the fold seems to be permanent.

If we're like Mack, we reestablish our relationships with God in the Church's model. Our testimonies return, and we are untroubled by serious doubts or questions. Many questioning LDS people have not been able to make it work, but when successful, it seems to provide permanent peace of mind.

We Make Do. "Friedreich," a convert in his mid-twenties, joined the Church while studying in the eastern USA. He accepted it without reservation. Moving to the west, he met and married another recent convert and they became quite active in the Church. His first temple experience, when he and his wife were endowed and sealed about a year after their marriage, had been a negative one. It started him wondering about other facets of the LDS religion as well. One afternoon, while on a

business trip, he realized that he didn't really believe the central tenets of the Church anymore. For several years, he endured the tensions of doubt in relative silence. Even his wife did not know the depths of his dissatisfaction. His emotional life suffered because his behavior did not follow his true beliefs. After some time, he disclosed all to her a rush of tears. She was very supportive, but confused and troubled. Later, he made known his questioning to his ward and has continued some activity in the Church, but without enthusiasm. He has yet to find complete peace with himself, or to choose a definite approach to his life. His personal relationship with God is also ill-defined and unsteady.

If we are like Friedreich, we try to ignore our doubts and disagreements, and struggle along, trying to live in the LDS house and attempting to fit in as best we can. Sometimes we do it without telling anyone about our true beliefs and feelings. Sometimes we feel a lot of anger and resentment which result in explosions, anger, and hurting ourselves and others. Our relationships with God are strained and we are confused about which behaviors and attitudes are correct.

We Try to Change the Occupants of the House. "Roger" was a champion of critical and logical thinking, which became the source and support of his own doubts about the historical claims of the LDS Church. He stayed active in the church but tried to "help" others be critical thinkers, too. He taught his own children the importance of reason, logic, and critically evaluating all claims. As a result, several of his older children have gone on to study science and engineering, but only two remain active in the Church. Two of the inactive children, instead of rejecting only the "irrational and contradictory parts" of the LDS religion, have rejected Christ's teachings and are ethical wanderers. These negative outcomes have proven to be a heavy burden for Roger, who naively assumed that his family would hold strong to Christ's principles of living.

If we're like Roger, we kick against authority and try to force changes on others. We try to convince others that our way is right. Rarely do we succeed and when we do, the results are not always what we hope for.

We Find a New Home. "Bob" had studied the LDS religion with a fervor not seen in most LDS people. He knew scripture, history, and doctrine like few others. The motivation for his strong attention to religion was driven, first by a need to prove the LDS religion correct, and later by the opposite need. When I first spoke with him, he was spending three to four hours per day studying, thinking, writing letters to General Authorities, and so forth. He was consumed by the problem, and had little relief from the tensions he felt. Rebuffed in his efforts to have people see things his way, he left the Church and eventually joined a quasi-Christian, New Age group in Oregon. Tragically, he left his family.

If we're like Bob, we leave the LDS house and move to another house. The new house provides another model, and we adopt the ways of our new house and housemates. Sometimes we may drive by the old house, but we can't go back. We often develop a new personal relationship to God (or we have no relationship at all), and we have a new personal religion.

We Leave but Can't Find a New Home. "Susan" grew up in the Church, but became disaffected during college. At thirty-five, she had not yet

married and was totally inactive. She dabbled in various other religious systems, but never adopted any particular tenets, beliefs, or prescriptive behaviors for herself. She had no personal relationship with God and her relationship with her family was strained. She seemed like an educated drifter. Her jobs and love relationships were constantly changing, and many sad and unfortunate personal experiences (e.g., she contracted genital herpes) left her cold and hardened. She is still angry and bitter with the Church, which she unfairly believes ruined her life by misleading her.

If we're like Susan, we abandon the LDS house and move from apartment to apartment, never really settling down again. We reject the LDS model and don't adopt any other. Our lives follow a winding road, taking us from place to place. There is some adventure in this trip but we make many mistakes, sometimes learning from our experiences, sometimes not. We indulge ourselves in activities that end in pain for us and for others. Our lack of purposefulness means that we never really find happiness or satisfaction. We blame others (e.g., our parents) for our unhappiness. We have at best, a limited relationship with God or Christ. We have no distinct models for our lives.

We Stay but Redecorate. "Terri" has been an LDS person for all of her fifty-five years. She served a mission, married in the temple, and has apparently lived the life of a typical Mormon. Yet in her mid-thirties she experienced a long crisis of faith which began when one of her children became seriously ill. Acknowledging that it would be impossible for her to reestablish her traditional beliefs (at least for the time being), she worked out an agreement with her husband (still an active believer) which allowed both of them to pursue their respective religious lives with as little conflict and disruption as possible. Terri's personal relationship with God is intense and meaningful, and she relies heavily on faith and prayer. Her activities with LDS people, though limited, are mature, loving, and mutually accepting. Her marriage and family appear strong and healthy. Her life is directed by a personally created model based on Christ's teachings.

If we're like Terri, we stay in the LDS house but rearrange the furniture and even remodel. We may add a rumpus room. In this approach, we adapt the Church's requirements and opportunities to our needs, but the house is still built upon the foundation which rests securely in the ground. We are honest with those around us and let others know of the changes we are making. We find it possible to develop satisfying personal relationships with God and people. Our models for behaviors and attitudes are compatible with, but perhaps different in some respects, from the LDS one.

Although this last approach may seem inviting, it brings some risks. Our spouses, children, and neighbors may dislike the changes, the disruption, and our rearrangement of the standard model. It may be threatening to them. What if family members follow our lead? It may create unity, but it may also result in stress and strain if they, in turn, carry their redecorating to excess. Our leaders may disapprove and may distance themselves from us. Additionally, this personalized approach can cause real trouble if the changes we make are sudden, dangerous, or ill-advised. The house may cave in around us or we may be asked to leave if

our changes are too radical. So we take a chance in redecorating, but we accept the risk because it makes living in the house acceptable.

This last approach, despite the risks and the heightened responsibility it requires, is my personal choice and recommendation as an alternative for those ready to leave the Church, and for those who have found the fifth approach—

re-accepting—impossible. Under these circumstances, the re-decorating approach is potentially the least disruptive. It may save your family from a lot of un-necessary stress.

It might be worth a try.

Redecorating

Why it can work. Many have told me that the redecorating approach is impossible for them. I agree that it may be impossible for some, but I think it may be possible for others because:

1. A personal relationship with God is available for anyone. God is no respecter of persons and loves each person equally. Prayer continues to provide a communication channel.
2. The blessings of the gospel come through following Christ's teachings about life, and through appropriate behaviors. It does not require a belief in Joseph Smith to be honest in your business dealings, for example.
3. Particular beliefs about the LDS religion may vary within certain bounds, making it possible for us to diverge from the standard model without alienation. It is not necessary to have an unwavering belief in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon to attend church, for example.
4. It is possible to be open and honest about our beliefs and feelings. It may not be easy, but it is usually the best approach—for ourselves and for others. Emotional health is easier to maintain when our actions follow our true beliefs.

[A personal note. As I grew up in the church, I found myself wanting to believe what I heard, and I was generally willing to accept the things I was taught, but there was always an element of question, always a little skeptical wondering, even during my early years.

During graduate school at Michigan, I read the entire seven-volume *History of the Church*. I was troubled by the picture that emerged. Though troubled, I stayed active for reasons I can't expand on here but would be recognized by most members. As the passing years brought parenthood and heavier church administrative responsibilities, I became even more skeptical, and consequently, more anxious.

Eventually I realized that I would never be convinced. But it's okay. I am actually reluctant to have an unwavering testimony, to know without a doubt, or to have all the answers because of what that might do to my enjoyment of thinking, wondering and searching and because of how it might effect the excitement of finding new ways of seeing the world. I actually like the pleasure of not knowing, and the good feelings of curiosity. (The joy is in the chase, not in the kill.) Perhaps there is an endorphin high associated with doubt, wondering, and thinking for oneself. Yes, there is tension and anxiety, but there is a unique peace in knowing that this is also a blessing—that it is what God intends for me. I

believe God loves me, is there for me, and is helping me to understand a more universalizing picture of divinity, love, and God's relationships with people.

I have come to believe that there is a mystery about life and religion which I will never understand but that God cares about all people and has a "program" for each person on earth which can only be understood by God (and maybe by that person). As such, I think the Church may be *literally* true for those who believe it is. For the past forty years I, like many others, have attempted to build a life compatible with the LDS culture but one which also gives me the freedom to be myself, to be honest with myself and others, and to develop my own relationship with God. I've had setbacks and disappointments, but this lifestyle has worked acceptably, and I have proven (to myself, anyway) that one need not leave the Church when doubts arise.]

Why do I tell you all this about myself? It is because I believe it is useful to be honest with others about our beliefs. There is no shame associated with it. It is emotionally healthy. And it is possible to do it without the world coming apart.

A warning. If you choose the sixth approach, the redecorating-stay-and-adapt approach, probably the worst thing you can do is begin changing the interior of the house without plans or assistance. Some people, in their anxious and angry phase, quickly move things around or tear down a few walls, and then do nothing more, living in the mess. Others furiously throw away old furnishing and appliances but have no replacements. These people live off the floor, eating out of pots and pans.

Before making changes, it is usually wise to consult with someone knowledgeable about the problems of redecorating. Talk it over with your parents, your friends, your spouse, and others who care about you. Help is available from others who have lived through the experience. The Society of St. Chad seems like a good support. LDS Family Service counselors have dealt with these problems countless times. I often urge people to talk things over with their bishops, if their bishops are unthreatened by this diversity. I believe that many bishops have gained valuable insights to the reality of questioning and wondering when someone is courageous enough to be honest, and mature enough to avoid anger and accusations. It can help bishops see that "prayer and fasting" *alone* may be too simplistic.

Before you alter this old house, it is also best to have some goals and some ideas as to what the new floor plans and furnishings will look like. If possible—and this *is* difficult for a person in the troubled emotional state of loss—it is best to (1) make a conscious decision to strengthen your personal relationship with God, (2) take your family's needs into consideration, and (3) consciously adopt an initial draft of a model for your religious life which is compatible with Christ's teachings, the LDS culture, and Church rules.

Sample Model for a Personal Religion

What does a personal religious model look like? Obviously, you must develop your own standards and expectations. It must fit your own needs

and desires. Most models are ideals to live by. Don't make a guilt trap for yourself when you can't maintain every detail of your model. Try to make your model as compatible with the LDS model as possible. If possible, discuss your plans with your spouse, bishop, stake president, or others you trust. Their love and counsel may be very valuable to you during this stressful change. If possible, make it something they can accept. It will make things much easier.

Sample model. The following model is an *example* of one you might make for yourself:

1. *As it pertains to Christ:* I try to understand and follow Christ's teachings. As such, my personal religion includes these behaviors:

- I study Christ's life and teachings.
- I try to follow Christ's example, for example:
 - I care about other people.
 - I try to "turn the other cheek;" I try to forgive.
 - I try to be honest with myself and others.
 - I share what I have with others.
 - I adopt the motto: "Do unto others."
- I honor my parents and grandparents.

2. *As it pertains to God:* I try to understand God and my relationship with God. I pray and stay close to God. I acknowledge God's goodness in my life. I show thanks to God by the way I treat others. I acknowledge that I do not know all there is to know about religion and God, and rely on faith to bridge the gap.

3. *As it pertains to other people:* I listen. I try to understand others. I accept others and their personal religions without criticism. I allow others to have their own beliefs, feelings, and desires. I try not to convert others in the Church to my ways of believing, but I am honest with others about my life. In doing so, I try to control and manage emotional responses (e.g., anger) which may hurt others. I communicate my desires, feelings, and beliefs, but in ways which will not hurt others. I listen to other people without criticism. I negotiate and compromise with others to solve problems. I respect others' rights to privacy. I take responsibility for my actions and attitudes which may hurt others.

4. *As it pertains to the Church:* I am honest about my beliefs and feelings about the Church, but I am not unfairly critical of it or its leaders. I remain active, as it benefits me and others. I accept callings which are compatible with my abilities and desires. I take responsibility for my activity in the Church. I seek to change—through regular channels—Church programs which I believe are not beneficial.

5. *As it pertains to my family:* I put my family's interests at the highest priority and I make my marriage as important as any other endeavor in my life. I try not be let my own beliefs and feelings be too disruptive

to the religious process they experience themselves. I support my wife and children in their beliefs and Church activities. I contact teachers and leaders and encourage them to teach Christian ways of living to my children. I negotiate acceptable arrangements concerning my Church activity with them on a timely basis. I respect my children's right to a stable life.

6. *As it pertains to my personal life:* I accept things as they are. When I have problems, I try to solve them. When I make mistakes, I say, "I'm sorry." I forgive others. I accept the principle of moderation in all things. I exercise, eat correctly, and maintain good health practices. I try to educate myself. I try to see the reality of every situation. I am honest with others about myself, my beliefs, and my feelings. I seek help and counsel when I cannot understand or solve a problem on my own. I listen to other's points of view. I avoid letting unwarranted guilt and fears drive my behavior.

Your model. You will have to develop your own model. It is exciting to take full responsibility for your own life (with God's help).

Living your model will be difficult. Don't be afraid to back off and make the model more realistic. Most of us develop models that are more stringent than we can live, and stricter than the current LDS Church model.

Motivation

The first thing we notice after adopting a new model for a religious life is the need for new motivators. In the existing Church model, prime motivators for living the house rules (e.g., Word of Wisdom, tithing, temple work, preparing and teaching lessons, attending meetings, "living the gospel," etc) include both the *presenting motivators* (those we like to mention, e.g., love of God, love of Church, obedience to God, individual growth, eternal rewards, personal satisfaction, tradition), and the *hidden motivators* (e.g., group pressure, guilt, fear, and possible divine punishment). These latter motivators, while strong, are often obscured and rarely mentioned, except perhaps when we deny their existence or importance. When used, they have a positive-sounding tone: "I couldn't afford not to pay tithing," is a positive and non-threatening way to say, "If you don't pay tithing, God will not only not provide for you, but he will also take away that which you have."

Hidden motivators, recognized or not, acknowledged or not, are powerful and influential, and you must deal with them if you are to change your lifestyle and still remain at peace with yourself. You might evaluate to what extent these hidden motivators influence you.

To start, how do you know when you are motivated by deep-seated guilt and fear? It is the last thing most of us want to admit. We prefer to think that we make decisions based on goodness, or on rational or reasonable analysis. But if there is any doubt about it, there are tests. For example, suppose you are a faithful fast offerings payer. Try for one month giving half of your fast offerings to another worthy charity.

And tell your bishop what you are doing. Tell him you want to turn your guilt and fear aside. If guilt is a motivator, you will feel uneasy, anxious, and fearful of the consequences. Skip blessing the food at meal time. Check for feelings of guilt and fear as you do it. Skip wearing your garments for one morning. Did you feel fear or guilt? While unusual, none of these tests is *sinful*. None should elicit deep fears or feelings of guilt.

Of course, guilt is a useful emotion and fear is an ancient, deep-seated, and powerful feeling. Both can lead us to correct and safe behavior. When these feelings keep us from killing, lying, or stealing, they serve us. However, as LDS people, we often feel *misplaced* or *unwarranted* guilt and fear. If we feel guilty about something which is not wrong or fear something which is not threatening, then guilt and fear are poor servants. They bar us from thoughts, beliefs, and activities which could enrich our lives. The following real-life stories illustrate these points. (Again, names and details have been changed to protect privacy.)

“Norma and John.” At one time, I was involved with LDS Social Services as a lay counselor. (It was one of the modifications I made in my own religious house. I decided to pursue more person-oriented service and avoid leadership/teaching calls.) Norma, active for most of her sixty years, called to say that her husband, John, a faithful and unquestioning member of the Church, had been suffering from a deep depression for several years, a feeling she also shared. In our discussion, she mentioned that John had never been called to be a member of a bishopric. As a result, he felt God must be displeased with him, that he lacked “valor,” or had not been forgiven for past mistakes. He could not identify any act or sin which might reasonably have prompted this divine displeasure, but nevertheless felt consuming guilt and overwhelming fear for the future and his salvation. Norma also wondered if she were the “cause” of the “problem.” Was her own unworthiness responsible for her husband’s “failure?” After several meetings and subsequent reassurance from their bishop, the feelings of depression were relieved. This is one example of the many types of misplaced and inappropriate guilt felt by LDS people.

“Marie” suffered from chronic uterine bleeding and actually believed she was within weeks of bleeding to death. Her doctor had warned that unless she had a hysterectomy, she would eventually die. She refused the surgery because she was driven by awful feelings of guilt. Her patriarchal blessing had promised many children “if she was worthy.” A hysterectomy would be a sign of unfaithfulness, an acknowledgement of unrepentant sin. It would be a sign that Marie was not worthy of God’s promised blessings—better to die than to contravene the promises. (Patriarchal blessings are sometimes a source of misplaced guilt among LDS people. Some may feel they receive the promised blessings but do not deserve them. Others do not receive the promised blessings and feel like they have failed, or that God does not love them. In either case, unwarranted guilt and fear are the resulting emotions.)

In Marie’s case, her bishop and stake president suggested that her interpretation of the blessing was too literal. She eventually came to believe that the blessings could be achieved in the after-life or with surrogate “children” in this life. She went on to have the surgery, but with

some misgivings, not having completely purged herself of the unwarranted fear.

“Steve” was eighteen when he almost drowned in a water-skiing accident. He had hit a log at high speed, crashed, and fallen unconscious into the water. His life preserver kept him afloat until help arrived. His mother told him that God must have intervened to save him. He didn’t really believe that. Then, guilt set in. How could he be so callous as to reject God’s intervention in his life? How could he not believe? What horrible sin or error was standing in the way of his knowing the truth about this? Several months later, he was diagnosed with a curable cancer. He blamed the cancer on his ungrateful attitude about the drowning accident. Eventually though, Steve came to believe that these were unproductive feelings and beliefs and that it didn’t really matter whether God intervened or not or whether he knew it or not. He was thankful for life, and came to believe that every moment was a gift of God.

It is these inappropriate and destructive fears and guilt which must be overcome before you can be completely happy living in your newly furnished home; and this may be a life-long task, a difficult challenge which will require much courage, thought, and effort. Being honest with yourself and looking deep within the reality of your life is the first step in overcoming these enslaving and inappropriate motivators.

Now, to what extent are *you* influenced by inappropriate guilt and fears? By unreasonable group pressure? In your own case, which of the following statements trigger uneasiness in you? Imagine yourself telling your mother, bishop, spouse, or friend one or more of the following (as they apply to you):

- *I don’t believe*
- *I don’t have a firm and unwavering testimony of the Church.*
- *I don’t find Church activity as useful as I used to.*
- *I don’t agree with everything the Church does. Some of the programs upset me.*
- *I don’t know for sure whether Joseph Smith was a prophet.*
- *I sometimes wonder if the temple ceremony is inspired.*
- *I sometimes wonder if God is with the Church.*
- *I sometimes wonder if God loves me.*
- *I don’t really deserve the blessings of my patriarchal blessing.*
- *I find Church meetings boring.*
- *I sometimes don’t enjoy doing [any Church calling].*
- *I don’t enjoy going to the temple. I don’t find it very uplifting.*
- *I have wanted to try a glass of wine.*
- *I take off my garments when I’m working in the back yard.*
- *When good people get sick, I wonder about the promises of the Word of Wisdom.*
- *I sometimes think my church leaders aren’t right.*
- *I wish I could give my fast offerings to the New Hope Center this month.*
- *My kids don’t want to go to Church.*
- *I sometimes think the Church’s programs are sexist.*

While troubling, none of these statements requires you to feel guilty. Such thoughts are not, by themselves, sinful. If you have any of these thoughts, then that is the actuality of your life. Better to acknowledge the thought and examine its reality in your life and its meaning for you. Better to deal with the problem than repress it. It will only come back at some later time, perhaps in an uglier form.

Finding New Motivators

Living the foundation principles (e.g., honesty, morality, love, kindness, giving, Christ's teachings) are essential to successfully constructing a new model. Motivators for living the foundation principles include both presenting and hidden elements. Whatever motivates you to do these things can basically remain unchanged.

Even if motivators are not entirely appropriate (e.g., guilt, fear, pride, trying to please the group), at least you reap some benefits from appropriate behaviors and attitudes. Blessings are largely the result of action, not ideals. Hopefully, however, you will eventually move away from guilt and fear, and adopt more appropriate motivators—"I am honest because I want to be, and I know it is good for me and others," or, "Christ showed us the way to live, and I believe he was right, so I do what he suggested."

Finding sufficient motivation for continuing to live the house rules—the organizational requirements—may be difficult. Unreasonable and unwarranted fears and guilt will be weakened as effective motivators. (Hopefully, they will eventually disappear.) Group pressures will weaken. Old motivators will have to be replaced by more mature motivators: personal choice, positive and loving attitudes, chosen behaviors, personal responsibility, and respect for your children. Rewards can continue to be a motivator, but hopefully they will be of simple goodness, of doing well, of seeing your children happy. Group pressures continue to be involved (e.g., your family, the ward), but the groups you identify with may change—from your ward, for instance, to a university group. You will have to identify and evaluate these new pressures. Reality and reason become important motivators. Being open and honest with others about your life is, in itself, a motivator.

A new model for a religious life is a challenge, but it can be very rewarding for those who succeed. James Fowler (see page 42) suggested that as a crisis of faith passes, a person moves from Faith Stage Four (wondering, doubts, tension, turmoil) back to Stage Three (safely rejoining the group) or forward to Stage Five (peace of mind, acceptance, universalizing love, and a personal relationship with God.) Those who venture—or stumble—into the wilderness of Stage 4 have the promise and blessings of Stage 5, or the safety of Stage 3. In either case, we can still lead religious lives compatible with the traditional LDS model

Chapter 11

The Evidence of Things Not Seen

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

Note: These days almost anyone can have access to the contents of entire libraries at the touch of a button, right at home. This accessibility raises questions and concerns about the use and misuse of information which has hitherto been protected by its unavailability. For example, the Church's historical repositories presumably contain many sacred or potentially controversial documents which have been restricted to legitimate researchers. The potential for universal access of this information (and potential misuse of it) presents two options. First, the church can live with the problem, trusting that a knowledgeable membership will draw positive conclusions and that those inoculated by germs of criticisms will be made resistant to apostasy. Or conversely, access can be heavily restricted, thereby preventing contact with the information altogether. This is the fictional story of the second option, and its effect on one individual.

It was Heber's letter to the Tribune that really caused trouble.

Until that fateful day Heber Tanner had been a faithful believing Mormon. Clean-cut, as solid as the temple foundation, and fresh out of BYU with an MA in history, he had been retained as an assistant researcher at the Church History Department at the new Church History Library in the City Creek complex—quite a showing of trust. Very few people had been allowed into the department, much less allowed to work there, since the access restrictions were imposed.

During the days of easy access, Heber had been a precocious senior at Salt Lake's East High School. Shunning sports and the like but excited by religion, social issues, and history, he had paid close attention to the arguments which flashed between ecclesiastical leaders and LDS intellectuals, as reported in the newspapers. Of course, he had sided with the Church. No sense giving enemies of the Church a chance to distort the truth, he had concluded. Heber's father, a bishop at the time, had solidly backed the Church's new policy. Honest men, he told Heber, men called of God, would still have access to the records. It wasn't as if the records were sealed up completely. The Church would provide any necessary information. Heber was a true believer, in both his father and the Church. It all made good sense. And sealing up religious records was not all that rare. Joseph Smith was given records which were partially sealed.

"It fits God's purposes to withhold some types of information," he had told his ward at his missionary farewell. During his mission in Texas, Heber became a staunch proselytizer and fervent testimony-bearer. He

felt the Lord's spirit regularly. On one occasion, the spirit directed him and his companion to the door of one eventual convert; on another, Heber healed a sister suffering from asthma. He had had only one questionable experience. A golden couple—loving, kind, full of the Spirit—Brother and Sister Ortega, called at the last minute to decline baptism. They mentioned having had an eye-opening experience that changed their minds about the Church. Something to do with anti-Mormon literature given to them by their neighbor. Heber responded like a sleepwalker awakened suddenly in a thunderstorm. Emotions flashed crazily through his mind like bolts of lightning: *surprise* (“My God, how could this have happened?”), *fear* (“Whose fault is this—mine?”), *frustration* (“Why do my investigators keep reading anti-Mormon stuff?”), *desperation* and *anguish* (“Will this never end?”), *guilt* (“Did I push too hard? Too fast? Am I living righteously?”), *betrayal* (“Why has the Lord forsaken me?”), *anger* (“What did I do to deserve this? Why does the damned devil interfere?”), *doubt* (“What does this mean? Is God really involved?”), *concern* (“What will the other elders think? What will happen to the souls of my investigators?”), and *disappointment* (“...so good!”)

Heber fasted and prayed for two days, but to no avail. The Ortegas were not only not ready, they rejected any further contact with him or the Church. He settled into a sullen, dull depression. Heber's mission president eventually transferred him to another area, hoping to pull him out of the dark hole. That seemed to help. A week later, Heber's letter was again tinted with the pinks and golds of hope and promise. The Ortega's failure was seen as test, a strengthening experience purposely provided by a loving Father. Stability, purpose, and confidence returned to Heber's mind.

His mission completed, he departed for BYU, married, fathered two children in successive years, and finished school. The job at the History Department was the next step in what seemed a foreordained destiny to be one of the chosen, one of the champions of the faith.

During the first few months, Heber had the task of compiling historical information for General Authorities who were writing books or preparing talks and speeches. Heber received no publication credit, but he knew that he had to serve a worthy stewardship before he could hope to become a recognized Church historian or author. Heber was content to play the role of a patient missionary waiting for the Spirit—one cannot push too fast or too hard when it came to Church matters.

After three months on the job, Brother Stevenson, one of the assistant historians, asked Heber to come in to discuss a new assignment. Brother Stevenson was in his early fifties, a former bishop, and a forty-acre farmer of history. Slightly graying in his thinning sideburns, soft-spoken and wise, a twenty-year veteran of the department, he had quickly become Heber's model. “You'll have access to Early Records Room No. 3,” he said solemnly. “You know the worth of original documents. Limit your handling of them. Use the microfilm when possible. Always sign in and out at the desk. And always wear these gloves when you handle any actual documents.” He handed Heber a pair of clear PVC plastic gloves.

“As you know, Room No 3. contains materials associated with Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball, and most of Brigham Young's wives. And I

believe we still have some early materials from the Smith family library stored in there.” Brother Stevenson stood up, smiling slightly. His clothes hung loose on his wiry body. He looked more like a clerk than an historian. He gave Heber a friendly pat on the back and the standard department admonition, “Keep your eyes on your work.”

Heber’s new task was to review and summarize materials associated with Brigham Young’s family life, as recorded in Brigham’s wives’ letters and journals. Albert O. Young, a member of the Second Quorum of Seventy, and a descendant of Brigham Young, was writing a book about early LDS family life.

Discussing the assignment with Brother Stevenson at lunch a week later, Heber observed that this might be the opportunity he had been waiting for. Maybe Brother Young would recognize his help in the acknowledgements, maybe even in the book’s dedicatory paragraph?

“Highly unlikely. And aren’t you pushing just a bit?” Brother Stevenson asked gently. “It might help to remember the admonition to have ‘an eye single to the glory’ of the Lord.”

“Mmmm,” Heber blushed. No pushing, he remembered.

That evening, walking home in the winter fog to his little apartment on Second Avenue, Heber wondered what the Lord had in mind for him. What could his purpose be in placing him in the department? Surely not just to be somebody’s researcher. In almost every other library in the country, the work he was doing would be done in seconds by computers. What did it all mean? He shivered and hurried on through the icy fog.

Each day for several weeks, Heber obtained the key and quietly let himself into the small room. It felt like a vault—clean, mysterious, and solid. A heavy table stood in the center, a microfilm reader on one end. Old library-style green shelving lined the walls on three sides. Assorted metal-trimmed wooden boxes contained the ancient documents. An inlet air register at one corner hissed quietly with air, controlled for temperature and humidity.

The room always seemed cool and dry so Heber wore his suit coat. He felt more respectful anyway. As the days passed, Heber mentally catalogued the major containers in the room. All were extremely interesting. But Heber kept to his stewardship—the microfilm labeled, “Brigham Young Wives.”

Storage boxes were identified by yellowing labels, typed years ago with a manual typewriter. “Andrew Jensen’s work?” Heber wondered with awe. A small, sturdy wood and metal box contained materials labeled, “Family Library #4, J. Smith, Sr., New York.” Heber was tempted to look in, but he knew he’d feel guilty if he did.

One Friday afternoon, Heber entered the room and flipped on the light. As the door closed, he noticed that the “Library #4” box was open. Someone must have been in the room during lunch and had forgotten to close the box. After a bit of internal debate, Heber’s curiosity forced him, against his own instincts, to the box. He cautiously lifted several documents from the darkness. His gloved hands trembled as he contemplated the Prophet himself holding those very same papers.

Disappointment came quickly. The box contained old newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and Protestant religious tracts. Somehow Heber

had expected to see handwritten letters, notes, diaries. Now he realized that such items would be in the First Presidency's Vault.

Heber carefully carried to the center table a yellowing and brittle copy of an old newspaper, *Wayne Sentinel*, folded open to page 3. Standing over the document, squinting, Heber was barely able to read the blurred and irregular type. A small article in the lower corner had been underscored by someone years ago. It was entitled, "Infant Baptism--A Corruption." The article appeared to be a strong condemnation of the practice of infant baptism.

He looked at the author and date at the bottom of the article— "Dec. 2, 1829, A. Campbell, N.Y." Somewhere it seemed to Heber that he had read this same material, and recently, too. "Yes . . . but where?" he asked aloud.

Then it struck him. He sat down heavily, chilled. Heber opened his briefcase and brought out his missionary scriptures, thumbing quickly to Moroni. He carefully compared the article to Chapter 8, Verses 5 through 22.

They were very similar—in some passages identical! Heber looked again at the date of the article.

"Dec. 2, 1829."

He carefully opened the paper to the front page. Yes, the date must have been correct. The newspaper was dated, "December 20, 1829."

Heber sat for several minutes not moving. His eyes glazed as he stared at the paper. Here was a newspaper article, very similar to passages from the Book of Mormon, written the year before the publication of the Book of Mormon, in a newspaper kept in the home of the Smith family. It was a library to which Joseph Smith had access.

Heber suddenly remembered the Ortegas' eye-opening experience and thought he understood. He lifted his newly opened eyes to the ceiling. "Joseph Smith must have copied Moroni 8 from the *Wayne Sentinel*," he whispered, his voice fading and high. Goose bumps cascaded down his chest and arms. He stood and leaned against the wall, his six-foot frame bent slightly at the waist. His knees weakened and he moved to sit again. The room seemed to darken; the walls moved in towards him. He felt nauseous and fought off the urge to throw up. His vision blurred. He lowered his head onto the table and cried.

Except for the experience with the Ortegas, Heber had always been able to avoid questions and doubts. Suddenly it was clear to him that everything in his life had been a shield, a wall to reduce the influences of the world and of Satan. He was the offspring of a system designed to protect, not to strengthen, a system intended to isolate, not to immunize.

Never in his life had Heber felt so assaulted, so invaded. In the space of a few moments a smooth and gentle plain of belief and belonging had been wrenched into a jagged chasm of doubt and alienation—from the Church, from Joseph, even from God. Heber sat, quietly regaining a measure of composure. Anger and betrayal swept through him. He wanted revenge. He stood, flipped off the light, went to his office, and quickly composed two letters—one to the morning paper describing his discovery and his sudden need to help others see the truth about the Book of Mormon. The other was a letter of immediate resignation addressed to

Brother Stevenson. On his way out he dropped both letters in the mail slot. The resignation would probably hit Brother Stevenson's desk Monday morning.

Friday night was hell. Fortunately, his wife and children were in Arizona visiting her parents. Picking at the pieces, thinking this and that, Heber spent the night alone, pacing the little apartment. He didn't feel like calling friends or family yet—what would they say? His news would devastate them, too. He wasn't ready for that. It took a couple of aspirins to get to sleep.

Sometime after three, he awoke to the smell of smoke. Struggling up, he looked out the window to see a smoldering garbage can below. The lights of the city had dimmed, but he could hear a siren way off in the distance. Stumbling down the stairs, he searched in vain for the lid to extinguish the fire. Suddenly they were there, two firemen dressed for a much bigger fire, dousing the fire with extinguishers; just as suddenly, they were gone. Climbing back to his room, he sat for a long time looking out the window. He could see nothing of the fire, but he could smell lingering smoke.

On Saturday and Sunday, his mood dulled, and he even had a few fleeting moments without pain. He tried to plan the next few weeks, and to think about the future, but his emotions kept getting in the way. Several thoughts kept coming back, "How could they have done this to us? Damn! How!? Why would God do this to me? Why?"

The letter to the morning paper, the one that eventually caused so much trouble, appeared in the paper Monday morning. About nine-thirty, Heber received a call from Brother Stevenson.

"Heber, I just opened my mail and your letter. And I've just been handed a copy of the morning paper. I'm shocked. I don't know what to say. Could you come down and tell me about all this?"

Heber said yes, he'd be down shortly. Heber wondered how Brother Stevenson was handling the faith-killing information. Would Brother Stevenson quit the Church, too? Heber felt bad about being the messenger bearing sad tidings, but what else could he have done?

At the office, Heber recounted his experience quickly as Brother Stevenson listened without moving, worry and concern visible as he listened.

When Heber finished, Brother Stevenson stood and walked around the desk. "Heber, why didn't you ask me? Don't you think we know about this thing already? We believe that Joseph wrote the article and submitted it to *Wayne Sentinel* under a pen name. He must have translated that section and wanted to float a trial balloon prior to the printing of the Book of Mormon." He put his arms around Heber.

Heber sat unspeaking, his eyes tightly shut.

"Of course, we don't know for certain what happened," Brother Stevenson said gently. "No evidence, however devastating, can survive against faith. Nothing we can see can ever be as valuable as that which we cannot see."

Chapter 10

All The News Fit To Print

Note : Some critics of the Church seem to assume that negative and conflicting information on the origins of the Church will destroy the faith of members. The following newspaper clippings suggest another possibility. Incidentally, this fictional story was written in 1982, several years before the Salamander Letter and other Hoffman forgeries were revealed as frauds following two tragic murders.

New York Post —Monday, November 1

LDS Church Announces Find Letter Rumored to Cast Doubt on Founder

(UPI—Salt Lake City) B. Glen Jones, a spokesman for the Salt Lake-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), today announced acquisition of a letter written by Joseph Smith, church founder. The letter, which was not made public, is rumored to throw doubt on the claimed divine origin of the Book of Mormon.

The letter, written to Seth Stowell of Pennsylvania, is dated January 16, 1830, the year of the church's organization. Stowell, son of a former Smith employer, was a friend of Smith's during the years he lived in upstate New York.

The letter was discovered in a waxed-tin box in the home of Mrs. Lucy Jacobs, great grand-daughter of Stowell. She contacted an antiques dealer in Philadelphia, who put her in touch with Herbert V. Mathews, University of Utah Historical Museum Director, and a private collector of historical LDS documents. Mathews eventually bought the letter for a yet-unnamed price.

"When I first saw the document, I thought it was probably authentic and valuable," Mathews told the press. Mathews had the letter authenticated in New York City before re-selling it to an unnamed person who recently donated the letter to the Mormon Church. The document has been declared a "monumental find" by Dr. Lynn Tanner, a BYU history professor and an authority on the life of Joseph Smith.

The Church's announcement said the text of the letter was being carefully studied by scholars of the church. "No one should jump to any conclusions," it stressed. No summary of the contents was included. Gary and Sharril Romney, vocal anti-LDS people living in Salt Lake, claimed to have seen a copy. The letter was "proof that Smith was a fraud," Gary Romney said. He declined further comment until the letter was released. "It's really going to hit the fan," he told a UPI reporter by phone.

New York Post —
Thursday, November 4

LDS Church Releases

Text of Letter

Founder's Motives Questioned by Detractors

(UPI—Salt Lake City) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) today released the text of a mysterious letter thought to be written in August 1830 by Joseph Smith, founder of the Salt Lake-based church. The letter is addressed to Seth Stowell, a friend of Smith's during his youth. An accompanying one-page press release cautioned Mormon Church members against over-reacting and promised further information and a lengthy study of its authenticity.

In the letter, Smith claims to have written the Book of Mormon with the help of family and friends for "a worthy purpose. I wrote it under God's inspiration to clarify the disparate teachings of the holy Bible which foolish ministers were preaching in this county. The book sold quite well, and others made exaggerated claims about the book which seemed to titillate the local gentry. I thought it harmless, and was gratified by the serious reception the book got from folks." Smith also wrote, "A number of fine people have come to me as their leader, and I am become their leader through the grace of God."

In the letter Smith asks Stowell for advice on leading his followers. According to Dr. Lynn Tanner, a noted historian at BYU, "Joseph Smith appears involved in circumstances that even he didn't seem to fully understand. As you know, he became the leader of a faithful Christian people."

It is not clear from the letter whether Smith believed in the divine origins of the book himself. "That which is wrought of God is eternal truth," he wrote in the letter's last paragraph. The letter does not say why Smith wrote to Stowell in particular, but Gary Romney, a local LDS Church critic, told the press that Smith was probably feeling guilty and needed to tell someone he trusted. "We've been expecting a smoking pistol like this for a long time," he told a UPI reporter.

The LDS Church news release said scholars were studying the text. It urged LDS people not to pre-judge the motives of the "prophet," and suggested that Smith may have been under duress when he wrote the letter, if he actually wrote it.

New York Post —
Saturday, November 6

LDS Church Explains Letter

Church Members Numbed

(UPI—Salt Lake City) The First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) today told church faithful that Joseph Smith, the church's founder, might have written a letter in 1830 which "could be interpreted to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Book of Mormon," a book Smith also claimed was given him by an angel. In an announcement

released to members yesterday, the First Presidency stressed that if it was Church founder Smith's letter, that his motives, thoughts, and feelings at the time are unknown. The article said the letter could be a blow to Smith's credibility, if taken literally and out of context.

Gary Romney, a vocal anti-Mormon, claims the LDS church is in deep trouble. "Joseph Smith was a false prophet and the Church is practically admitting it. How can members continue to support the church?" he challenged in a letter to the editor of a Salt Lake newspaper this morning.

Asked about the 1830 Smith letter, Mormons on Salt Lake's Main Street were mostly unresponsive to a UPI reporter's questions. "I don't know what to think," was a common reply. Most said they had not yet seen the letter and were waiting for the First Presidency's explanation.

B. Glen Jones, official church spokesman, asked yesterday why the letter was released, said, "We rarely keep anything from our members. We teach correct principles and allow members to govern themselves." He went on to say that truth was paramount, no matter what effect it might have. "We can stand an open light on any document," he said.

New York Post —

Monday, November 8

Church Members Respond to Letter

Attendance and Offerings Unaffected

(UPI—Salt Lake City) Yesterday's attendance at LDS church meetings was reported to be higher than normal. A telephone poll of ten bishops of local congregations in the Salt Lake City area brought reports of business as usual. "At our monthly Testimony Meeting a lot of members reaffirmed their commitment to the Church," one bishop in Salt Lake City reported. Offerings were said to be about normal.

When asked why members would continue to support the Church in spite of recent developments, B. Glen Jones, official church spokesman said, "Most members have received independent witnesses to the truthfulness of the Church and Christ's teachings. Whatever else happens, the Church is Christ's church."

Gary Romney, vocal critic of the LDS Church, asserted that the Church was so entwined in the everyday life of members that a sudden explosion was unlikely. "When your whole life has been engulfed by one single precept, when your entire social and business life is tied closely to one central authority, things can't change quickly," he said. He was surprised, however, by the lack of defections. "I'd have expected to see a few more, really."

Dr. Lynn Tanner, a BYU historian and an expert on Joseph Smith, told UPI that a few intellectuals in the church had already discounted some of the claims made for Joseph Smith. "Another letter isn't going to make much difference," he said. "This only makes it easier for some to be more objective about Joseph Smith, and to see him as human."

New York Post —
Monday, December 24

LDS Church Leaders Express Optimism

Members Keep the Faith

(UPI—Salt Lake City) Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) today expressed optimism for a continued bright future. In a Christmas message, the First Presidency thanked members for their continued support. “Given the events of the past two months, it is gratifying to witness the continued faithfulness of our members,” they said. “It shows the true love of Christ in each of you. We have great missions to accomplish on this earth, and we have the will and means to accomplish them.”

George C. Smith, First Counselor in the church’s First Presidency, expressed optimism in a news interview with UPI reporters. “In a sense, the burden of certainty has been lifted from our shoulders,” Smith said. “The emphasis has shifted slightly. It isn’t as important to gain a testimony of the Joseph Smith story as in the past. Rather the emphasis has shifted to developing a testimony of Christ and to following His teachings.”

Gary Romney, outspoken critic of the Church, expressed “dismay” at the response of LDS people to recent events. “Either they’re totally brain-washed, or I’ve been mistaken. I can’t understand how the LDS Church keeps bouncing back from disaster,” he told reporters last week.

President Smith responded to this statement by saying, “Because the LDS Church teaches true Christian principles, and because it is a beacon of hope and love on a dark horizon, it is ordained to be strong and healthy, in spite of its imperfectly understood origins.”

Chapter 12

Life in the Borderlands

As mentioned previously in this book, statistics generated in and out of the Church suggest that—sometime during their lives—as many as 80% of those baptized either leave the Church, are asked out, become non-participants, or become unsure of their places in the church and hover along the borderlands of the church.

All of this raises a few questions.

What is the meaning of this high attrition rate? So much loss suggests that we may not be meeting the needs of a lot of members. During the past thirty years I have made it my own personal calling to help a small segment—those in the borderlands (like me)—to continue to think of ourselves as “LDS” and to stay with the church. Although we don’t always feel acceptable (and some members don’t feel we are acceptable), I believe we have the right to think of ourselves as LDS and to urge our friends and neighbors to treat us as brothers and sisters.

I like the scripture that says, “For the body is not one member, but many; ...And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; ...Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary; ...the members should have the same care one for another; ...and when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27.)

Has the definition of an “acceptable” LDS person narrowed? Looking across the last century of Church history, I believe the answer is yes. Joseph Smith once corrected the high council for calling up a man for erring in doctrine. Joseph wrote that he did not like the concept of a creed, which a man must believe or be asked out of the Church. “I want the liberty of believing as I please, it feels good not be to trammelled. It don’t prove that a man is not a good man, because he errs in doctrine” (Ehat and Cook 1980, pp. 183-84).

Joseph also reportedly said:

The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members of the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe *all true principles* that exist (HC 5:215, my emphasis).

Similarly, President Joseph F. Smith testified before the Congress of the United States that Latter-day Saints “are given the largest possible latitude of their convictions, and if a man rejects a message that I may give to him but is still moral and believes in the main principles of the gospel and desires to continue in his membership in the Church, he is permitted to remain.” At the same time he said:

Members of the Mormon church are not all united on every principle. Every man is entitled to his own opinion and his own views and his own conceptions of right and wrong so long as they do not come in conflict with the standard principles of the Church. If a man assumes to deny God and to become an infidel we withdraw fellowship from him. But so long as a man believes in God and has a little faith in the Church organization, we nurture and aid that person to continue faithfully as a member of the Church though he may not believe all that is revealed. (See the Reed Smoot Hearings record, pp 97-98.)

Are we who are in the borderlands of today’s acceptability doing our part to be acceptable? The coin of acceptability has two faces. On one side is the question, “What is acceptable?” On the other side is the question, “Are we doing our part to be acceptable?” It is difficult to say how “acceptability” should be defined. My own definition looks like this:

An acceptable Latter-day Saint is a member of the Church who has faith in and tries to live Christ’s teachings as described in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, “believes in God and has [at least] a little faith in the Church organization”, and who espouses “truth above all, even when it upsets and overwhelms us.” (Quotes from Joseph F. Smith and Henri Amiel.)

That’s pretty broad, I know. To me, the body of the church is indeed made up of many, many parts, all important. Others of our brothers and sisters obviously have more strict criteria of acceptability, e.g, related to Church attendance and activity, manner of dress, temple work, Word of Wisdom, obedience, following blindly, and so forth. Whether we like it or not, we are often judged upon that more narrow criteria.

Perhaps that is why the “march of love” (during an April 1994 Conference), for example, while well-intentioned, backfired. First, the march occurred during the morning session. How could marchers be listening to Church leaders if they marched during the most important meeting of the year? Second, they didn’t look like traditional “Mormons” on a conference Sunday. Television pictures, unfairly perhaps, showed a ragtag bunch, few of whom had on “Sunday” dress. This is a trivial example, but it teaches us an important lesson: We, who are in the Borderlands, must do our part to be acceptable. We must be willing to go along with the mainstream as much as we can.

Much more could be said, but time requires me to leave this topic for each of our own personal evaluations. Are we doing all we can to be acceptable and compatible? This again brings me to the next question:

What can be done to broaden the bounds of acceptability? Jaunita Brooks once wrote of her father’s advice: The Church is like a huge herd of cattle being driven across the landscape. To jump out in front and try to turn the

herd will result in being trampled. It is best to call to the lead cows from the sidelines. Hearing, they may turn, but only in small increments.

I think we need to cautiously and in Christ-like ways influence both the leaders of the herd and individual members of the herd. This generates two sub-questions:

What might be done to broaden acceptability criteria at the general level, and what might be done to enhance acceptance at the local level? When local activities seem inhibited by general policies, one has the right (and even the responsibility) to try to influence general policy, or at least better understand the policy. For example, if I believe that my child needs more instruction on Christ's teachings of honesty, and if I perceive that the Correlated Program does not emphasize enough teaching of honesty for my child, I have every right (and responsibility) to ask appropriate leaders to include more instruction on honesty in Church lesson plans.

The same approach works for almost any concern. If you feel the Church needs a policy of greater acceptance of diversity in order to foster tolerance and love at your local level, then by all means, let your feelings be known.

I know from personal experience over the years that our leaders read (and sometimes respond to) serious letters, written in private, concerning things that trouble us. Working through normal channels is always a good idea, if it is possible.

General Church leaders have stated that the early-nineties excommunications of intellectuals and scholars, and the investigations of others, were local actions that followed general policies outlined in such documents as the "Statement Regarding Disciplinary Councils" which was sent to all local leaders.

There has not been a consistent response at every local level, obviously. Given this situation, it appears that it would be useful for us to influence local members and leaders as they try to follow what may seem to be imprecise and inconsistent policy, local traditions, and personal attitudes and bias. We want local people to avoid unloving actions that create suffering, and that tend to narrow acceptance and breed intolerance.

Like politics, general Church programs are local in their impact and many local activities have the potential for influencing other local groups and the general church itself.

Here are a few thoughts for expanding acceptance at your ward and branch level:

- Stay involved with the Church. Little can be accomplished by those outside the Church. Concerned faithful members can change things for the better at the local level, and eventually, if appropriate, at the general Church level. Organizing and participating in unofficial Church-like organizations and meetings can only bring temporary relief. Furthermore, the Church will move ahead without you, and without your important contributions and influence.
- Let your local leaders and ward members tactfully and lovingly know of your feelings and concerns. Speak out, as appropriate. It is best to be polite, loving, and Christlike in your comments and suggestions, of course. Let's not hurt or embarrass anyone. If only one

person in each ward stood up for increased tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and for the search for Joseph Smith's "all true principles," it would have a worldwide impact for good.

- Give time to your concerns. Things will likely correct themselves because the Church is led by well-meaning, inspiration-worthy leaders. It may take years but eventually right will prevail. (Who knows, we might be wrong, too. Time is a good friend and teacher.)
- Work for change through regular and appropriate channels where possible.
- Support truth. Work and pray to understand the issues and then tactfully and humbly share what you know with others, as warranted and appropriate.
- Be honest with yourselves and others in all communications.
- Be careful not to hurt others by your actions. Let Christ's example be your guide.

Author's Note: I am the author/editor of the "Borderlands" columns published in the *Sunstone* magazine for the past eight years. The column shares stories and experiences of those who have found themselves in the LDS "Borderlands." As of January, 2010, thirty-six columns had been published. A copy of every column can be downloaded free from our website: www.forthosewhowonder.com.

Chapter 13

For Those Troubled by Church Programs and Policies: One Way to Respond

If they could, most people would change a thing or two in the Church. Some people are truly worried about this or that Church program, policy, or leadership decision.

A few feel very angry or frustrated. Some go inactive, leave the Church, or are invited out. Some bite their tongues and do nothing, simmering in their discontent. Some say it isn't their stewardship and, if things are wrong, someone else will take the blame. Personally, I don't care much for any of these approaches. If you will forgive me one more time, I will share my own experience.

Someone once asked me, "Have you ever had a spiritual experience?" If you knew me, you would know that my skeptical and questioning nature would make me a poor candidate for metaphysical experiences. But the answer is—amazingly—yes (...maybe. I'll tell you about my inevitable questions in a few moments.)

In the winter of 1963, I was a missionary in Japan serving in Tokyo North Branch with five other missionaries. I was a serious missionary and a true believer in the usefulness of Christ's teachings in Japan.¹ I had become worried and frustrated about the impact of the Northern Far East Mission on new, starry-eyed missionaries coming into the field with prepackaged fervor and idealism. Being assigned to branches with seasoned (i.e., often tired and jaded) missionaries regularly killed off their enthusiasm. I had seen one disappointed Elder go home early, and many others adopting bad habits. It bothered me that nothing was being done. *What should I do about it, dagnamit!?!*

I felt personally responsible.

One Sunday, a bright but cool winter day, I was sitting alone in the middle of our rented hall, waiting for Sunday School to begin. Japanese members were arriving and there was that Sunday background noise we all recognize—young, happy, jabbering voices, children's banter, loud greetings across the hall, and so forth. I was seriously into my thoughts and bowed my head to ask a prayer of frustration—"What should I do about this new-missionary dilemma?"

Suddenly, the room went absolutely quiet (or so it seemed to me). I heard a relatively loud, deep, authoritative-but-kind, male voice say:

“Follow the President”

I was at once startled, amazed, curious, and humbled. I looked around the room. The happy chapel noise had resumed; no one else had heard the voice, obviously. In just a few seconds, the experience was over.

As you know from reading this book, I’m a born skeptic. From early times I have questioned everything. I like questioning. I like things to be logical, rational, and explainable in concrete, tangible, mathematical terms—a real left-brainer. In some ways it’s been a blessing; it might even be my spiritual gift. But, here I was, suddenly with a “spiritual experience.” A mystery voice had spoken to me. I had received a Message. I couldn’t deny it.

I wondered, of course, about its origin, but its meaning was clear to me.² It meant, “Get some information to the President and let *him* take the proper action.”³

Over the years, I have generally interpreted the message to mean, “Let the proper authority know what you know and think. Be honest but don’t be rash or hurtful. Let time and care work, and have faith that right will prevail.”

When the Church was going through its pains over the Blacks-without-Priesthood policy in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, I was a student at the University of Michigan. I felt embarrassed, frustrated, and angry.⁴ The mysterious message *Follow the President* tempered my frustrations, and I was able to survive by writing of my experiences and thoughts to those in authority. At another time the temple ceremony seemed particularly unloving to me, so I wrote a criticism of the ceremony and sent it to two Apostles.⁵ In both cases, I waited patiently, hoping and trusting that my small efforts, merged with the efforts of many other people, would eventually have some effect. (And things have changed for the better.)

There have also been times I have disagreed with my stake president, bishop, and other local authorities. (I have served as on the Stake High Council and in two bishoprics, among many other callings.) Most of the time, I have let the “message” guide my responses. And it has served me well when I did. Sometimes my comments and suggestions were accepted by those in authority. Sometimes I was wrong and avoided personal embarrassment by simply “following the president.”

Perhaps you might find something useful in this approach.

Before I close, I should mention my thoughts about the origins of the message. I have wondered about it a lot, but I just don’t know. Could it have originated outside my head? Not by any natural means of which we know. Since no one else in the room heard the voice (which was as real to me as any voice), it was not the traditional sound-pressure wave impinging on my ear drum. Whatever it was, it had to access my brain’s hearing centers in some other way. It might have come from God or Angels by some mechanism unknown to us—I don’t deny that possibility.

It just as well could have been my right brain talking to my left brain (telling it to chill out). It could have been programmed into my DNA to be accessed at the right time through prayer. The possibilities are endless (but not testable with our current knowledge.)

Very curious, indeed!

Notes

1. I was convinced that a Christian and Mormon approach to life was superior to the Japanese model of the day. My missionary approach was primarily to show investigators that their lives would be happier, fuller, and more meaningful as Mormon Christians than in the lives they were living. I never suggested to investigators that they should join because the Church was “true.” Rather, I told them that the Christ and the Church were “good” and that if they joined, their lives would be blessed. This approach seemed to work because my companions and I had sixty baptisms.

2. Some might take it to mean, “Sit back and let God run the show through his appointed leaders.” Or, “Shut up and don’t worry about it.” Or, “Don’t think; don’t act; have blind faith.”

3. I wrote a letter about my thoughts to the Mission President. In a couple of weeks I received a message from him that he, too, had been concerned and was starting a pilot program to put new missionaries in special branches. Our branch was to be the first to participate in the new program. Three missionaries were soon transferred out of the branch and three brand new missionaries arrived.

4. I was a Seventy at the time and had several negative experiences related to the policy. One choice and loving family had been baptized and only found out about the policy afterwards. It was left to me to try to explain to them the indefensible policy. Needless to say, my words didn’t have much effect and they quickly left the Church. Another convert told me, “I think its great to keep ‘niggers’ out of the Church.” (This was the type of people the policy appealed to.) On one occasion, at a campus meeting to explain Mormonism, the meeting degenerated into catcalls from the rear of the hall from several blacks who well understood that they weren’t “worthy” of full fellowship. At another time, I was with a friend (who happens to be black) at the time Martin Luther King’s death was announced. My friend, shaken and hurt by the death of the great leader, asked me why the Church didn’t accept blacks into full fellowship. I could only stammer and say that things would change.

5. The essay was sent back to me, via my stake president, with suggestions not to publish it.

Chapter 14

Believing for Dollars

I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.
— Wilson Mizner

Note: Much has been said about some LDS people having unreasonable faith in get-rich-quick schemes being sponsored by “trustworthy” LDS church members. Having faith in our leaders and fellow members and in what they say and do is an important facet of our religion. Many of us have our faith strengthened by hearing others bear their testimonies, and we certainly are expected to have faith in decisions made by our leaders. Therefore, it is not surprising that some make the jump from spiritual to temporal to economic faith, especially when such things have their origin in the same mouth, and sometimes in the same breath. This is the story of an Olympic-class broad jumper. [This chapter is a fictional exploration of faith and belief. We have been encouraged to “lighten up” a little. That seems like a good approach this point in the book.]

“Buy low, sell high.” That’s the first commandment for stock brokers, real estate people, and other smart folks like my Sunday School teacher, Elder Jones. We call him Teach, over there at the Ward.

Me? I’ve always bought high and sold low. That is until last September when Teach invited me to a seminar, “How to Buy and Sell Off-Season for Fun and Profit.” It’s pretty simple—you find something off-season cheap, then sell it at a higher price during the regular season. The secret is believing, they said. You’ve got to believe in yourself and the program. “You gotta have faith, brother,” I heard more than once. And you’ve got to have good contacts. Somebody you can trust. Somebody who’s real active in the church.

Anyway, about a week later, Teach called about an off-season deal, and I made my first buy. It was pretty simple. Brother Jones, you see, is a salesman *and* someone from church I can trust, and his discount company was clearing out somebody’s over-stocked motorcycles. I had him save one for me. I couldn’t believe it—a new motorcycle at the ridiculously low price of “about” \$3,000. And a beauty it was—sleek, black, and still in the box. After adding in the extras—shipping, commission, assembly, taxes,

and a small finder's fee—I got the bike for an amazing \$3,545! That was way below retail.

Teach is kind of a big, outgoing guy—always talking and laughing. He's the kind of guy you can really trust. He knows something about almost everything. And he's always given me good advice and instruction. This time was no exception. I remember he slapped the contoured seat with his hand and said, "Drive it all fall and sell it in the spring for a handsome profit."

And that's just what I did, sort of. Unfortunately, winter arrived a bit early last year—about October. I didn't get in a lot of riding.

"Oh, well," I later explained to my wife Cindi, "a low-mileage bike will sell even faster in the spring."

"Right," she said. "Twenty-seven miles should be real attractive to somebody."

"Very funny," I said. "When I make a killing on this deal, you'll see." Cindi's not much into risk taking. She sticks to her needle work and the kids mostly.

Spring arrived that year a wee bit behind schedule. People were still skiing Snowbird on June 25th. And there was an abnormal amount of rain and cool weather in the valley. But these tiny impediments didn't cool my enthusiasm for getting on with the killing. (It was too cold to ride the machine, anyway.)

In June, I put a cheap 2-liner in the local paper's want-ads.

Almost new Cycle. exec cond. low price. Low miles. See to appreciate.

Not one call! But it was a learning experience. In the next ad, I remembered to add my telephone number.

The second ad got a couple of calls. On the first one, we were inexplicably disconnected right after I quoted \$3,545. (By now, my conscience had gotten the best of me. I didn't really want to take advantage of anyone. I'd get my money out and call it my training experience. Nothing like a little success to spur one on.) The next call was from the woman next door. "If that lame-brained son of mine calls, tell him I absolutely refuse to have one of those death traps around," she almost shouted.

"Look, Mrs. Nelson, they're not death traps . . . and I'll throw in a helmet. . . ." She hung up. Her son never called. No one did. The summer went by and now it was time to get *aggressive*.

I opened the newspaper to the want-ads under "Motorcycles." At first I thought I must have been in the "Houses for Sale" section. Column after column after column. Hondas by the herd. Suzuki, Yamaha, Kawasaki, Harleys. The lowest price for a bike like mine—\$2,700. "What a piece of junk that must be," I said aloud, shaking my head.

"You talking about any particular motorcycle?" Cindi asked, not looking up from her cross stitch.

"Hardy, har, har! Funny lady...I better call this guy and see what's the matter with his bike," I said, dialing.

He wasn't home but his wife said he had eighty-four miles on the machine. Seems he knew this salesman down at this discount store....

I told her thanks. She asked if I had sold my bike. “How do you know I’ve got one for sale?” I asked.

“You’re the third guy that’s called with the same kind of bike for sale.”

I didn’t like her tone, so I politely slammed down the receiver. My next call was to Elder Jones. “Last fall, you said....”

I heard his pudgy hand slap the seat of a motorcycle nearby. “Who’d ever thought the weather would turn so sour, brother! You think you got troubles! Come on down here! We’ve got another fifty of that same model selling, so to speak, at \$2,995.”

Fortunately, he came through for me again, giving me some good advice on selling the bike. My next want-ad looked almost professional:

*** LOOK! SPECIAL! LOOK! ***
Almost New Motorcycle.
Must sell this weekend.
Low miles. Rack.
Lots of extras. Windshield.
Brand new!
Extra low miles. Unheard of low price.
Only \$2,799!! Call 801-555-1254

The ad cost \$47 to run for the weekend, but I was desperate. The silly bike was threatening our budget. (Teach said lots of extras hanging on the bike would sell it fast. So I bought about \$300 of bike accessories out of July’s rent.)

This time, it worked. I got almost thirteen calls! Three hung up before I got to the phone, unfortunately. Five were to see if I wanted to trade up. I didn’t. Four were checking to see if I had gotten lucky. I hadn’t. One was from our next-door neighbor, again. I promised I wouldn’t sell to her son.

When the next Spring rolled around, I sat up and gave the problem a long, thoughtful evaluation—just like we do down at the plant. The solution finally hit me—direct sales! I went and bought one of those black and red

FOR SALE

signs, a steel chain, and a big steel lock. Wheeling over to the corner of Orchard and 18th, I chained it to the traffic signal post, went home, and waited for the calls to start coming in.

I imagined crowds of people standing around admiring the sleek black body, all waxed, and low miles. Price? A ridiculous \$2,499!

I saw young men racing each other for the nearest phone. And my wait was not long. A polite but gruff voice came on the other end of the phone.

“You gotta bike tied down over here on da corner?” he mumbled. I wondered if he had any money. “Yeah, you interested? I can be flexible on the price.”

“Nope. My wife says we’re gettin’ an RV. Anyhow, I’m gonna impound it. Section 40-32a of the city code. Can’t tie down to our pole—ya know that, right?”

“No, I didn’t know that,” I said innocently.

“You can get it down at the city yard, next Tuesday. Ya gotta see Judge Butcher, first, though.”

“Gee, ah, I’m awfully sorry. Maybe if I just ran right over?”

(No way.)

“Well, what about the cost?” I asked, hopefully.

“Yes, sir. Ahhh....\$65 for towing...\$35 for storage...that’s per day... and \$85 for court costs...plus whatever Judge Butcher says ya gotta pay in fines.”

Sounds disastrous, doesn’t it? Well, I guess you have to have faith that things will work out. During the trip to the city yard, the bike fell off the impound truck and was totalled. All city costs were forgiven. The insurance company paid “fair market value.”

“Just what was fair market value?” Cindi asked in a cute tone of voice like she didn’t really care.

“Never mind,” I said. “Just keep to your knitting and leave the wheeling and dealing to me. It was fair. That’s all we could hope for, right? We couldn’t predict the weather, right?”

“Right,” she said, biting through a stray bit of thread. “By the way, Brother Jones called about some unsold, distressed computerized bug barbecues. He said he has some real good off-season prices. He’ll let you to buy a few for quick resale in the heat of the summer. He suggested Ebay, maybe.”

“Wow! Brother Jones! Where’s the ward roster?”

“I think I lost it,” she said in her please-don’t-ever-do-it-again voice. She looked up at me with her head turned slightly to the side, a stern face hiding behind a smile.

I can take a hint. No more wheeling and dealing. It was fun, though, just like they said at the seminar.

Chapter 15

First Impressions of a Salt Lake Landmark

Doubt is pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother. — Kahil Gibran

Note: Life is diversity. One person loves flowers; another hates pollen. You hear music; I hear noise. Some believe easily while others doubt easily; some require sensory evidence while others can accept by faith. This is a fictional story of two different perceptions.

I don't like to fly—in fact I don't even like to think about planes. For me, boarding a plane is like walking alone into a dark chapel at night—it makes me nervous. So when I fly, I do everything possible to keep my mind off what's happening to the plane. Conversation with fellow passengers distracts my mind from dangerous thoughts.

On a recent flight to Denver, I was seated between two young men. Like ripe peas in a pod, we filled all of right side of Row 7. The flight was full and the weather a little blustery—a typical October afternoon.

And of course I was nervous. “Is Salt Lake your home?” I asked the man in the aisle seat just before takeoff.

“No, we're from Colorado Springs,” he said, smiling and nodding his head toward the man at the window. His crisp New England accent and well-bred demeanor contrasted with his casual, western clothes. I was relieved that he was friendly.

“What brought you boys to Salt Lake? And how long were you here?” These are what I call “copper” questions—they lead either to the “golden” ones, or to a discussion of the copper mine for those not inclined to church conversation.

“We just came over to sightsee, and to go through the...Salt Lake Temple,” he said, hesitating on the last three words.

“Don't worry—I'm LDS, too,” I said. “I go often.” We shook hands in a brotherly way.

As the plane lifted off, I learned more about my traveling companions. They were brothers, John on the aisle and Bill at the window, aged

twenty-four and twenty-six, originally from New Hampshire. Both had recently graduated from Yale University; neither was married; both worked for companies near Denver—John as a civil engineer, Bill as an organizational psychologist. Their father was a minister, so their growing-up years had been filled with Christian activities—they had been choir boys, altar assistants, the works. Conversion to the church a year ago in Hartford had been surprisingly easy, just before their dual graduations. And now they had made their maiden journey to the Mormon Mecca ... and it had been their first trip to the temple.

“We also went to the Great Salt Lake,” John added awkwardly. He brushed back his blond hair which fell just to the collar of his red plaid cowboy shirt. He looked like a tall Robert Redford, I thought. But like many engineers, his shirt pocket hosted a row of mechanical pencils. The dichotomy of a Robert Redford nerd entered my mind, but I quickly dismissed it.

“Really? What did you think of it?” I asked.

A pause. “The Great Salt Lake or the Salt Lake Temple?”

“The Great Salt Lake,” I answered quickly. Talking about the temple is like talking about flying—it makes me nervous. And, casual conversations about either are impossible. Worse, *anything* might pop out of the mouths of two novice temple-goers. Planes are occasionally hit by lightning, and I didn’t want to provide any extra incentive.

“Well, it was very interesting,” John said, turning first to look at me, then stretching his neck to look over at his brother. Bill’s silent expression betrayed a friendly disagreement. “I really liked it,” John concluded, leaning back.

This emphasis his cue, Bill turned from the window and reluctantly volunteered, “I guess I was disappointed, all in all.” I guessed Bill to be about six foot six, and less than 200 pounds. He was big, but his voice was soft, hard to hear over the airplane noise.

“Why were you disappointed?” I asked. I’d heard people both praise it and pan it. I was curious to see what this young man had to say.

“Well, I’d heard so much about it, and I guess I really built it up in my mind.” Bill paused and looked out the window. Sunlight shone warm on his brown sports coat. Unlike John, he was dressed in a white shirt and tie. His hair, blond like his brother’s, was thinning in front—a shiny spot was showing through in the sunlight. He looked like a thoughtful person, but at this moment there was anguish showing on his tanned face. “Look, it was different from what I thought it would be, that’s all,” he finished, sitting back with a finality. He folded his arms and continued looking out the window.

“Okay,” I said. “Don’t worry about what I’ll think. Really, I’m curious about why you were *so* disappointed.”

Bill seemed pleased that someone was interested in his feelings. “Okay, I think I’d like to tell you. First, you should know that I love swimming. My father spent years teaching us to swim and dive. It has been a big thing in my life—college swim team, scuba diving, the works. So the first disappointment for me was the lake’s shallowness.” His hands went down in the sign of something low.

“But I don’t like to be in over my head,” John said.

“Well, it was far from that,” Bill responded to his brother. Leaning forward to see us better, he said, “John and I put on our suits and literally ran into the water. That felt so good we headed for deeper water. We walked for twenty minutes—and the water was still only at our thighs!”

“We never did find any really deep water in two hours of wading,” John admitted. “But that didn’t bother me.”

“It’s never been famous because it was deep,” I agreed, trying not to sound defensive.

John continued, “We finally just sat back in the water. I enjoyed that. It was quiet and peaceful, the sun was shining, people around were friendly, and a warm breeze was blowing. Best of all, the water was buoyant. I was amazed how it could lift me up. I really felt great!” He leaned back and closed his eyes, obviously enjoying the memory.

“I enjoyed the peace and quiet, too,” Bill agreed. “But the water’s buoyancy—actually its saturated heaviness—bothered me. The water kept pushing me back to the surface, tipping me over, making me lose my balance. I couldn’t really get into it.” Bill loosened his neck tie a little. His neck was slightly sunburned. I noticed he wore a scuba diver’s wrist watch.

“Did you try swimming?” I asked.

Bill’s face was intense. “That place is something else! Every time I started to swim, I got salt in my eyes. It stung like crazy! Even with my background, real swimming was impossible.”

“But salt adds savor, Bill,” John said. “Think what life would be without it!”

“I like salt fine,” Bill said, irritated at John’s mild joke. “But not when it’s so heavy. Not when it keeps me from enjoying the water.”

The conversation was interrupted by the captain on the intercom: “Good morning, folks. We’re climbing through 10,500 feet on our way to our assigned altitude of 33,000 feet. Now, off to your right you can see the Great Salt Lake, and to our left is the beautiful downtown Salt Lake ...”

Everyone strained to see through the windows. Yes, the lake stretched off to the western horizon, its blue and green bands of water gleaming like polished metal in the afternoon sunlight. To the east we could see the city and its spired temple, surrounded by downtown skyscrapers like strong young servants around an old master.

“Look at the lake.” John observed almost with reverence. “It’s beautiful like the ocean—powerful, invigorating, inspiring, full of life and hope.

Bill scratched his eyebrow and sighed. “That just the surface. Actually, the lake is just the opposite of the ocean. It’s actually uncreative and sterile; its almost completely devoid of life. The only thing that can live in its waters are brine shrimp—helpless, mindless creatures eternally treading water.”

“But birds—beautiful seagulls—live on the lake, too.” John protested.

“But they have to fly elsewhere for real nourishment,” Bill said.

John responded, “But they always return to the lake. Despite its shortcomings, it somehow provides protection and comfort—a place of refuge. You remember how carefree they seemed, soaring over the lake.”

Bill nodded, leaning back in his chair again. "It's a dilemma for him," John said to me. He reached over and slapped Bill on the leg. Bill's smile thanked John for his thought.

"I've never heard anyone talk about it like this before," I observed, speaking to no one in particular. Bill's intense disappointment made me nervous. It had the sudden depth of a cold mountain lake after you've fallen out of the canoe.

Fortunately, I'm a good floater. The time had come to change the subject.

For the rest of our flight we talked about the weather, the football season, and business. Snacks were served, the plane landed without crashing, and we said a quick goodbye. I felt sorry that Bill had such a troubling first impression.

You know, it amazes me how differently people respond to the same things!

Chapter 16

The Issue of Honesty

We believe in being honest...
— LDS Articles of Faith 1:13

“[current events]... demonstrate the need for honesty and integrity in family relationships, in business affairs, and in...religious ministries.” — “Ethics and Honesty,” Elder David B. Haight, Ensign, Nov. 1987; p. 13.

It is disconcerting to recognize that many faithful members of the Church do not feel they can always be honest about the way they believe or think if their beliefs and thoughts do not follow a specific format, or do not fully support the policies or official history of the Church. This says something about our LDS traditions which need to change over time; but for now and for ourselves, we should consider the act of dishonesty in light of what the scriptures say:

Speak truth to each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. -Ephesians 4:25

I once exchanged emails with one such person. The person questions and doubts but remains in the closet, even to her husband. Here is a short quote from “Sandra” (all names and some details have been changed to protect identities):

... I also recognize that I might be a hypocrite. To get a temple recommend I agree to statements that I don't believe. In essence, I lie. I do not like this, but I do not believe any greater good would be served by my quitting the church and hurting my husband and children. There is nothing in my lifestyle that would prevent my from getting the temple recommend. Looking in from the outside I am the model Latter-day Saint sister.

Tonight one of my sons who is almost 22 years old approached me about his going on a mission, His younger brother is serving one now, but he did not feel ready on his 19th birthday. He asked me point blank about my feelings concerning his mission and the church. What I said would have made any Bishop in the Church proud, I do think a mission can be a positive thing, but I expressed beliefs to him that were fabrications. Now I feel like my soul is tied between two poles; one that continues to pretend and the other that longs to express my true feelings. I am tearing in half.

Another member, “Bill,” sent the following email:

I am a 39 year old male, Utah born and raised, returned missionary, great temple marriage of 16 years, BYU, three great kids, etc. I have been firmly within the “borderlands” for a good fifteen years.

I [wonder about] many core [LDS] beliefs, but still find it a good place to be. Reading about others in similar situations in your column has been insightful and welcome.

I have a comfortable understanding with myself as to my limited beliefs, and don't say more than I feel when speaking. I do feel very uncomfortable with the seeming hypocrisy of my situation, since most other ward and stake members think I am a liberal but faithful member.

Here are some recent questions from a younger member, "Sierra":

... I have a few more questions for you. The first one is regarding coming out of the closet. We've talked with our parents and our bishop about all of this, but we still feel a sense of duplicity. They perceive this as something we will work through. In reality I think it is impossible for us to return to the type of belief we had before. I don't know--have we already come out of the closet?

So, what does it take to "come clean?" I don't think we ought to be getting up in sacrament meeting and bearing a non-testimony. I agree with you that it will help us feel better to be honest. But what should we do?

These are snippets of recent correspondence. A consistent thread spun through almost all of the personal stories sent to me by members is the issue of honesty.

Why do we feel a need to be secretive about our true beliefs and feelings? How can we deal with this need? What happens to us if we are not honest with others? How honest should we be with "true-believer" members? And, as asked by Sierra, "What should we do?"

In order to attempt answers to these questions, I'm going to quote from one of the most important essays ever written on subject, "The Challenge of Honesty," by Frances Lee Menlove.¹ Her words provide insights to the important issues listed above.

Let's first recognize that honesty is a complex subject. Honesty has many meanings, shades of color and different ways to be applied. Think, for example, of the subtle and not-so-subtle nuances associated with these words and phrases: "emotional honesty," "personal honesty," "public honesty," "blunt honesty," "brutally honest," "radical honesty," "tactfully honest," "honest with self," "honest with others," "plagiarism," "white lies," "black lies," "honest truth," and "shading the truth."

We recognize that "honesty" is an issue in all facets of our lives, not just religion. Here's what Frances Lee Menlove wrote:

The problem of honesty is...shared by all men [and women]. Psychologists and psychiatrist have become increasingly concerned with the lack of authenticity and the sham that seems at times to permeate to the very core of Western men. As Mormons, we not only live in a society whose pressures and criteria for success and happiness can foster dishonestly and inauthenticity, but we have, we believe, a peculiar and divine mandate to seek truth and exemplify honesty. For these reasons it is crucial for Mormons to meet openly the challenge of honesty.

And I think we can all agree that good communication (or the lack of it) impacts our ability to "be honest." We may have every intention of being honest but then be thwarted by inadequate or inaccurate communications.

Given these complexities, we must narrow our explorations here to the issue of being open and honest with regular members.

Based on my long experience, I have observed that we who are other than orthodox LDS true believers usually keep our interpretations and unique outlooks to ourselves. Sometimes, even our spouses don't know the extent of our beliefs, doubts and musings. Why do we feel it necessary to be secretive about sharing our true beliefs and feelings?

First, there is the fear of being ostracized. Mainstream believers often remain aloof and feel uncomfortable around those who ask too many questions or demonstrate a doubting nature.

More seriously, believing members often interpret a rejection of their cherished religious beliefs (and myths) as a rejection of themselves.

The second reason is the fear that our chance for meaningful Church participation might be reduced. Some have worried that an unsympathetic bishop might deny them a temple recommend.

Next, the church seems to tolerate divergent beliefs as long as those beliefs are held personally and no attempt is made to sway others—“Keep your questions to yourself.”

Finally, many express the important thought that it is not their place to alter the beliefs of others. Coming out may be too great a shock for those whose testimonies rely on the strength of another's beliefs.

So, given the climate we live in, it is difficult to be honest. Our honesty may disturb regular members. It may effect others' testimonies. It may cause confusion and consternation among friends, family members, and especially, our children.

Care, tact and timing are thus important facets of this brand of “being honest.” Consideration for our children, our spouses and others requires careful management of our true beliefs, feelings, and desires.

As wonderers we learn to speak “truthfully but discreetly.” When asked to bear testimony, we may say something like, “I know the Church teaches correct principles; I know that the Lord answers prayers; He loves every person; We must all work out our own salvation.” Can we accept the president of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator? Some say, “Why not? Certainly no one else speaks for God,” or “I can accept the possibility that he is a prophet.” Others may say, “I accept, with what faith I have.”

Unfortunately, the need to maintain secrecy and to perfect a subtle dishonesty isolates us from one another and creates internal conflict. Psychologists universally agree that emotional health is easier to maintain when our actions follow our true beliefs.

As long as we remain in the closet—which requires some dishonesty—we will enjoy fleeting and temporary seasons of peace, but our movement in the direction of acceptance (by ourselves and others) slows. We come to feel like hypocrites, maybe even liars, and these negative emotions seem to further estrange us from God, the church and regular members. A few feel like they are being “torn in half.” For some the “lies” become intolerable and they suffer, injuring themselves and others around them. Menlove suggests:

There must not be two selves, one outwardly calm and unruffled, basking in the “knowledge” of the gospel, and other private and unexplored, pushed to the outer limits of awareness. If the individual does not have an honest relationship with himself, he cannot have an honest relationship with others. If he cannot avoid dishonesty within the church, he will not be able to avoid it in the secular world. We must attempt to meet the challenge of honesty, realizing that our honesty is enmeshed within a whole framework of values, and honesty, like truth is always a partial achievement. There is only the latest word, never the last.

So my advice to people like Sierra is to cautiously and judiciously move to honesty. Being honest with ourselves and others helps us to come to terms with the reality of our experiences and our lives. It allows us to move on. It helps us and others to accept ourselves as we are. It helps regular members recognize that there is more than one way to be acceptably LDS.

Of course being honest does not mean trying to convert others to our ways of thinking. Let’s allow others to have their own beliefs, even when they differ from ours. Support others in their unique beliefs as long as they don’t hurt people. (Someone’s belief in lying wouldn’t warrant support). Let other people develop and live their own personal religions. On this subject, Menlove wrote:

Honesty is often equated with expose. A movie or book advertised as “honest” is often one that merely exposes something previously held secret or private. The notion seems to be that the one who can say the most unpleasant things is the most honest. Honesty can become a billy club, an instrument of aggression capable of destruction. It is just as dishonest to suppress or play down the positive, the hopeful, the good, the real achievements of the self and the church as it is to speak *only* of these.

To close, here is a thought experiment. Imagine you stood in your ward testimony meeting and said in a loving and caring way something like this: “To me, the questions, ‘Is the Church *true*?’ is not as important as the question, ‘Is the Church *good*?’ And the answer for me and for many millions of others, is ‘Yes’. And so I am a faithful member of the Church and love being counted one with the body of Christ, with you, whom I love and cherish. That is my testimony.” What do you think the reaction of your ward, family and spouse might be? Are you ready to slip a foot out of the closet? Handled carefully, it could do a world of good for you and for true-believing members.

Only when we are honest are we likely to see the borders of acceptability expanded to include all Latter-day Saints. Frances Lee Menlove also wrote, “We are the church and we are responsible for the church.”

Notes

1. *Dialogue*, Vol 1-1, Spring, 1966. Menlove’s article is one of the most thoughtful and well-written of all LDS essays.