

"If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed" –President J. Ruben Clark

I'm sorry this is such a long overdue letter. I first want to thank you for the e-mail you sent me last March 23rd, and your prayers on my behalf. But I'm even more thankful for a loving mother who cares enough to reach out to me in a way that she no doubt believes is best for me.

My entire life you have ever been the fundamental example of charity and selflessness. I am so grateful for that example. I believe that is what life is all about above all else, loving and serving. I wish I were better at it.

I have reread your note, and I have also listened to Elder Holland's conference address, "Lord, I Believe" (and others like it) on several occasions. As moving as it is, unfortunately like the vast majority of church instruction, it doesn't touch on the many issues that are troubling me, rather it is as I have come to expect... "Regardless of all else, just keep the faith".

I have gone round and round in my mind whether I should send this letter to you or just a simple note saying "I'm done... done with church". I have a good friend who was in my ward in Heber (who consequently thinks it is best to stick with the church though he has come to many of the same conclusions as I have, and is trying his best to help me) who thinks it would be better for me to just declare, "I'm done" and leave it at that. Somehow this would generate less concern and worry for you. If I did that though, my concern is that would leave you wondering why and how I came to this point. Undoubtedly this would lead to much effort to try and figure out what it is I'm not telling you and how you can help me which I don't feel is fair either. So, damned if I do and damned if I don't.

I'm sorry this is so long, you may want to sit down.

Where to begin? I guess the beginning...

My testimony

For as long as I can remember, I feel like I have always been compelled to try and please others. A big part of that is doing, or trying to do, what I think others expect of me. (Perhaps this stems from insecurities as a little kid in grade school... I don't know.) So when it came time to serve a mission, I never gave it another thought. That was "what I was supposed to do".

I remember reading the Book of Mormon my senior year of high school, in preparation to serve a mission, and being so excited to implement the Moroni promise I was taught about in primary, young men's, seminary and EFY. Unfortunately though, I never received any feelings that I could identify as a confirmation. Oh, I remembered the talks I had heard in EFY about not expecting to receive heavenly visitations, visions, audible voices or anything of the sort. I knew that what I was looking for was a "still small voice", "burning in my bosom", positive

impressions... anything contrary to a “stupor of thought”. But all I recall is being confused about whether or not I was receiving conformation or if I was just trying to answer my own question. Needless to say I was far from confident that I was receiving an answer.

I remember fighting the urge to think that I was doing something wrong. Was my repentance not sincere enough? Was my faith not strong enough?

During this time, I recalled a scripture you had shared with me, DC 46:14. You explained that you would often hear others bare their testimony and ask yourself, “How can they say that? How can they say they know?” So from that time forth, until the time came that I could say for myself “I know”, I consciously based my testimony on that same scripture, believing on other’s faith. As I was taught in EFY, and I quote, “Fake it until you make it!”

Over the course of my mission and after returning home, I reread the Book of Mormon several times. Each time upon conclusion, I would again put Moroni’s promise to the test, and each time I would experience more questions regarding my feelings than any sense of conformation. Unfortunately, I never do recall having a moment where I thought, “That’s it, now I know”.

Questions

As time went on, I started developing questions in my mind. These questions were nothing to cause me much concern, primarily unanswered thought that I would stick in the back of my mind. These were not so much the typical “why is there so much suffering in the world”, but rather they mostly dealt with the nature of God and how it related to the gospel that I was taught. But as I got older, perhaps partially because I never really “knew” via any feelings, my analytical skills and sense of reasoning became more and more an important part of my belief system and I began to think more and more about these questions. Questions like...

Does God really answer priesthood blessings more than that of the prayers of faithful, God fearing, yet non-LDS individual? And if so, does that really display an attribute of a loving Heavenly Father? Is it fair to penalize those individuals just because they haven’t been able to find his true church? If not, what really is the purpose or incentive of priesthood blessings then? And if priesthood blessings are more effective, wouldn’t it be relatively easy to point to statistical evidence that show a higher percentage of even perceived blessings within the church as opposed to out?

Why do many (I think we can safely say the vast majority) of those who seem to be honest, God fearing individuals, who are earnestly seeking God’s truth and will, have such difficulty finding it? Is it fair that finding God’s true church is so difficult that even the majority of people who truly want to find and serve him can’t? Is that really an effective plan or is it really meant to be that exclusive? I understand free will and the idea of Satan’s deceptions, but we can assume that devout members of any religion are practicing their religion because they honestly and firmly believe it

is their best possible avenue to find God. Yet when those same individuals are presented with the opportunity to follow God within his “one and only true church”, that vast majority of the time they are unable to recognize it regardless of the pure intentions of their hearts to earnestly follow Him. Or is God’s plan for men so inefficient and/or exclusive that only 0.001% of his living children can find it?

Why would God want to exclude non-members from witnessing an eternal marriage ceremony frequently causing harsh feelings and splintering families. Why would a loving Heavenly Father want this? Certainly you can understand this point. It seems to me that it would be relatively simple to make things a little different allowing for a lot more peace and harmony for all those that care for and love deeply the individuals getting married without having to sacrifice any of the sacredness of the event.

Why would God care so deeply regarding what underwear we wear that it would render one ineligible to return to His presence and subsequently the ability to live with loved ones after death? If the purpose of garments were truly for spiritual protection and to act as a reminder shouldn’t it be enough for members to want to wear them as frequently as they feel appropriate instead of being compelled to wear them all the time, every day and night. And if they weren’t worn all the time why would a loving Father in Heaven see fit to make such a seemingly insignificant action the cause for not being able to return to him? I get that some things are just a test of obedience but I would think there are many other ways that obedience could be tested. If I had a hat that I felt was really special because it has symbolic meaning to me. And if I gave that hat to one of my kids when they left home for college, or some other life event, because I felt that the symbolic nature of the hat would be a huge benefit to him or her, I might be sad if they chose not to wear it. I would possibly even be a little hurt, but I certainly wouldn’t disown that child or ever deny them the ability to return home.

Are symbolic ordinances so important to an all-powerful God that he would require the building of extremely expensive temples to conduct them within? Given the huge expense of building and maintaining the temple, could it not be more Christ-like to use those funds to help human suffering, hunger, cures for disease, etc. I understand about fast offering, humanitarian funds and the like, but how much more could be done if temple funds were also use in likewise fashion?

Why are we told to avoid material that causes questions, or doubt? If the church is true shouldn’t it be able to reasonably withstand any and all rational questioning. Wouldn’t any rational questioning only strengthen the validity of its truth? Shouldn’t truth be able to triumph on the merits of truth? And like all laws of nature that can be proven through any and all means of testing, if it really is a true law, why can we not know the truthfulness of the church through reason and logic? Why are we taught that a sure knowledge of the truthfulness of the church cannot be obtained through rational thinking and reason, but only comes through the spirit whispering to our hearts, a whisper that I have yet been able to ascertain?

I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea. Though such questions started weighing on my mind, they had not yet caused me to really consider the possibility that the church was not really “the one and only true church” ... until a little over a year ago.

I don't remember when exactly it was, and I don't remember where I was returning home from, but it was several months before the presidential election. I was flipping through the radio stations and I came across a program where they were talking about Mormons. At first my assumption was they were talking about Mitt Romney. Perhaps they started the conversation talking about him but not the portion I heard. Instead they were talking about some things regarding the church that I had never heard. Again I didn't get the whole program, but the premise was there is a lot of teachings, even doctrine, throughout the churches history that has drastically changed and even contradicted itself in which the vast majority of the members of the church are unaware. These teaching did not originate from the local clergy, but from the presidents and general authorities. However, when questioned today regarding these changing doctrines and contradictions the only real attempt at an explanation given is that it was not “canonized” doctrine.

The guest of the show explained what this meant. Because the 15 top ranking authorities of the church didn't formally take the issue up for a vote and subsequently declare their conclusion as “official doctrine”, it never really counted and therefore should not be an issue of concern. Never mind that the church members were neither aware of, nor did they even have a reference to make this distinction, when “false” teaching were being taught.

This explanation did not trouble me nearly as much as the scenario they presented as an example of this. They explained that twice during general conference address Brigham Young taught that God and Adam were the same being. Further, he instructed that this teaching be implemented into the temple ceremony. I had heard vague references to the “Adam-God theory” some early members of the church believed, but never had I heard the origin of that teaching. However, because the top 15 ranking leaders of the church never canonized this teaching, it was never really “official doctrine”. Never mind that it came from a prophet of God, and never mind that it was taught twice in General Conference and also in the temple.

I suspect that most members don't differentiate between what a prophet says from the pulpit or publishes in a book and an "official" pronouncement of policy or doctrine from the Church. Wouldn't most Church members expect what the prophet says or writes in authoritative tones to be authoritative? Especially when Church members are taught to accept General Conference talks and Ensign articles by the First Presidency and the Twelve as modern scripture.

As a side note, though not insignificant, the guest of the show also pointed out that the current president of the church, during a General Conference address, had warned the members of the church against paying too much attention to historical

teaching such as “the Adam-God theory taught by members of the early church”. His point being that he would not even reference Brigham Young by name, which in itself is disingenuous.

This example brought a whole new light to there “canonized doctrine” argument. Was this true? Did the church really use this argument as a scapegoat for errors in its history? And did Brigham Young really teach in General Conference and in the temple that Adam and God were the same being? How is it I had never heard this. Was it all anti-Mormon propaganda? If so, how could they believe they would ever get away with spreading such blatant lies?

I thought about these questions frequently as I reflected on that radio program I stumbled across during a long drive home. It was not long after that that Kristen received a calling from our bishop.

Kristen’s Calling

Without question, the most significant catalyst to my current state was that of Kristen’s calling. Sometime not too long after the radio show, Kristen was called by our bishop to be the Relief Society President. At the time the calling was extended, because he spoke with us both at the same time, I didn’t have the opportunity to expand on my concerns as much as I would have liked to without making Kristen uncomfortable. Regardless, I expressed my concerns regarding Kristen’s health, both physical and mental, and I explained that I didn’t feel it was the right calling at the right time, not unlike the feelings you expressed when you declined the call to be the stake young women’s president. She was still dealing with severe depression, was in a perpetual state of sleep deprivation, and severally overwhelmed and stressed with the kids and life events already. Not to mention summer had just started and I knew I was not going to be around much to help.

All that said however I did express, though I recommend against it, I would support her if she chose to accept it. The bishop asked me to pray and fast about it, which I did on several occasions, and though my feelings never changed, he never asked me about what answer I received or spoke with me about it directly again. Rather, for something like five months, he “counseled” with her as much as opportunity extended, on Sundays at church, by phone or on the street, asking her to reconsider even after she had declined more than once. He would say to her things like, “I believe it would produce the blessings you need to be healed”, “I really don’t believe it would require that much from you” and “why wouldn’t Scott want you to get the blessings for this”. Somehow through it all, it seemed to become about me, not Kristen, and that my lack of faith was standing as an obstruction to her blessings, my family’s welfare, his ability to do what is best for the ward and the work of the Lord in general. To be fair, no one ever said these things, but because of how the situation transpired, that is how it made me feel.

He was persistent that she was whom the Lord wanted. Each time she declined, he would initially accept her answer, but later return to her with, “don’t say no yet, let’s

give it more time". Thank God Kristen and I have such a good relationship, the way this situation transpired was divisive and could have been the cause of some serious marital discord. Don't get me wrong, the bishop is a good man and I know he was just doing his best to do what he was "supposed" to and I don't blame him for that. Lord knows I wouldn't want his job.

Like the many questions I listed above, this became a classic question about the nature of God, but on a much more personal level. How is it that the bishop and I could both take the same question to the Lord regarding what is best for someone we both have "stewardship" over and come up with two completely different impressions? Again, was my inquiry not sincere enough? Am I not worthy enough to receive inspiration on behalf of my family? Were the bishop's impressions misguided? And if God's plan is so absolute, how could those trying to follow this plan, utilizing the guidelines He set forth to do so, come into such contradictions with each other. Is that really an efficient process?

Discovery

In large part because of this experience, I had some questions that I wanted to research and started looking over the internet. I was looking to see if anyone had published a copy of the leadership manual bishop's receive so I could determine if there is actually instruction to call the husband in and counsel with him first when extending a call to his wife, or if that is something I just heard somewhere. I don't remember how I found it, but I came across a page titled "Basic Truths Most Members Don't Know" and I decided to test my knowledge and see if I knew more than "most members". After all, I was raised in the church, served a mission and went to BYU, I at least knew more than average right? I should at least know a good part of what was listed. I was wrong!

Not only did I not know the things I read, I cannot describe how bewildered and dismayed I was by them. As I read them I needed answers, and I needed them yesterday! Just like with the radio show, I was confused. These things couldn't be true. If they were, surely everyone would know about them. They had to be lies. But how could anyone expect to get away with such gross fabrications? The more I read the more I had to search for answers. Unfortunately though, as I searched for answers, it only developed more and more questions. I was learning more and more details about the Church that I had no idea about...

I did not know that African Americans were allowed to receive the priesthood until Brigham Young became the prophet. I did not realize that the church was among the very last churches in the US to accept equal rights for African American. Shouldn't the church have been leading that charge, not lagging far behind?

I did not know the reason polygamy was practiced was not because there was a shortage of men as I had been taught in Sunday school, and have repeated to countless others (mostly non-members) throughout my life. Kirtland, Nauvoo and

Salt Lake City census records all indicate that these areas had more men than women.

I did not know Joseph Smith started and ran an *illegal* bank in Kirtland, Ohio, printed his own currencies, lied about how much money he kept in the vault giving a false sense of security to those who were trusting in him, as the Prophet of God inquired of the Lord, and received the answer (*...not only [heard] the voice of the Spirit upon the Subject but even an AUDIBLE VOICE.*) for all of those investing that it could not fail, and would *“...grow and flourish and spread from the rivers to the ends of the earth, and survive when all others should be laid in ruins.”?*

I did not know of Joseph’s belief and heavy involvement in “folk magic”. A handful of examples that show some of the depth and breadth of the their superstitious and magic practices: Oliver’s “gift of the rod” divining rod, Joseph’s many different peep stones, magic circles when digging for treasure, magic pouches to hold magic amulets, David Whitmer’s seer stone, Hiram Page’s seer stone, Joseph’s Jupiter Talisman, the inscribed Smith family magic dagger, the Faculty of Abrac, the “Holiness to the Lord” magical golden parchment with the Jupiter symbols similar to the talisman Joseph had in his possession when he was killed...along with Tetragrammaton variants, magic signs, Nal-gah the good third angel of ceremonial magic, healing handkerchiefs, the Smith family “Saint Peter Bind Them” magic parchment, the “Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah” amulet against evil spirits, healing cloaks, healing canes, healing capes, phrenological readings, along with numerous others.

I didn’t know that virtually no one in the early church, including Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and many other prophets and apostles, followed the Word of Wisdom. Joseph Smith put a bar in his hotel and had Porter Rockwell bartending, and Brigham Young owned the largest distillery in the Salt Lake Valley, which he leased out to the county (of course he was on the county council). The Church itself, through ZCMI, made a lot of business with alcohol, coffee, tea, and tobacco sells.

I did not know the overwhelming DNA evidence shows that all pre-Columbian Native Americans are descendants from Asia and have no connection to Jews or the Middle East. Nor did I know that shortly after this evidence was revealed the introduction page of the Book of Mormon was quietly changed from saying the Lamanites “are the principal ancestors of the American Indians” to the Lamanites “are among the ancestors of the American Indians”. Scientists from various research organizations, including biologists from BYU, have tested the DNA of many thousands of American Indians. These tests covered over 130 tribes scattered throughout North, Central, and South America. This research has revealed that in excess of 99 percent of women and 90 percent of men of the ancestors of living Native Americans arrived on the American continent from Asia over 12,000 years ago. Lesser DNA lineages originate in Africa or Europe, most likely Spain, but none from the Middle East.

I did not know of the many places in the Book of Mormon it references things in the past tense, though according to timelines those things hadn't occurred yet when they were supposedly recorded. Not only are there numerous past-tense references to events presumably in the future, but there are also scriptural references for scriptures yet to be written in the Old World. I basically knew very little of the dozens of other problems surrounding the Book of Mormon as a historical document such as the numerous problems with archeology, population, language, geology, anachronisms, (horses, cattle, milk, oxen, donkeys, goats, sheep, swine, elephants, honey bees, barley, wheat, figs, silk, seven day week, bellows, brass, iron, chains, plows, breast plates, copper, gold and silver currency, steel swords, scimitars, chariots/wheels, etc.) and many others. These are not insignificant issues, they are many, and they are based on sound reasoning and science. In fact, despite what members would like to believe, the general scientific community, such as the Smithsonian Institution, rejects the Book of Mormon as a historical document in every way. How can this be from a book that is supposed to be so plain and precious? The Book of Mormon claims that between the Nephite-Lamanite and Jaredite battles around the Hill Cumorah 2.2 plus million people were killed. This is almost 4 times the number killed in the entire American Civil War in a much more condensed area, yet there has never been one shred of archeological evidence to substantiate this anywhere. This is just one example of many problems involving the Book of Mormon as a true historical document.

I did not know that in the 1950's and 60's, the Church tasked Thomas Stuart Ferguson, BYU's archaeology division founder, to find archaeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon, which proved an utter failure. Ferguson was more than your average good member. He would wake each morning at 4:30 so he could study the Book of Mormon before his day's work. When dating, his wife described the relationship as "Dating the Book of Mormon". His life's ambition was to find the cities, runes and artifacts that are mentioned within its pages and prove its truth. This is what Ferguson wrote after 17 years of trying to dig up evidence for the Book of Mormon. "...you can't set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere - because it is fictional and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archaeology. I should say - what is in the ground will never conform to what is in the book."

I did not know there have been many major alterations in the temple endowment and to the temple covenants. I did not know the Church quietly implemented the use of surveys regarding the temple to come up with these changes. How is this divine revelation? Didn't Joseph Smith teach, "Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed"? I did not know that Death-oath covenants, which were removed the year I took out my endowments, along with many other parts of the endowment including the signs, symbols, tokens, covenants and language, are almost identical to ceremonial aspects of the initiation into the Freemasonry, which Joseph joined just seven weeks before introducing the LDS endowment. How is copying rituals from the Masons a divine endowment from God? Heber C. Kimball, a Mason himself said, "We have the true Masonry. The Masonry of today is received

from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon, and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing." Only we now know that Masonry originates from Medieval Scotland and has nothing to do with Solomon's Temple. I did not know that before 1927 there used to be an oath of vengeance against the United States government for the death of Joseph Smith. (*You and each of you do covenant and promise that you will pray, and never cease to pray, Almighty God to avenge the blood of the prophets upon this nation, and that you will teach the same to your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations.*) What?

I did not know that soon after the first printing, Joseph sent Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery to Toronto Canada to sell the copy right of the Book of Mormon for \$8,000 but they failed in doing so, partly because the revelation sent them to the wrong place. Nor did I know that when the two men questioned Joseph why he sent them, after taking the matter to the Lord Joseph's reply was "Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of men: and some revelations are of the devil." So which one was this, from man or the devil? And how can we trust a prophet that does not know the origin of his revelations?

I did not know that Mormon leaders, including Joseph Smith, described the Moroni visit as a "dream" until after the church was organized.

I did not know about the book "View of the Hebrews", which was published just years before the Book of Mormon by Oliver Cowdery's pastor, which is almost the identical storyline as the Book of Mormon including the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of Israel, long journey and migrations to the Americas an uninhabited land, the development of two civilizations, wars between the two, etc, etc, etc. Regarding this General Authority Elder B.H. Roberts says, "Did Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* furnish structural material for Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative forces of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin." I did not know about the many stories in the Book of Mormon that are very similar, and seem to be borrowed from the stories in the King James Bible including concepts expressed in identical sequence of ideas, sentences and phrases (like "stinketh" and "sleepeth"), such as the stories of Judith in the Apocrypha compared to the decapitation of Laban, Alma the younger compared to the apostle Paul, Alma and Amulek's escape from prison compared to Paul and Silas's rescue from prison, Jared's daughter dancing for Akish compared to Salome's daughter dancing for Herod, and Jesus raising Lazarus as Alma did Lamoni just to name a few.

I did not know that at least 26 of the names of places and the descriptions of places, in the Book of Mormon are almost identical to actual names and descriptions of places of the region Joseph Smith lived. I also did not know that Camora and Moroni were common names in pirate and treasure hunting stories involving Captain

William Kidd, which were some of the stories Joseph, a treasure hunter himself, learned to read with. In fact, the uniform spelling for the Hill Cumorah in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is spelled as “Camorah”. I did not know that out of the 330 names in the Book of Mormon (Isaiah extracts excluded), 161 are found in the Bible. Another 60 appear to be formed either by rhyme or adaptation of biblical names. Thus 221, or about two-thirds, appear to be biblically inspired, mainly from the Old Testament. Joseph Smith’s Bible, which is in the Library-Archives of the Community of Christ (RLDS), had an alphabetical table of the proper names in the Old and New Testaments together with the meaning or signification of the words in their original languages.

I did not know that the papyrus Joseph Smith claimed to translate the Book of Abraham from has been proven to be nothing more than a common pagan Egyptian funerary text for a deceased man named “Hor”, which was created nearly 2,000 years after Abraham could have written it, and has nothing to do with Abraham or anything Joseph claimed in his translation for the Book of Abraham. This includes miss-interpreting Min, the pagan Egyptian god of fertility or sex, sitting in a chair with an erection, as “God sitting on his throne”. I remember hearing about in seminary, but did not know the full story of the Kinderhook Plates which Joseph claimed to have translated a portion and also claimed they contain the history of the person (body remains) with whom they were found and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt. However these were later realized to be a hoax, made by the person who “unearthed” them. I did not know about Joseph’s complete miss translation of a Greek Psalter which when Dr. Willard Richards, a Mormon apostle, was questioned about Joseph’s emphatic insistence that it was a dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics when it was actually nothing of the sort, Richards said, “sometimes Mr. Smith speaks as a prophet, and sometimes as a mere man. If he gave a wrong opinion respecting the book, he spoke as a mere man.” Caswall, who provided the Psalter, replied, “Whether he spoke as a prophet or as a mere man, he has committed himself, for he has said what is not true. If he spoke as a prophet, therefore, he is a false prophet. If he spoke as a mere man, he cannot be trusted, for he spoke positively and like an oracle respecting that of which he knew nothing.” If Joseph was willing to be so emphatic about something that was not true, how are we to know when he was speaking as a prophet or as a mere man or trust him in either case? In fact, none of the ancient documents that Joseph “translated” have ever been shown to be even remotely accurate by any scalars, including Mormons. I also did not know that, like the View of Hebrews, Joseph Smyth had copies of books called “The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato”, by Thomas Taylor and “Philosophy of a Future State” by Thomas Dick’s which even according to LDS scholars such as Klaus Hansen “bears a remarkable resemblance” to Joseph’s theology, as well as its cosmology and astronomical phrases and concepts found in the Book of Abraham. Keith Norman, another Mormon scholar, had written regarding these things, such as the Book of Abraham, that for the LDS church, “it is no longer possible to pretend there is no conflict.”

I did not know that Joseph Smyth did not “translate” the Book of Mormon, as I testified had happened hundreds of times on my mission and throughout my life. Apparently the Urim & Thummin was only “used” for the Book of Lehi, the first 116 pages lost by Martin Harris, not to mention no one ever saw them but Joseph. Rather he dictated it word for word as the words appeared to him on a rock, or rather the peep stone he found while digging a well several years earlier, which he placed in a hat and stuffed his face into. The exact same method and rock he used to swindle customers by telling them the location of buried treasure, though none was ever found. In fact he was arrested and convicted in 1826 in Bainbridge for such actions, “disorderly person and impostor”, several years after his claimed visitation by God the Father and Jesus Christ and multiple visits from Moroni. In most cases the Golden Plates weren’t even in the same room during these “translation” sessions. This is not what I was taught, and this is not what is depicted in Church artwork I have seen everywhere including chapels and temples, in Church magazines, in missionary flipcharts and videos. Preservation of the artist’s work is apparently not the issue here either as the Church has altered other works of art by non-Mormon artists to make it more in harmony with the Church’s teachings. I was shocked to learn that the Church still has the peep stone used by Joseph Smith quietly tucked away in a vault. Why hide it? Are the leaders embarrassed of how the Book of Mormon was “translated”?

I did not know that the portions of the Book of Mormon that are word for word the same as sections of the King James Version of the Bible have the same English translation errors as the King James Version that Joseph Smith had. If the Book of Mormon were the most correct book on earth then why would it contain the same translation errors as the King James Version of the Bible that Joseph had, errors that were discovered about the King James Version since the time that Joseph “translated” the Book of Mormon? Also, I did not know that there are sections of the Bible that Joseph corrected with his Joseph Smith Translations, which before the “correction” were identical to the verses in the Book of Mormon that quoted the Bible. Again if the Book of Mormon were the most correct book, why would those verses have not been “translated” to match what Joseph later corrected in the Bible in the first place?

I did not know that when pressed on the matter, the witnesses did not testify to seeing the Golden Plates with their physical eyes, but rather their spiritual eyes, or “Second Sight” were people believed they could see things as a vision in their mind, and they never signed anything stating such. Nor did I know, the names of the witnesses were all written by Oliver Cowdery, and there is no testimony from any of the witnesses directly attesting to the direct wording and claims of the statements in the Book of Mormon. I knew very little about the many other faiths that have “witness accounts” of their faith that are much more compelling than that of the Golden Plate witnesses.

I did not know that before Joseph was taken to Carthage Jail, for destroying the Nauvoo Expositor's press, which he did because they were attempting to expose his

polygamous affairs, he destroyed the original manuscript of the 1843 polygamy revelation. Nor did I know that because of the garments organ of being used to distinguish those who were practicing polygamy, Joseph removed his garments and instructed the others with him to do so as well. Not to mention that while in Carthage Jail, they drank wine to lift their spirits, Joseph sent an order to the Mormon Nauvoo Legion to attack Carthage jail “immediately” to free him (which was not carried out because Major-General Jonathan Dunham knew it would lead to two blood baths – one in Carthage and another when the Illinois militia retaliated by laying siege to Nauvoo for insurrection), he shot three men (two of which died) when the mob attacked and with his last breath attempted to use a Masonic distress signal to prevent his death. Not at all the story of martyrdom I was taught in primary, Sunday School, or church videos, movies and plays I have seen.

As troubling as these and many, many other things that I have discovered are, there are two things specifically that, if true, would be the beginning of the end of any testimony I ever had...

I did not know that Joseph Smith hid the fact that he was practicing polygamy from most members of the church, the government and even his wife, Emma (at least until she was presented with the “revelation” that she would be destroyed by God if she did not accept polygamy, but only after she had learned about some of Joseph’s affairs). I did not know that Joseph had 31 people sign an affidavits testifying that he was not practicing polygamy, when he actually was. Among the signers was Eliza R. Snow, one of his plural wives whom he married 3 months earlier, 2 Apostles and future prophets, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff who were also very aware of Joseph’s polygamy behind the scenes when they signed, Bishop Whitney who had personally married his daughter Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph as a plural wife a few months earlier and Whitney’s wife and Sarah’s mother Elizabeth. I did not know that 7 of his 33 known wives were teenage girls, two being 14 years old. Pedophilia, even by 1800’s standards. Among these women and girls was a mother-daughter set, three sister sets and several of these girls included Joseph’s foster daughters who lived with him. And this next one absolutely devastates me! I did not know that 11 of his wives were already and simultaneously married to other men! The Church’s own genealogical websites support this. (Update: the Church now admits this in one of the essays on LDS.org) These marriages included Apostle Orson Hyde’s wife, Marinda Nancy Johnson, while Orson was away, sent on a mission to Jerusalem by Joseph (many suspect Joseph was the actual father of Marinda’s son Frank Henry because of timing), to Windsor Lyon’s Wife, Sylvia P. Session who on her deathbed told her daughter Josephine that she was “the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith” not Windsor, to Prescindia D. Huntington, wife of Norman Buells, who said that she did not know whether her husband Norman or the Prophet was the father of her son Oliver, and to Zina Huntington, the pregnant newlywed of Henry Jacobs.

When Zina and Henry asked Joseph why he had not honored them by performing their marriage, he replied that the Lord had made it known to him that Zina was to

be his Celestial wife. Jacobs followed the prophet and went to England as a missionary, leaving his wife, Zina, and newborn child behind after Joseph and later Brigham Young were both married to his wife, only to get off the boat in New York on his way home where he received a letter from his wife saying she'd moved in with Brigham Young and had his child. These events devastated Jacobs, on Sep. 1852 he wrote, "O how happy I should be if I only could see you and the little children, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh... I am unhappy," Henry lamented, "there is no peace for poor me, my pleasure is you, my comfort has vanished.... O Zina, can I ever, will I ever get you again, answer the question please." This is from one of several letters Jacobs wrote expressing his torment and depression. How is this ok? Jacobs was certainly worthy to be "sealed" to Zina, serving a mission at the time. Although Jacobs eventually remarried, after Brigham Young told him that his wife and children belonged to him (Brigham) and not to Jacobs, he continued to yearn for Zina and his children. There doesn't seem to be any good, logical reason why Joseph and then Brigham Young would take Henry Jacob's wife Zina from him and force him to abandon his children and find another wife. Why was it necessary for Joseph and Brigham to unnecessarily torment this faithful man?

The "marriages" by Joseph to wives of other men were often kept a secret from their husbands and on several occasions became the origin of irate outcomes. Also, these marriages clearly go against the outlines for practicing polygamy in D&C 132, the same chapter where Emma is told she would be destroyed if she did not accept polygamy. Joseph also had several failed proposals to married women who refused him: John Taylor's wife Leonora, Heber C. Kimball's wife Vilate, Orson Pratt's wife Sarah, William Law's wife Jane, Hiram Kimball's wife Sarah not to mention Sidney Rigdon's daughter Nancy. I did not know that promises of salvation were given to many of these women's/girls and their entire families if they were "sealed" to Joseph. I did not know Joseph also threatened several women/girls with the loss of salvation and that he would destroy their reputation if they would not marry him, or if they told others of his proposals. I did not know that on multiple occasions there were threats given that Joseph would be slain by an angel with a flaming sword who had been sent to Joseph, if these women/girls did not marry him. I did not know that Joseph was "practicing" polygamy before the sealing authority was even given in the Kirtland Temple and even before that, there were several allegations, including by his wife Emma, of his adulterous behavior with various girls. Joseph's "relationship" to Fanny Alger was described by his cousin, Oliver Cowdery, as a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair". Also, the March 24, 1832 middle of the night (pulling him out of bed) mob attack on Joseph was not because of his story of seeing God as I was taught in church, but was based on Joseph's unsolicited sexual behavior with Nancy Mirinda Johnson which explains why Dr. Dennison was brought there to perform a castration on Joseph.

Ann Eliza Young, who had been married to Brigham Young, had this to say about Joseph Smith.

Joseph not only paid his addresses to the young and unmarried women, but he sought 'spiritual alliance' with many married ladies... He taught them that all

former marriages were null and void, and that they were at perfect liberty to make another choice of a husband. The marriage covenants were not binding, because they were ratified only by Gentile laws.... consequently all the women were free....

One woman said to me not very long since, while giving me some of her experiences in polygamy: 'The greatest trial I ever endured in my life was living with my husband and deceiving him, by receiving Joseph's attentions whenever he chose to come to me.

This woman, and others, whose experience has been very similar, are among the very best women in the church; they are as pure-minded and virtuous women as any in the world. They were seduced under the guise of religion,...

Some of these women have since said they did not know who was the father of their children; this is not to be wondered at, for after Joseph's declaration annulling all Gentile marriages, the greatest promiscuity was practiced; and, indeed, all sense of morality seemed to have been lost by a portion at least of the church.

From Joseph's First Counselor and close confidant William Law in an interview with the Salt Lake Tribune, July 31, 1887, said "Joseph was very free in his talk about his women. He told me one day of a certain girl and remarked, that she had given him more pleasure than any girl he had ever enjoyed. I told him it was horrible to talk like this". Joseph Smith's personal secretary, William Clayton, records that on May 22nd, 1843, Smith's first wife Emma found Joseph and Eliza Partridge secluded in an upstairs bedroom at the Smith home. Emma was devastated. And from Benjamin Winchester, stake president of the early church in the 1830's and 1840's, "It was a subject of common talk among many good people in Nauvoo that many of the elders were sent off on missions merely to get them out of the way, and that Joseph Smith, John C. Bennett and other prominent Church lights had illicit intercourse with the wives of a number of the missionaries, and that the revelation on spiritual marriage, i.e. polygamy, was gotten up to protect themselves from scandal."

Sara Pratt, Orson Pratt's wife, was excommunicated by Joseph for not having relations with him while her husband was on a mission. This was her remarks to Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal, an investigative reporter, on May 21, 1886, regarding Joseph Smith.

I want you to have all my statements correct in your book and put my name to them; I want the truth, the full truth, to be known, and bear the responsibility of it.

I have told you that the prophet Joseph used to frequent houses of ill-fame. Mrs. White, a very pretty and attractive woman, once confessed to me that she made a business of it to be hospitable to the captains of the Mississippi steamboats. She told me that Joseph had made her acquaintance very soon after his arrival

in Nauvoo, and that he had visited her dozens of times. My husband (Orson Pratt) could not be induced to believe such things of his prophet. Seeing his obstinate incredulity, Mrs. White proposed to Mr. Pratt and myself to put us in a position where we could observe what was going on between herself and Joseph the prophet. We, however, declined this proposition. You have made a mistake in the table of contents of your book in calling this woman "Mrs. Harris." Mrs. [G. W.] Harris was a married lady, a very great friend of mine. When Joseph had made his dastardly attempt on me, I went to Mrs. Harris to unbosom my grief to her. To my utter astonishment, she said, laughing heartily: "How foolish you are! I don't see anything so horrible in it. Why, I AM HIS MISTRESS SINCE FOUR YEARS!"

Joseph Smith, the son of the prophet, and president of the re-organized Mormon church, paid me a visit, and I had a long talk with him. I saw that he was not inclined to believe the truth about his father, so I said to him: 'You pretend to have revelations from the Lord. Why don't you ask the Lord to tell you what kind of a man your father really was?' He answered: "If my father had so many connections with women, where is the progeny?" I said to him: "Your father had mostly intercourse with married women, and as to single ones, Dr. Bennett was always on hand, when anything happened."

It was in this way that I became acquainted with Dr. John C. Bennett. When my husband went to England as a missionary, he got the promise from Joseph that I should receive provisions from the tithing-house. Shortly afterward Joseph made his propositions to me and they enraged me so that I refused to accept any help from the tithing-house or from the bishop. Having been always very clever and very busy with my needle, I began to take in sewing for the support of myself and children, and succeeded soon in making myself independent. When Bennett came to Nauvoo, Joseph brought him to my house, stating that Bennett wanted some sewing done, and that I should do it for the doctor. I assented and Bennett gave me a great deal of work to do. He knew that Joseph had his plans set on me; Joseph made no secret of them before Bennett, and went so far in his impudence as to make propositions to me in the presence of Bennett, his bosom friend. Bennett, who was of a sarcastic turn of mind, used to come and tell me about Joseph to tease and irritate me. One day they came both, Joseph and Bennett, on horseback to my house. Bennett dismounted, Joseph remained outside. Bennett wanted me to return to him a book I had borrowed from him. It was a so-called doctor-book. I had a rapidly growing little family and wanted to inform myself about certain matters in regard to babies, etc., -- this explains my borrowing that book. While giving Bennett his book, I observed that he held something in the left sleeve of his coat. Bennett smiled and said: 'Oh, a little job for Joseph; one of his women is in trouble.' Saying this, he took the thing out of his left sleeve. It was a pretty long instrument of a kind I had never seen before. It seemed to be of steel and was crooked at one end. I heard afterwards that the operation had been performed; that the woman was very sick, and that Joseph was very much afraid that she

might die, but she recovered.

The only "wives" of Joseph that lived in the Mansion House were the Partridge girls. This is explained by the fact that they were the servants in the hotel kept by the prophet. But when Emma found out that Joseph went to their room, they had to leave the house.

You should bear in mind that Joseph did not think of a marriage or sealing ceremony for many years. He used to state to his intended victims, as he did to me: "God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it" He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he had found out that he could not get certain women without it. I think Louisa Beeman was the first case of this kind. If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: 'Be silent, or I shall ruin your character. My character must be sustained in the interests of the church.' When he had assailed me and saw that he could not seal my lips, he sent word to me that he would work my salvation, if I kept silent. I sent back that I would talk as much as I pleased and as much as I knew to be the truth, and as to my salvation, I would try and take care of that myself.

In his endeavors to ruin my character Joseph went so far as to publish an extra-sheet containing affidavits against my reputation. When this sheet was brought to me I discovered to my astonishment the names of two people on it, man and wife, with whom I had boarded for a certain time. I never thought much of the man, but the woman was an honest person, and I knew that she must have been forced to do such a thing against me. So I went to their house; the man left the house hurriedly when he saw me coming. I found the wife and said to her rather excitedly: "What does it all mean?" She began to sob. "It is not my fault," said she. "Hyrum Smith came to our house, with the affidavits all written out, and forced us to sign them. 'Joseph and the church must be saved,' said he. We saw that resistance was useless, they would have ruined us; so we signed the papers."

Sara further expressed that she was the source of Joseph Smith's idea for receiving a "revelation" regarding polygamy as a way to get out of trouble with Emma over his extramarital affairs.

If that wasn't enough, the following is a letter Joseph Smith wrote to Newel K. Whitney's daughter Sarah Ann, whom Smith had secretly "married." It is another example of Smith's cloak-and-dagger approach to his extramarital affairs:

"... the only thing to be careful of; is to find out when Emma comes then you cannot be safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect safety. ... Only be careful to escape observation, as much as possible, I know it is a heroick undertaking; but so much the greater friendship, and the more Joy, when I see you I will tell you all my plans, I cannot write them on paper, burn this letter as soon as you read it; keep all locked up in your breasts, my life depends upon it. ... I close my letter, I think Emma wont come tonight if she dont, dont

fail to come to night, I subscribe myself your most obedient, and affectionate, companion, and friend. Joseph Smith."

There are many, many more such references, but this is more than enough. Only one to begin with would be more than enough!

I am absolutely unwilling to accept that God wanted and directed Joseph to do these things. Not my God! And no amount of "you just need to have more faith" will ever change this in my mind. I'm not the one that is broken on this. I'm not the one that is being deceived. If God stopped Joseph from retrieving the Golden Plates because he had inappropriate thoughts of using them to make money, than God certainly could have stopped him before he "married" (though there was nothing marriage like about it) in secret and had sexual relations with other men's wives. In no way should this be acceptable to honest and good people regarding the founding of their "one and only true" faith. And dare I say if God did send an angel with a flaming sword to threaten Joseph that he would be slain if he did not marry other men's wives, then I am fine spending the rest of eternity in a "lesser degree of glory" for such actions and deceit is contrary to my whole value system, ironically the vary value system I learned in church.

Did Smith's free agency matter to Heavenly Father? Why didn't the angels appear to anyone but Smith (i.e. the women)? Did the women's free agency matter to Smith or Heavenly Father? Theoretically, wouldn't marrying one other woman "establish" the law of plural marriage? If Smith were sent to establish a law, why didn't he do any of it in the light of day? Why didn't he lawfully petition governments, argue before the judiciary, and take care of some of the difficult footwork necessary in order to establish the law? How can a father's salvation be assured through a daughter's marriage to Smith, if we also hold the Articles of Faith to be true? Smith foresaw the trouble polygamy would cause, but the Lord giving the commandment didn't? Why didn't he follow the rules about polygamy as outlined in D&C 132? It clearly states that to take another wife, she must be a virgin but obviously the women that were already and simultaneously married to other men were not.

Please don't think me naive enough to believe that all these things occurred exactly as they are portrayed here. I am also aware of examples touted in General Conference of times when many members have left the Church over discovered historical documents only for those documents to later be proven a fraud (not unlike when the Church leaders were coned into shelling out \$900,000 in the 1980's to purchase fraudulent documents from Mark Hofmann). But to hold up one example of historical inaccuracy in an effort to discredit all unfavorable historical findings is an old debate trick. As with all things historical, the best you can do is look for patterns and corroborating facts from various sources, and in the case of Joseph Smith, it's very damning!

This is not the Joseph Smith I knew and testified about on my mission and throughout my life! This is not the prophet I was taught about in Primary, Sunday School, etc. This is not the prophet that is more responsible for the salvation of men

than any other man save Jesus himself. How am I supposed to sing Praise to the Man ever again after learning this information? How can I ever teach about Joseph and the Restoration in Sunday School again? Certainly this is not the best God could do. Certainly there were many others, even during the same era if that was so important, that earnestly prayed to know which church is true. Certainly there were others who didn't have remotely as questionable ethics and actions as Joseph, who could have been entrusted to usher in the restoration of the Gospel. Would God really entrust such important events to one so questionable just to test the faith of his followers? And if so, how are we to discern the truth between Joseph's claims and those of the many, many other divine claims by questionable charlatans?

And the straw that broke the camel's back...

I did not know that the official First Vision story was not written by Joseph Smith and wasn't produced until decades after the event supposedly occurred. Nor did I know that there are at least four accounts (many more if you count third party journals) of the first vision that were produced at various times over the course of 10 years, one of which was written by Joseph Smith's own hand but not the "official" version. However these accounts are all over the place with their facts... when it actually occurred, how old he was, the reason why he was praying and who visited him. Some versions say he saw a host of angles, some say an angel, some say a pillar of fire, but none of them say God the Father visited him except for the one "official" account produced in 1838. I did not know that virtually no one appeared to know about the first vision until decades after it occurred. It was not recorded in any of the early church documentation, it was not reported in any of the church publications or pamphlets, there is no record of it ever being discussed in church meetings or general conference, and though Joseph's mother kept a detailed journal, much of which was about Joseph, there was no mention of the First Vision in her or any other family member's journals.

I did not know there have been many changes from the original Book of Mormon, including doctrinal changes. From "mother of the God" to "mother of the Son of God" (1 Nephi 11:21) and "the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!" to "...yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!" If the Book of Mormon were the "most correct of any book on earth", why would it need to be changed? And why do the declarations regarding the nature of the Godhead change over time in the Book of Mormon and other church literature? I did not know about doctrinal changes on the views of the Godhead found in the Book of Mormon follow the same evolutionary process as Joseph's changing First Vision narratives – starting with a private forgiveness epiphany involving a singular Jesus in 1823 and changing over time into a literal visitation in 1820 by two distinct personages in a waking vision in a grove of trees.

If the official First Vision story was so important, why did it go unpublished until 1842? If Jesus Christ and God the Father really told Joseph Smith in 1820 that all churches were an abomination, then why did he try joining the Methodist church in June of 1828? If Joseph Smith saw God in 1820, why did he pray in his room in 1823

to find out "if a Supreme being did exist?" Why did Joseph Smith fail to mention his First Vision when he first wrote a church history in 1835? If Joseph Smith could not deny that he saw God, then why did his own handwritten accounts have a different account? If Joseph Smith's First Vision was the most important historical event since the atonement, then why didn't early church members know about it? If it really happened, why couldn't Joseph Smith tell a consistent story about such a powerful experience as meeting with God and Jesus Christ face-to-face? Why does the "official" First Vision story contradict Joseph Smith's own handwritten testimony? If Joseph Smith saw God the Father in the flesh with a body in 1820, why did he teach later than God the Father did not have a physical body? Why did Joseph Smith's mother, in the extensive history of her son's life, not mention Joseph ever having a vision from God and Jesus Christ, or that he was persecuted for it?

These are not all the issues I have discovered that are troubling me, there are many more. But these issues mentioned above should paint a pretty good picture of what I am struggling with. I have also found that thanks to the solid investigation and collaboration efforts of a few individual's relentless quest to piece together parts of the church history puzzle, there is a lot of information out there expanding on these various issues that are based in sound reasoning.

These issues matter, and for the life of me, I can't comprehend the radicalization of members who are familiar with these issues and flippantly dismiss them. I do not understand the mindset of "I know it's true, therefore I do not need to concern myself with sound reasoning."

How is it possible that I did not know all these things? I was born in, and attended church all my life, I went to Primary, and Young Men's, though not every morning (and I'm convinced it would not have made a difference if I did as the issues of concern were never discussed there anyway) I attended Seminary, I went to EFY, I served a mission, I studied the scriptures and Ensigns, I listened to General Conferences, I took church history courses in institute, I graduated from BYU where I also took more courses in church history, I tried to serve as faithfully as I could in my various callings. I'm 42 years old! How is it possible that I did not know these things?

The answer to this question partially came to me when I was trying to research the "faithful history", a phrase I came across a couple of times but was unclear what it was referencing. I still don't have a full understanding, but what I have been able to piece together is basically that the leaders of the church have made a conscious decision to "stick to the story" about church history and its founding events, the way we were all taught in primary and Sunday school, suppressing all the evidence that may surface to the contrary, putting agenda before truth.

My suspicions regarding the "faithful history" were confirmed when I came across a little article regarding Leonard J Arrington, the Church Historian in the early 70's.

*Between the works of "faithful historians" and historical works grew the New Mormon History, which emphasized "examining the Mormon past in the hope of understanding it" rather than attacking or defending the religion itself. The most noted of the early New Mormon Historians was Leonard J. Arrington, who earned his doctorate in economics but whose early work culminated in the publication of *Great Basin Kingdom, An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* (Harvard University Press, 1958), which became "a watershed in the writing of the New Mormon History. "Arrington was important in the organization of the Mormon Historical Association in 1965 and became its first president.*

In 1972, Arrington was called to serve as the LDS Church Historian, although he was not a General Authority. But Arrington's attempt to publish New Mormon History through the Church Historian's office met stiff resistance from members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Some of Arrington's subordinates were not allowed to publish through church organs or imprints, and they were eventually removed. Privately, Arrington wrote, "Our great experiment in church-sponsored history has proved to be, if not a failure, at least not an unqualified success. In 1982, the First Presidency sent Arrington a personal letter releasing him from his call as church historian, and the release was not publicly announced in General Conference. The East Wing of the Church Office Building contains a gallery of portraits of all the church historians—except for Arrington.

Mormon studies became an increasingly hazardous pursuit for Mormon scholars, especially if they were members of the Brigham Young University faculty. The Church restricted access to papers formerly available to non-Mormons and asked researchers to sign releases giving the church permission to exercise pre-publication censorship.

With this, it became apparent to me that not only had the church not taken an active role in providing all the facts, it was actually implementing efforts to suppress and stifle information deemed contrary to the primary and Sunday school teachings or anything that would cause doubt among its members. I have recently read a paper that categorized over 150 (not a comprehensive list by any means) incidences where the Church has fibbed, deceived, distorted, inflated, minimized, exaggerated, prevaricated or lied in the name of the Lord. Some of these even indicated times when Church leaders have expressed that it is, at times, appropriate to be deceitful. I was reminded of the time when my mission president flat out told the missionaries that we should lie to investigators in certain circumstances.

I have come to learn that this deliberate set of actions by the leaders of the church to cover up undesirable history and teachings is referenced as "whitewashing". Boyd K. Packer, in his "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," talk delivered at the 1981 Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium said, "[Church history] if not properly written or properly taught,... may be a faith destroyer... The writer or teacher who has an exaggerated loyalty to the theory that

everything must be told is laying a foundation for his own judgment.... The Lord made it very clear that some things are to be taught selectively and some things are to be given only to those who are worthy." In "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," reprinted in *BYU Studies*, v. 21, no. 3, 1981, pp. 259-277, "Some things that are true are not edifying or appropriate to communicate. Readers of history and biography should ponder that moral reality as part of their effort to understand the significance of what they read." On May 18, 1993 he stated, "There is no such thing as an accurate, objective history of the Church without consideration of the spiritual powers that attend this work... There is a temptation... to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith-promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful... In an effort to be objective, impartial, and scholarly, a writer or a teacher may unwittingly be giving equal time to the adversary... In the Church we are not neutral. We are one-sided. There is a war going on, and we are engaged in it... The fact that something is already in print or available from another source is no excuse for using potentially damaging materials in writing, speaking, or teaching: 'Do not spread disease germs!'"

Another really clear example of how the Church is not forthcoming is very well illustrated here...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EReUoXIesMI&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZWY3r5EV3Y>

Even back in 1985, at a Church Educational System conference at BYU, Elder Oaks seemed to be confirming this conscious decision by the Church when he said, "Balance is telling both sides. This is not the mission of the official Church literature or avowedly anti-Mormon literature. Neither has any responsibility to present both sides."

I can't begin to describe how upsetting it is to me to see things of this nature coming from those whom I had entrusted above everything else. I believed them when they told me that I should not read anything that was faith threatening. In fact with any question that arose in my life, my first inclination was to ask what the leaders of the Church have said on the matter. To the extent I became aware of an answer from Church leaders on such questions the debate was over in my mind. Their opinions were from God – case closed. But isn't commanding us not to read anything that is faith threatening and then not telling the whole story, just a step away from burning all our books? And just because we don't read something that causes us to question our faith doesn't mean that which we aren't reading is untrue, it just makes us ignorant. Discovering it was and continues to be dishonest runs contrary to everything I believed the Church to stand for. To me the Church was the one and only absolute in this life.

How could a social organization that teaches its followers a principal such as "the sin of omission", otherwise committing sin for not doing something we ought to be doing, not only purposefully omit pertinent facts about its history but also actively

try to hide these facts from its followers? How is this not the height of hypocrisy, validating what opponents of religion have been arguing throughout history?

I'm sure by now you are thinking that all I am referencing is anti-Mormon sources and I have fallen into a trap of lies, but that is not at all the case. When I discovered all these previously unknown facts (unknown to me anyway) regarding the church's history and its founding events, I first went to the official church websites, such as LDS.org and Mormon.org, for answers. There was very little, if anything, to be found on any of these topics. Certainly nothing that gave me any kind of reassurance. Of course I encountered many sources that I would have previously dismissed as "traditional anti-Mormon" without even knowing the content. Because the official church websites are so uninformative, it appeared there was little choice but to reference these options, though I did so very skeptically. I also became familiar with sources dubbed as "apologist" sites, such as FAIR and the Neal Maxwell Institute (formerly FARMS). Though the latter is funded by tithing dollars and headquartered at BYU, I could find no evidence that the information within it is accepted as doctrine. While I have found some information to be useful from both these sources, more often than not, they are more damaging than helpful, appearing to throw any possible answer against the wall and hoping something sticks. Through these sights I "learned" that a horse isn't a horse, an elephant isn't an elephant a chariot isn't a chariot and the Hill Cumorah isn't in New York. Additionally, they are obviously agenda based, so like the "critic" sources, I approach these with a fair (and I feel appropriate given my findings about Leonard Arrington and other white washing) amount of skepticism.

I eventually became acquainted with some sources that are not agenda driven, for or against, but whose mission is to find truth, regardless if that truth supports or contradicts the church. Many providers of such sources express earnest desires for the church to be true, and have even spent their life in service of it, but are unwilling to ignore or alter facts to arrive at a pre-conceived conclusion of "truth" or faith. I have great admiration for these people, and I find myself currently in their camp.

One of the books I am currently reading is "In Sacred Loneliness – The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith" by Todd Compton, who, I believe, is still an active and devout member. In his words, "Many Mormons today... do not know of his (Joseph Smith's) contempt for traditional marriage and Victorian morality." The book chronicles thirty-three extraordinary lives of Joseph's plural wives (who's salvation he guaranteed), which began with "promise and devotion and ended almost uniformly in loneliness." The stories in this book are heart ranching, yet pail in comparison to the thousands of lives polygamy has and continue to bring great devastation to today.

Another book I'm reading is An Insider's view of Mormon Origins by Grant H Palmer. Grant Palmer spent 33 years in the church educational system and a three-time director of LDS Institutes of Religion in California and Utah. At the time his book was published, he was the high priest group instructor of his ward. His book outlines many of the facts I mentioned above regarding things I did not know. In the

preface he explains that his intent in writing the book was to increase faith, not to diminish it, but further exhorts that faith needs to be built on truth and as members “we insist on things that are simply untrue.” If there were anyone who desired the church to be true, I would think that Grant Palmer would be a textbook example of it. At the time I bought this book I was unaware that Palmer was eventually ex-communicated for his works. The church has never claimed that the facts in his works are untrue; rather he was ex-communicated because his works were causing members to lose their faith.

Unfortunately, I have discovered that Brother Palmer was not alone in his membership fate. Many others have also been ex-communicated for their work regarding church history. Like Brother Palmer, many were ex-communicated because their works were causing members to lose their faith, not on the validity of their works. In fact much of their research and sources of information originated from the church’s historical records themselves. Does this mean that Brother Palmer and others like him are damned for bringing to light historical facts? Is telling the truth in such a case not only just a sin, but such a grievous sin that it penalizes someone for eternity? I have also read of other Church Educational System instructors who have been disciplined, again not because of what they are teaching is not true, but because it is causing other to question their faith.

Yet another book I am reading is Joseph Smith – Rough Stone Rolling by Richard Lyman Bushman. Richard is an awarded Church historian and is a member of the Church who taught at BYU and has held callings as Seminary teacher, bishop, stake president, Stake Patriarch and is a faithful apologist.

Another source I have come to trust is www.Mormonthink.com. The contributors to this website are members or post-members. In the site introduction they express...

With both sides of the LDS faith issue being labeled as biased, why should you trust us? The people contributing to this web site are in a unique position. Most of us are members of the LDS church, yet we are fully aware that some of the history taught in the church is radically different from the actual historical record. We value truth above all else whether or not it supports what we have always believed.

Since many of us are still active in the church, we do not wish to make it look bad and make ourselves look foolish for being members of a church that may not be entirely true. But we believe in total honesty, so we will not sugarcoat anything just to spread the gospel. We think that only the truth is good enough for the members.

We feel that in order to really make an informed decision, that honest truthseekers should look at all sides of the issues. To that end we generously link to many critics and many true-believer websites in each section so they can really explore all viewpoints in their own words. Currently we have over 300

pro-LDS website links and book references. We are continuously updating our references as we find stronger arguments supporting each side.

Tom Phillips, the current managing editor of Mormon Think has served in most leadership positions including Bishop, Stake President and Area Executive Secretary. He also served as the Area Controller for the British Isles and Africa as well as the Financial Director for the Church's U.K. corporate entities, not to mention he has had his calling and election made assure. Yep, that's right, he had received his Second Endowment, something I knew very little about as the Church keeps it such a secret. I was always taught in church it is a personal visitation from Christ himself. Apparently that is not quite how it works. It is really only a "Second (temple) Endowment", which assures them of Eternal Life in the Celestial Kingdom, which they are told to keep secret, even from their family. These individuals are selected by recommendations of others who have also received this endowment and approved by General Authorities. It's quite the exclusive club. If you care to, you can read his words on this experience here <http://www.exmormon.org/mormon/mormon508.htm>

If you wish to better understand these issues that are bothering me, MormonThink.com is the best place to start. They are much fairer than FAIR and the Neal Maxwell Institute. They have many links to these two other sources though these other sources, FAIR and the Neal Maxwell Institute, will not do the same.

I only go through the effort to explain some of the sources I am referencing in an effort to express that I do not take these issues lightly, by any stretch of the imagination, and I don't just accept anything I come across. I absolutely believe I am being as objective as possible and I pray for guidance through the process. I want the Church to be true! Considering the notion that it is not true is an extremely difficult place to be on so many levels there is no way I could accurately express it in words. It conflicts with everything I know and have been taught. However, no matter how much I want it to be true, I simply cannot dismiss sound reasoning and logic. Unfortunately, I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that much, if not all, of these issues that are troubling me so deeply, are historically accurate and I just can't understand how so many really good people can be willing to accept so many really bad things regarding the foundation of their faith.

It appears that I am far from the only one who is coming to these conclusions. Since I began researching these issues, I have discovered that due to the improved availability of information, thanks to the Internet, members are leaving the church by huge numbers. Church Historian and General Authority, Elder Marlin Jensen said "Maybe since Kirtland, we've never had a period of - I'll call it apostasy, like we're having now; largely over these issues..." I have seen one estimate that since 1995, 1.5 million members have "resigned". Of course, the church keeps all such information a secret, along with a great deal of other things, so I doubt there is any real way to know for sure. Other statistics I have seen say there is something like 12 million members of the church but of that only about 5 million are active. And yet another that indicated that the baptism rate in developed countries (i.e. country's

with common access to the Internet) is plummeting. Again, there is no way to know for sure as merely being a devout member of the Church doesn't qualify anyone to actually receive information about the Church to which they belong.

There are even those in high positions within the Church that are now coming forward with their concerns regarding the church as well. Just recently, Hans Mattsson a member of the Quorum of the Seventy and area authority over in Europe has just made public his concerns with the church. See the front page New York Times article about him here. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/us/some-mormons-search-the-web-and-find-doubt.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

I have also become aware that there seems to be a large silent faction, at least silent during church services, of the Church that doesn't believe the historical foundation and other doctrinal issues of the Church are true but try to stay active the best their conscience allows them to anyway. This is evident by the hundreds of such stories found on www.staylds.com and other websites.

What this means to me.

First please understand that I do not share the information I have discovered to try and persuade you (or anyone) into any manner of thought. I share them because I don't want you to think that I am drawing conclusions flippantly. These issues have been the cause of much prayer, fasting and meditation.

Coming to the conclusion that everything you thought you know is wrong is an extremely emotional ordeal. It's a very difficult thing to have all the answers you thought you knew taken away from you. It's scary to realize that I really don't know what happens after death. It's extremely lonely, regardless of the well-meaning intentions of the bishop and other members. I am so fortunate to have a wife, which is supportive of me. I have read that 80% of marriages that have one or the other member go through a loss of faith end in divorce, a statistic that is truly heart breaking.

However, I strongly believe that every member should have the opportunity to, at the very least, gain a good understanding that these issues exist, thus affording them the chance to make an honestly informed decision for themselves, and I absolutely include my children in that statement. With the exception of my children, I have no desire to be the one to educate others, not to mention those that do, often find themselves excommunicated. With my children however, I will support and love them in whatever they decide, just as I would if they decided to become Buddhist or atheist, but to not give them the opportunity to know about these issues would be to set them up for the same colossal letdown I am experiencing. I also feel that the churches conscious decision to not only not educate its members of these issues, but also actively hide them is completely dishonest, something we as members cannot be if we want to obtain a temple recommend.

During this process I thought many times about the analogy of the frogs in the pot of water I was taught about in seminary regarding sin. I'm sure you are aware, the

analogy explains that if you toss a frog into a boiling pot of water it will immediately jump out, however if you put it into a pot of water that is room temperature and slowly heat it up, the frog, not detecting the gradual change of temperature, will slowly cook to death. Though it was to be an analogy of how sin can destroy our lives, while discovering the many things in church history that I am at odds with, I was reminded of the frog in the pot. How many people, if they knew of these issues prior to joining the church would actually join? What percentage of members today actually knows these issues beyond the periodic casual reference? It took me 42 years to learn of these things. I feel like a victim of an old “bait and switch” con where the temperature of the water is slowly increasing. I know of times when investigators, while learning about temples, asked about specifics regarding the endowment (pre Internet of course as now you can get plenty of descriptions and even video on YouTube). When they were told they could only find out after being a member for a year and going to the temple to see for themselves, the investigators would never join the church. Why is that? Why cannot God’s one and only true church also be the most open and forthcoming organization on the face of the planet? I understand the “milk before meat” argument, but it just feels more like the boiling frog to me.

I am in no way discounting all the good, “Christ like” principles that the leaders of the church teach, though one could argue that most, if not all, good faiths (and not just Christen) teach principles such as being thy brother’s keeper, the golden rule, patience, long suffering and other Be Attitudes. However, more than all the church’s history issues I have uncovered, as deeply troubling as polyandry (simultaneous marriage to multiple husbands), the multiple accounts of The First Vision, and the many other issues are, it is the apparent practice of the church leader’s conscious decision to follow principles that are designed to, first and foremost, maintain or expand the Church’s influence, frequently by using emotional leverage, that disturbs me the most. I very much include the “white washing” of church history in that statement.

Social organizations that survive in the long term evolve effective means of keeping their people under control, and these means usually come to be regarded as “sacred” and hence beyond question.

Bias by the Church leaders often leads them to miss, or even intentionally avoid, moving (at least until they are forced to) in directions that would benefit many individual members because of the threat, or perceived threat, to Church leadership authority. Given this, the Church has predictably always fought against all government, social and individual forces that were inclined to reduce the control over its members. There have been numerous examples of this throughout the Church’s history including clashes with the government over the use of militia, civil power vested in a religious organizations, polygamy, Civil Rights, feminism, individualism, science, academics and gay rights, not to mention all the covering up of Church history by white washing. Because of this, I believe the Church “looks out”

for the Church first, and is an unreliable source of wisdom for the individual members.

This fact is better understood when you look at how the church makes its decisions. Virtually all the decisions made within the Church, and certainly all that has any value, are made by the unanimous decision of 15 aged men. These 15 men receive their positions of authority by being selected by, yep, these same 15 men, chosen primarily on the basis of their conservative nature and absolute devotion to the Church. Those two qualifying attributes wouldn't be such a bad thing if it didn't put them at odd with making decisions with what may be best for the individuals that follow them, instead of what is best for the church organization.

Plato had a philosophy known as his "philosopher kings" concept. Simply put this concept was that philosopher kings were the wise few, who were justified, in Plato's view, in deceiving the masses when it was necessary, since the masses are incapable of understanding what was in their best interest. I do not doubt the leaders of the Church care for the members, nor do want to believe the Church leader consciously "deceive", but I believe that they are so sure that they are right that they are incapable of intellectually checking the means by which they use to push the members toward what to them seems to be the only possible conclusion.

Yes, over long periods of time, the church does make corrections for the better when forced to do so, but, as with equal rights for African Americans, because of the nature of the 15 aged conservative men who make the decisions for the church, it will always lag far behind the mainstream. I believe that the church is very likely to one day accept gay marriage, it may yet be several decades before it does, and, as with equal rights for African Americans, it is likely to be the last major religion in the U.S. to do so.

I am glad to see that the Church may begin addressing the issue of white washing church history, or at least address the issues that have been white washed by the church regarding its history. But again, I believe it is doing so only because it is in a position where it is forced to (by the available information on the internet and an effort to stop the hemorrhaging of the huge amount of members questioning or leaving the church) not because it is the right thing to. If that were the case, it would have been forthcoming a long time ago. On the MormonThink.com website I mentioned before, I recently found this...

Church to release answers to troubling issues - 6/3/13

MormonThink has learned from multiple reliable sources that the LDS Church will soon begin publishing on the official Church website a series of at least 13 essays addressing controversial historical Church topics. The rising tide of accurate, first-hand historical source documents available for faithful members to research on the internet has forced the LDS General Authorities to move beyond giving shallow answers to the issues these documents raise.

The essays addressing historical concerns will provide more extensive details and will attempt to re-contextualize the first-hand source documents regarding topics that the Church deems most problematic for its members. Among the first essays approved by the First Presidency and slated for release at this time will be the multiple, differing accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision -- a subject that will undoubtedly catch many lifelong members by surprise as most will learn about these alternate, conflicting First Vision accounts for the first time.

We are encouraged to hear that the Church leadership is finally acknowledging the reality of the varying historical accounts, and is making what appears to be a good-faith effort to share this factual information with the general Church membership. It is our hope that the growing availability of information that contradicts the Church's depictions of historical events will encourage the Church to break its pattern of marginalizing and trivializing accounts that challenge official Church versions (e.g., Book of Abraham translation issues, Book of Mormon historicity, polygamy). We hope that Church leaders will be forthright regarding all aspects of the historical record and do not merely summarize the issues and quickly dismiss them. As always, we encourage faithful members to explore the information and source documents objectively to determine if the interpretations the Church provides are the most probable or likely interpretations.

We at MormonThink will be certain to examine these essays for historical and contextual accuracy and provide the most relevant and accurate information to our readers for a balanced review of the topics addressed. We are hopeful that the Church, with its vast resources, will provide full and complete detail on each topic. If it falls short on this, you can be assured that MormonThink, with its small team of volunteer contributors, will correct any misrepresentations and fill in any identified gaps.

(Follow Up Note: At the time I wrote this letter, the Church had not yet released any of these articles. However, currently the Church has released a dozen such articles on lds.org, and is apparently planning to release more. Unfortunately, to those who read them carefully and analytically, and are willing to put intellectual honesty above emotional ideology, these articles create more questions than they answer. And completely avoid all together some of the more critical facts and questions. They are nothing more than carefully word-crafted spin, and an effort to appease members who are not willing to put forth the effort to really analyze them and their claims. For example, in the essay about Joseph Smith's polygamy, it states that Joseph was not given any clear instruction how to practice polygamy, but that is not true. D&C 132 gives clear instruction, and Joseph clearly did not follow it. Among many other omissions, it also does not mention that one of the 14-year girls he married was promised salvation to her and her family or that he was practicing "polygamy" before he even received a reevaluation for it. By the leaders of the Church's own admission, these articles do not do much to answer questions by many who already diligently seek. They seem to merrily be a preemptive effort

against those within the Church who may yet stumble across these issues, and are not willing to put forth the effort to truly, and honestly, evaluate these issues and the subsequent articles. It appears that they are no more than an attempt at damage control. This makes me very sad because I was really hopeful for some true revelation or honesty, but instead have only solidified my conclusions with their obfuscation.)

What does this mean for those church members who have been excommunicated for writing books on that subject? I wonder if any member of the church had ever been excommunicated for speaking up for equal rights for African Americans.

I don't believe that lagging far behind in regards to progress toward what is right is really what God had intended for His one and only true church and I now do not believe that the prophet and general authorities are led by divine revelation which only they are eligible to receive, as much as they are led by their conservative nature and their commitment to follow principles that strengthen the Church's influence.

Yes, I believe that God may hear and answers prayers of the leaders of the Church, and at times they may be inspired, just like I believe a loving God hears, answers prayers and provides inspiration to all men and women regardless of which church they attend. But I also believe that the Church leader's philosopher kings approach greatly clouds their ability to always receive unhindered inspiration with making decisions regarding what is best for the individual members, not the church.

A book could be written regarding the leaders of the Church making decisions and implementing "policy" (for lack of a better word) that was/is based on expanding the Church's influence over what may be best for the individual members. However, I will only give one example that I think you will understand, as this letter is way too long already.

During my discoveries I have learned that initially Mormon marriages were performed anywhere and those performed in the Kirtland temple were open to non-members. Joseph Smith's own diary list marriages he performed in the temple, which included non-members as participants and as witnesses. It wasn't until later, in order to keep his polygamy a secret, Joseph created the temple endowment with its oaths of secrecy and closed the temple to the public. On May 4th, 1842 Joseph Smith initiated nine men into his new inner-circle called the "Holy Order," the "Quorum," the "Holy Order of the Holy Priesthood," or the "Quorum of the Anointed." For the first year, only a very select few men received the endowment and all were sworn to secrecy based on a death oath. By using a secret ceremony and oaths, Joseph was able to keep his practice of polygamy a secret for years. History of the Church Volume 5:1 documents these first meetings and the participants who were all in Smith's inner-circle of polygamy. Heber C. Kimball's journal (1840-45) also describes the introduction of the secret endowment as it relates to polygamy. This consequently also appears to be the origin of garments. It started with the secret circle of men that accepted and practiced Joseph's plural wife

doctrine and was his way of setting them apart from monogamous men. It was originally the "uniform" required for men to practice polygamy. *Reference Emma Hale Smith Biography*. This is also where the term "Celestial Marriage" and the practice of "sealing's" came from, polygamy.

For quite some time, even after the temple was closed to the public, it was permissible for members of the church to first receive a civil marriage and then immediately afterward a temple marriage. And why not, if God does not recognize civil marriages why would it be any different than hopping on one foot and clucking at the moon like a chicken then getting married in the temple? If God does not recognize civil marriages, why implement a penalty that members have to wait a full year to get married in the temple after a civil marriage, even if they are otherwise completely worthy to have a temple recommend? This practice is heartbreaking and rips families apart. There have been countless accounts of loving parents and other family members who sit tearfully outside the doors of the temple while their son, daughter or other loved one is getting married inside without them because they are not members. People all the time are forced to choose between their family and their faith. Furthermore, the stigma if a couple chose to have a civil marriage then wait a year to go to the temple, even if they are 100% worthy, is that they were unable to enter the temple because of some kind of sin, probably sexual. This seemingly arbitrary policy drives a wedge between LDS and non-LDS. I really cannot see any reason why a loving Heavenly Father would want this. The only rational reason I can possibly come up with why a worthy couple cannot receive a temple marriage right after a civil marriage is because it is a way for the Church to extend influence, read "control", over its members.

If it were at least permissible to get sealed right after a civil marriage, you and Dad wouldn't have had to hide the fact from his family all these many years that you were "sealed", and consequently legally married, the day before your public wedding. I assume this is something that you have always been, at the least, uncomfortable with as you have never shared this with me. Please note, I absolutely do not hold anything against you for this, I would have done the same thing myself. However, it's the fact that you had to do it because of the Church's policies that is what I am getting at.

And to my point, just from this one example, temple marriage, we can see a whole bunch of decisions that were made to maintain or expand the Church's influence, starting from Joseph Smith efforts to hide polygamy by closing the temple to non-Mormons, to the decision much later to not allow worthy members the ability to receive a temple marriage right after a civil marriage, to the upholding of this policy today, strengthening significantly the effectiveness of this control tool. And yes, I greatly resent the fact that there is a good possibility that I will not be able to attend the marriage of my greatest loves and joys in life, my flesh and blood, my own children if they stay with the church, because one really good con artist in the 1800's was breaking the law while being deceitful and dishonest to his wife along with many others and closed the temple to non-members in an effort to keep

polygamy a secret. I know the Church's response to this would be, it is my choice. I can repent and become "worthy" and be at my children's wedding if I choose to. However, if I do, I am letting the Church force me into living what I feel in my heart is not right. So do I live a lie for a lifetime, dying a little inside each time I sit in church and sing Praise to the Man, or, it is my turn to teach about the restoration of the gospel, thus sacrificing honesty and self-integrity, or do I try to be honorable to myself and forfeit the ability to be with my children on their wedding day if they choose to get married in the temple? God does not want this!

When the leaders of the Church make decision based on maintaining or increasing the church's influence, much of which by utilizing emotional warfare, and when they make continues decisions to not be forth coming regarding church history, they cross the lines from being servants of God to "playing God". They are not allowing the members the opportunity to think and choose for themselves based on all the available information. I realize that this sounds resentful, and I guess I am. I can honestly say that I love the members of the Church. They are good, loving, God fearing people, the vast majority of which have little to no idea about the Church's trouble history, white washing, and the practice of increasing influence whenever possible. However, and it saddens me to say it, I cannot support any leader within the Church that had either taken part of white washing and/or made decisions in the interest of the church over the individual members nor can I support those who stood ideally by knowing full well those practices were/are taking place.

Further, I simply cannot accept that Joseph Smith was chosen by God to be the individual more responsible for the salvation of man than any other save Jesus Christ. There is more than enough evidence that, at the very least, Joseph Smith was not trustworthy. From selling the location of buried treasure though there never was any, to lying and signing an affidavit saying he was not practicing polygamy and getting 31 other people to lie and sign, to hiding his polygamist (read adulterous) affairs from his wife and many others, to not coming even remotely close to accurate in any of his translation efforts, to telling Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery that the reason why they failed in selling the copy rights to the Book of Mormon as he commanded was because the revelation to do so must have come from man or the Devil, to manipulating and strong-arming many women and others on a major scale, and on and on and on. If it was by God's design to pick such an untrustworthy individual to bring forth such a pivotal sequence of events regarding the salvation of man, then how could He truly expect us to be able to discern its truth given Joseph's deceptions, contradictions, exaggerations, hypocrisies, infidelities, etc. What am I supposed to make of the fact that his varying accounts of the First Vision is all over the place? Are we really supposed to believe that seeing God was not memorable enough to produce an accurate account that doesn't conflict with other accounts?

Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a Prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to

mislead people, then he should be exposed, his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false... -President Joseph Fielding Smith

And I'm sorry, what would we think of President Monson if we discovered he was marring, and have sexual relations with other men's wives without those men knowing, saying he was commanded by an angel of the Lord with a flaming sword to do so or he would be destroyed. We would not accept that from a prophet today, why should we accept it from a prophet less than 200 years ago, in fact the one prophet that is more responsible for the salvation of men than any other?

Emotions and the Spirit

I simply cannot understand why so many really good people can accept these things. How can we be so ill rational? I know, in part at least, the answer has to do with feelings and emotions. Most people seem to be more motivated by emotions than sound logic. The Church knows this and masterfully used it to every conceivable advantage it can, like true philosopher kings. Intellect and reason are ineffectual against the emotional firepower of the Church. It has tremendous ability to leverage, dare I say, manipulate emotions... "You want to be able to be with your family after death don't you?" or "There are severe penalties for not raising your children in the Church, do you want to be held accountable for not making sure your children are raised in the gospel?" or "God holds those accountable who don't follow all these covenants made in the temple. Do you want God's punishments?" (Never mind the fact that it was never explained to me that I would be required to make covenants and what they meant before I went to the temple the first time.) Not to mention the stigma of not being faithful enough to conform and, worst of all, not being allowed to attend a wedding of your own son or daughter. In most cases sound logic doesn't stand a chance against emotions, but feelings and emotions can be easily tricked, fooled and manipulated. Of course reason and logic can be tricked as well, dependent on available information and the ability to interpret the information, but it doesn't seem they are as susceptible as feelings, at least not in my psyche. There are millions of examples of where people, even entire nations, have been motivated to action through emotional manipulation, sometimes for good, sometimes not. Masses of people have been tricked into drinking poison Cool Aid, or becoming Kami Kaze or suicide boomers. In Japan there is a phrase, "Gunshun-Shinri". The closest English translation is "mob-mentality" or "group thinking". It is a phrase to describe the phenomena that happens when a group of people can be persuaded to believe in something primarily because there are a lot of other people believing it and telling them it is true.

I have read physiological and psychological scientific explanations why emotions, in relation to survival instincts which have evolved in the human psyche, based on truth or not, are such an effective motivator to action. Because everyone's body chemistry is a little different, this could explain why some people feel like they receive divine impressions, and conformations (i.e. the spirit), whether they are or not, and others struggle to. This also helps explain why people of varying, and even

contradicting, faiths could also receive “testament” for themselves that the work and belief they are engaged in is true and complete. You can’t tell me that members of the Jehovah Witnesses, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and a host of other faiths don’t “know” within their heart that their beliefs are true and even the one and only true doctrine of God.

Just like Mormons, the Hindus have the chakras, some of which have manifestations of elation, lifting and pure knowledge while meditation. During mediation (prayer) a flame is felt inside of the heard (part of the heart chakra), from which the mantra rings out and cooperates with the brow and crown (mind) chakras for realizing the “Clear Light”. Islam has the “hajj experience” and Islamic transformation that are essentially just as or stronger than the Mormon “burning in your bosom”, as is evident by those who feel so emboldened as to commit suicide for their testimony.

I don’t want to belabor this point, but I will quickly relay one recent experience I have had. Not long ago I was in town dropping off guests at the airport. Because I had an hour or so before I had to pick up my next group of guests I decided to swing into a fast food place and grab a quick bite. Once I sat down with my food, I noticed a man a couple of booths down that was reading the Book of Mormon. It was one of those paperback type that missionary’s give away to investigators. He was somewhere toward the beginning of the book, my guess was around Second Nephi. By the look on his face I would say Isaiah’s translations. As I sat there and watched him, I fought off the urge to hand him my business card and tell him that if he ever wants a perspective of the Church from a lifelong member, a perspective he would not get from the missionaries or the Church, give me a call. The longer I sat there, the stronger the urge was to approach him, but I didn’t. After I got into the car and started to drive away the urge was so compelling that I almost turned the car around. Even after I got to the airport, I looked at the time, realizing I still had some time, and contemplated going back, but again I didn’t. I’m not sure why I didn’t approach him, but I guess it’s because I really don’t want to become one of those individuals that let their troubles with the Church consume them, or define who they are. My point in conveying this experience though is to illustrate that the strong urges I was experiencing is exactly how the Church would describe promptings of the Spirit, only of course we know it wasn’t. In fact, I can honestly say that the feelings I was experiencing that day was stronger than any I have ever had to get out of my seat and bare my testimony on Fast Sunday, or any other time in my life that I can remember.

Again, volumes can be written on this subject, suffice it to say that I believe that, because trusting on emotions alone is so unreliable, the Church, should be able to be proven true on sound logic together with emotions, not instead of it.

At the risk of repeating myself, if the Church is true, it should not only be confirmed through faith but also withstand tests of sound reason and logic, which it falls way, way short of. God gave us the ability to develop logical thinking and analytical skills based on sound reason, but in the case of the Church we are basically told to “pay no

attention to the man behind the curtain”. We are told that if everything inside you, even after all the honest prayer and meditation you can achieve, tells you the Church isn’t the one and only true Church, just go on faith. And if you can’t believe it because it doesn’t feel right to you, believe it because it feels right to me. In other words, talk yourself into it.

When the bishop came to visit out of his concern for me, he flat out told me “you will most likely never receive answers to the questions that are bothering you in this life time” and that I just have to go on faith. How is that acceptable? These are not questions like where is the end of the universe and how old will our bodies be when they are resurrected. These are questions regarding the honesty and integrity of the individual man responsible for founding our Church. Born Again Christians, Buddhists, and Jehovah Witnesses have also told me that I must go on faith that what they are telling me is right and true. Am I to believe them? Faith must be founded on truth, but just because you have faith in something doesn’t make it true.

Tithing

I have absolutely no problem with donating 10% or more of my earnings to charity that I know is going toward humanitarian efforts, but when the Church is spending an estimated \$5 billion on the megamall City Creek Center in downtown Salt Lake City and it only spent a total of \$1.4 billion on humanitarian aid in over 25 years from 1985-2011, something is fundamentally wrong.

The church often boasts it has contributed [\\$1.4B to humanitarian efforts since 1985](#). During that same period of time, however, the church has collected an estimated \$150B (or more) in total revenues. In other words, the church has only given about 1% of its total revenues to humanitarian efforts in the last 30 years. As a side note, I find it interesting that while the church no longer publishes any of its financial information, it does disclose how much it gives to charity. I find it ironic since the scriptures teach we should not to boast of such things.

In 2002 President Hinckley made the following dishonest statement to a German journalist during an interview...

Reporter: In my country, we say the people’s Churches, the Protestants, the Catholics, they publish all their budgets, to all the public.

Hinckley: Yeah. Yeah.

Reporter: Why is it impossible for your Church?

Hinckley: Well, we simply think that the... that information belongs to those who made the contribution, and not to the world. That’s the only thing. Yes.

But that is not true. The Church does not disclose its books to the members. Why is this and why would President Hinckley be dishonest about it? Again, why cannot the Church be the most open and honest organization on the planet?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, interestingly, has about 19 million members worldwide. It builds smaller meetinghouses and focuses its efforts and resources on building thousands of schools and hospitals for the poor. The Adventists also have one million new members join them annually, compared to an estimated 300,000 total new members each year for the LDS Church.

The Adventist model is much more service focused. Receiving roughly only \$3B in total revenues, the Adventists have built and successfully run more than 7,800 non-profit schools and hundreds of hospitals around the world. Apparently, focusing on schools, education, and health, especially in third world countries, is much more effective in gaining converts than expensive marketing efforts and other business endeavors.

The church, on the other hand, will spend as much as \$3-\$4M on a single billboard this year in Times Square. I'm not sure how many billboards the church leases, but I think it's quite a few.

I plan on continuing to donate 10% or more of my earning to charity, perhaps some of that to LDS fast offerings, but until the church stops using tithing dollars to make business transactions and it is forthcoming with how and where it spends tithing income, I believe I can do more good in the world donating to other worthy organizations.

BITE

There is a scientific method used by political, religious and commercial groups to extend control over individuals called the BITE model. It stands for Behavior Control, Information Control, Thought Control and Emotional Control. You can see a short You Tube clip here on how the Jehovah's Witnesses use it so effectively. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=GmeSmlHyDRU. Intentional or not, these same techniques are use in the Church. Again, this issue warrants a book in itself.

The Bottom Line

If the brethren got up next General Conference and said, "You know what brothers and sisters, given the advancements in recent history regarding the ability to collaborate, compile, and evaluate historical evidence it appears that some facts previously accepted as truth regarding the Church's history may be in error. However, one thing is certain, though it may not be the 'One and Only True Church' we thought it was, these historical events, whether factual or erroneous, created a church that had evolved into one that does a lot of good for the betterment of mankind", I could go along with that if, moving forward, it acted upon this new understanding. That would unleash the potential for real progress for the Church members as individuals and for the Church as a social institution. But I don't think it would ever happen. The Church would have to be willing to relinquish some of its control over the members, which it won't do, for one thing, and tithing would go way down, at least in the short run, for another.

I use to think, that if I learned that the Church wasn't true, it would still be worthwhile to stay in. While I still believe it does a lot of good, because of its instance to believe things that simply are not true, and it's practice of choosing what is best for the church over the individual, I believe there is a lot of harm hidden between the lines. If it's not true, what good is attending a church when a large percentage of it is just tradition geared toward increasing its influence on its members? And what good is attending a church when you constantly have to double back and check it's teaching for truth and accuracy? Why would we want to attend a church that tears apart families because of its policies regarding temple marriage? Why would we want to attend a church that, despite what it may say from the pulpit, its practices promote judgmental behavior, racialism, homophobia, intolerance, inferiority of women, and disdain for other religions such as Catholics, Protestants, Jews and many other? Why would we want to attend a church that promotes devoting so much of your time to nonsensical traditions, such as endowment sessions, instead of devoting time to efforts that genuinely help others? Why would I want to donate 10% plus of my income to an organization that feels it needs to keep when, how, and why it spends this money a secret from the very people who donate it? And why would I want a large part of my donations to go to building and maintaining costly temples instead of humanitarian efforts like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, searching for cures to disease and suffering, etc. Why would we want to attend a church that stunts real learning and progression, such as by telling us that many areas of sound science are all lies? Why would we want to limit our quest for spiritual growth to one source, which is laden with errors, and forsake so many others that can aid us in our journey? Why would we attend a church where we continually have to check with our children to determine whether or not we believe what they are being taught is accurate and true? Why would I want to mislead my children regarding the truth of a church just to set them up for a colossal letdown, possibly causing them to loose faith in all things good when they learn otherwise? It seems like a lot of time, money and energy would be devoted to trying to correct things that really don't make a positive deference in the world or are, in many cases, downright destructive, thus losing a lot of opportunity for real growth, learning and service. In short, I don't need something that is based on lies to help me want to be a better person. There are plenty of other social organizations that can replace the good things lost by not attending the Mormon Church.

Though I still hold on to some hope that someone will be able to point out the errors in my conclusions, it will have to be on substance, addressing the specific concerns I have issues with, and not merely an admonishment to have faith despite of all the evidence to the contrary. The Church leaders, the Twelve Apostles and the President, must stop hiding behind FAIR and the Neal Maxwell Institute and address these issues in a substantive matter, not just acknowledge them then dismiss them. And though I do have some hope, I honestly don't see it happening. I have read letters written to General Authorities by individuals pleading for help regarding many of these issues I have discussed. However, because the replies they received from the General Authorities had a legal disclaimer in them saying that legal action

may be taken against them if the response is shared with anyone beyond to those it is addressed to, there responses cannot be read. In spite of this, I have read the replies of the individuals to the replies received from the General Authorities, and they always indicate that the General Authorities basically stayed with the same platitudes, "I know it's true" and "only after the trial of your faith", but just like the official Church sources, avoid addressing directly any of the issues which are the source of the pleas for help.

Kristen and I recently went to the temple as my bishop had implicated that doing so would be what I needed to help get back on track. I gave heed to his council that "where doubt is faith cannot be". I went fasting and with the greatest preparation of prayer and meditation I know how. I prayed continually throughout the session and in the Celestial Room. Unfortunately though, as with my experience with Moroni's promise, I did not receive anything that I could identify as confirmation that the Church is true, or that I should stay in it even if it isn't true. Rather I was continually reminded about what I have learned regarding the temple endowment and Joseph's Masonic initiation, the founding of polygamy in Mormonism and the many other things I have discovered. If my religious affiliation is to serve a useful function in my life, it must not require me to believe things that, on the basis of reasonable evidence and sound evaluation, are highly likely to be non-sense and to disconnect me from reality. How are we supposed to base important life decisions on a belief that has such questionable foundations?

Though this journey for me has been lonely and painful, believe it or not, it has also been very positive. I somehow feel like I have had a rebirth of sorts. I now realize I have a greater responsibility to seek out truth and spiritual progression, knowing I cannot rely on the Church to do all my thinking for me. I now realize I have a greater responsibility to be a better husband and father as I cannot rely on the Church to correct my mistakes or fill in any hole. As mentioned at the very beginning of this letter, I have a new conviction that what really matters is helping and serving others and I intend to look for ways where I can do better at it. I am sad that many things I thought I understood are not the foundations they once were for me, but at the same time I feel like I have a lot more sources available to me to help me grow in ways that were never part of my considerations before. For some inexplicable reason, I feel much calmer.

Please don't beat yourself up wondering what you could have done different for me. You did not have anything to do with the many Church History issues that I have concerns with. You did not have anything to do with the Church's efforts to hide these issues from its members. And you have nothing to do with the policies the Church makes that promote the Church's best interests over its individual members. I could have not asked for a better mother. Your example of service is now the foundation of my belief system. And I could not have asked for a better father, his example of selfless sacrifice and support to his family is what I pray I will be able to emulate with my family. I love my children with all I have, and I will do everything I

can, and deem right, to make sure they grow up to be good people with attributes of love and service.

I absolutely believe in God. And I believe in the gospel principles of Jesus Christ's teachings: love, charity, service, etc. I have no intention to throw the baby out with the bath water. I realize it was through the Church that I initially learned these teachings, and that I can be thankful for. But that doesn't make it the one and only true Church. Beyond that... I don't know. It has taken 42 years of conditioning to get me to this point. I imagine it will take quite some time using the best efforts of prayer, meditation and studying as I know how to sort it out in my mind. But one thing is looking certain, my bishop is right, it seems very doubtful I will find the answers I am looking for in this life, so I now begin a quest to seek new questions.

I love you, Dad, and all my family with all my heart. I hope you know I would do anything I could for any and all of you. I also hope you don't think any less of me. I really feel like I have grown in many ways during this process and I pray that my continual quest for enlightenment and truth will lead me on a path toward more service and Godliness.

Live a good life. If there are gods and they are just, then they will not care how devout you have been, but will welcome you based on the virtues you have lived by. If there are gods, but unjust, then you should not want to worship them. If there are no gods, then you will be gone, but will have lived a noble life that will live on in the memories of your loved ones." -Marcus Aurelius

*This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.
-The Dalai Lama*

With All My Love,

Your Son