



# WHEN HE STOPPED BELIEVING

*I never thought it would be me. Yet there I was, sitting across the bed from my husband while he told me that he no longer had a testimony that the gospel was true.*

Although his love for me and his dedication to our family were as strong as ever, my husband just didn't believe in the gospel anymore. He didn't even know if God really existed.

### How Could This Happen?

This wasn't supposed to happen to me—not my husband, not my marriage. In my naiveté, when I had read or heard of accounts where a spouse turned away from the Church, I thought, “Thank goodness that would *never* happen to our temple marriage.” I am embarrassed to even mention how judgmental I had been, thinking that surely those individuals should have known before they were married that their future spouse really didn't have a testimony deeply rooted in the gospel. It would be impossible, I had thought, for a man and a woman who married in the temple with full faith and honesty to find that after years of dedicated Church service and obedience, one of them no longer believed.

Yet there I was, facing one of the most dreaded scenarios of my life. The heartbreak was beyond description. Despite the abundance of spiritual experiences that we had shared since our courtship, the daily personal and couple prayers, the faithful fulfillment of every calling, full tithes, generous fast offerings, scripture study, and family home evenings, it was gone. My husband admitted that he no longer believed. He had no desire to attend church beyond helping me with the kids. And he no longer wanted to pay tithing, a difficult situation I thought I would never be asked to face.

On a day when the heartache was nearly unbearable, I started to wonder: what had I done wrong? The one desire I had maintained stronger than any other in my life was to have an eternal marriage with a man dedicated to living the gospel. I had done everything I could in my life to live worthily, to marry with unmistakable surety, to keep my covenants, to attend the temple, and to dedicate my life and my home to the Lord. Would Heavenly Father really deny me the righteous desire I longed for the most, when I had done everything He asked to attain it?

### What I Have Learned

In response to my many tearful prayers, one encompassing answer continued to impress itself strongly on my mind: “Just love him!” That impression has led me to a wealth of understanding and has enabled me to find healing and hope, as expressions of the Savior's love have become more evident in my life than ever before. While my husband is unchanged in his lack of belief, this experience—and following the prompting I received—has facilitated tremendous growth within me, and I know I will never be the same wife or mother again. It has been through this process that I have learned the following truths.

### In the Lord's Plan, We Each Have Agency

First, I have learned that the glory of a celestial marriage is the union of a man and a woman, as separate agents, choosing one another and the Lord above all else. It is impossible for my husband to dedicate his life to the Lord if that is not his personal choice. Regardless of how desperately I long for my husband to have a strong testimony of Jesus Christ, I cannot wish or force or pray him into receiving that testimony. In accordance with our Heavenly Father's plan, he must attain that by his own choice. If he submits solely to my will, as he did in many instances through the years, then he is deprived of submitting his will to the Lord, and the growth of his spiritual knowledge is inhibited.

### I Am Responsible for My Choices

In addition, this truth has taught me that while I cannot control my husband's testimony or choices, I can certainly take responsibility for my own. I can seek through prayer to know how to be a better wife, how to love and serve my husband and children more each day, and how to personally grow closer to the Lord.


Initially, I was upset that I had been deprived of the spiritual blessings I had sought so diligently to obtain. I have come to realize, however, that my temple marriage hasn't been taken from me and that I still have my own covenants to keep, many of which are directly related to my attitude toward my husband. Furthermore, the opportunity to seek

a *celestial* marriage is still right in front of me; the chance to unselfishly serve my spouse's best interests is more immediately present than it has ever been. During moments of self-pity, with the help of the Spirit I have realized that either I can focus on what my husband's choices have taken from our temple marriage, or I can strive even more to develop a celestial relationship with him. I can have significant influence on the spiritual progress of our marriage despite his choices.

### **The Decision to Love Blesses Each of Us**

Already the answer I have received to love, trust, and serve my husband has strengthened our marriage in profound ways. While my husband still lacks sure knowledge that God lives, from my perspective our marriage has become closer to heaven. As I seek to love my husband more each day, the Savior's love seems to permeate my heart, causing it to expand with a deeper love than I have ever known. From my point of view, through our daily expressions of love for each other, the overall feeling of love and the occurrence of spiritual experiences have been strengthened both in our relationship and in our home.

Through this experience, I have come to apply a more personal meaning to John 15:13, in which the Savior says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." For me, to "lay



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down [my] life" means to put aside my own will and desires—my own agendas and stipulations—for someone I care about. It is a love without conditions, a pure love rooted in Christ (see Moroni 7:47–48).

In order to achieve this love in our marriage, we must give the energy of our heart to loving our spouse, regardless of how well they meet our expectations. This does not mean that we should desire or expect any less from our spouse, but that we should give our love freely no matter what point they are at on their personal road of progress.

In addition to strengthening my marriage, these realizations have altered my approach as a mother as I have come to better understand the meaning of charity. I am learning more how the love of our Heavenly Father truly knows no bounds.

It is my deepest desire that someday my husband will regain a personal testimony of the Savior and that we can share that united faith in this life. I don't know if that will happen, but I do know that I can trust my testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. I also know that our Heavenly Father wants what is best for us and allows us to experience hardship in order to realize greater blessings. I have come to know that Jesus Christ is the only sure foundation on which we can build a solid testimony (see Helaman 5:12) and that He can help us find happiness in this life and the next. ■