

Doubt Not, but Be BELIEVING

What should we do if we have questions about what we once knew to be true?

By Jakob R. Jones

Many of us have had powerful moments when the Holy Ghost has borne witness to our hearts that the gospel is true, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that the Lord guides His Church through living prophets today. Those impressions from the Spirit are hard to ignore or forget.

Yet there are moments when the testimony we have gained through these experiences may be tested. When these tests arise, we can remember that it's normal and okay to have sincere questions. The Lord loves us. As we learn to look to Him for answers to those questions, He can help us resolve our concerns and develop greater faith and testimony.

Amy (name has been changed) had been a faithful member of the Church her entire life and felt she had a strong testimony of the gospel. One day, she encountered statements that surprised her about early Church history and leaders. She struggled to reconcile this new information with the spiritual witnesses of truth she'd experienced in the past and began to have questions about her testimony. She felt guilty for having these questions, so she kept her concerns to herself. The sources she turned to for answers only increased her concerns.

Before long, Amy's unaddressed questions grew into doubts that began to affect other parts of her life. She questioned the reality of God and Jesus Christ. Without the hope of Christ's Atonement, she began to lose confidence in herself. She even began to wonder if she really wanted the life she had chosen as a wife and mother. What began as concern over unanswered questions became a daily struggle with guilt, confusion, anxiety, and fear.

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You or someone you love may be struggling like Amy. What should we do if we encounter something that causes us to have questions about what we once knew to be true? How can we obtain a lasting testimony of Jesus Christ and His restored Church? How can we avoid allowing our questions to become doubts that threaten our faith? Here are eight principles I hope can help those who are struggling with sincere questions or doubt.

1. Seek the Holy Ghost

President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, taught: “The truth that matters most is verified only by revelation from God. Our human reason and the use of our physical senses will not be enough. We live in a time when even the wisest will be hard-pressed to distinguish truth from clever deception.”¹

What Amy’s heart really longed for was the peace and personal witness of truth that can come only from God.

The Savior also gave this guidance to His disciples, knowing He would soon no longer be physically present to answer their questions:

“These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.



“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:25–26).

A testimony of divine truth does not come from an internet search or from our own reasoning. Receiving revelation requires great effort. But that effort does not consist of just using our intellect; as we study and search for answers, we need to seek the witness of the Holy Ghost to discover truth.

2. Hold to the Testimony You Already Have

When Oliver Cowdery desired a witness of the Book of Mormon, the Lord counseled him to remember the experiences he’d already had:

“If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

“Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–23).

I remember sitting in a Primary room as a young boy when the Spirit bore witness to me that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith. I remember reading the Book of Mormon as a young man and receiving the overwhelming witness that the people I read about were real and their stories true. I remember countless moments as a missionary teaching in people’s homes as the Holy Ghost witnessed the truth of the restored gospel. I’ve felt Jesus Christ changing me and allowing me to repent of my sins.

As Amy began to look to the Lord for answers to her questions, she too was able to recall many experiences where she’d felt the witness of the Holy Ghost. Our past experiences can serve as anchors for our faith. It’s okay to hold to them when our testimonies are tested.

3. Talk to Your Bishop or Stake President

When the time came for Amy to renew her temple recommend, she didn’t want to go to the temple, much less have an interview with her bishop regarding her testimony. But at her husband’s prompting, she met with her bishop. The bishop sensed something was wrong and asked how she was doing. Amy finally shared her concerns. She had been so worried



that her bishop would think less of her, but he reassured her that God loved her for wanting to do the right things and would not stop loving her because she had questions. Amy’s bishop listened to her concerns without judging her. They talked about how she could begin to receive answers from the Lord through the Holy Ghost. Amy still had questions, but she left that visit with renewed hope.

If you are struggling with questions, please talk to your bishop or stake president. The Lord can give you personal guidance through them. They love you, and the mantle they carry is real.²

4. Remember God’s Mercy

Moroni gave this invitation to all those seeking a witness of truth: “Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things” (Moroni 10:3).

Why does Moroni suggest remembering God’s mercy as essential to receiving a witness of truth? I believe it’s because something changes in us when we realize that Jesus Christ can heal us, that we can repent and be cleansed of our sins, that we can change. When we experience God’s mercy for us personally, we see all of His works through the lens of His mercy.

As Amy worked to feel God’s love for her, she realized she didn’t need

to judge Church leaders and that the mortal frailties of others did not impact the witness of truth she could receive through the Holy Ghost. When we encounter perceived shortcomings in others, we can remember that the same mercy that allows us to be forgiven also allows God to patiently work through His imperfect servants.

5. Convert Doubts into Sincere Questions

When we are troubled by uncertainty, the Savior counsels us to avoid doubt. He said, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36). And Moroni wrote, “Doubt not, but be believing” (Mormon 9:27).

We should remember that “the term *question* is not synonymous with the term *doubt*.”³ Doubt assumes the very worst about ourselves and others. When we doubt, we fear that someone is trying to cheat or deceive us. To doubt that Jesus is the Christ implies that He and those who have borne witness of Him are confused, misguided, or lying. To doubt the Book of Mormon, one



must assume the worst about Joseph Smith and everyone who gave so much to bring it forth. To doubt our ability to repent and change implies that Christ cannot do what He claims, that His power is somehow limited.

Although the Lord discourages doubt, He invites us to come to Him with our sincere questions. “Ask, and it shall be given you,” He taught (Matthew 7:7).

We can replace doubts with sincere questions, such as “Is Jesus the Christ?” “Is the Book of Mormon true?” “Did Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appear to Joseph Smith?” “Does Christ lead this Church today?” or “Can I be forgiven of my sins?” Sincere questions like these can soften our hearts as we show our trust in the Lord and look to Him for answers.

We may also discover that some of our questions aren’t so important or don’t really need immediate answers. Tad R. Callister, Sunday School General President, stated: “I can live with some human imperfections, even among prophets of God—that is to be expected in mortal beings. I can live with some alleged scientific findings contrary to the Book of Mormon; time will correct those. And I can live with some seeming historical anomalies; they are minor in the total landscape of truth. But I cannot live without the doctrinal truths and ordinances restored by Joseph Smith, I cannot live without the priesthood of God to bless my family, and I cannot live without knowing my wife and children are sealed to me for eternity.”⁴

If we truly seek God’s will, we will know which questions are important to pursue now and which can wait. Amy discovered that the things she worried about weren’t relevant to her testimony and that she could wait for further understanding.

6. Study

The Lord has commanded us to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). The purpose of our study is not to uncover every scientific or historical fact that might prove or disprove our concerns. The purpose is to provide opportunities for the Holy Ghost to bear witness of the truth to our mind and heart.

What should we study? If the fruits of the Spirit are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23), it is unlikely that the Spirit will bear witness of truth when we study the opinions of those who are filled with anger, hatred, and skepticism toward the Church, its leaders, or the Savior Himself.

A witness of Jesus Christ comes as we study His words and the words of His servants. If we desire to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet, we study the things he brought forth, including the Book of Mormon and the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. A testimony of living prophets will come as we read and listen to their words in general conference. If we are sincere in our desires, the Spirit can bear witness in the very moment we study or hear truth.

Amy began to study the scriptures and words of living prophets instead of looking to the internet for answers. After one evening of study, she commented, “I know Heavenly Father loves and cares for me. I have a new feeling and a sense of peace and liberation I’ve been seeking for so long.”

7. Pray

Moroni wrote, “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4).

How can we pray with a sincere heart and real intent? One of the most sincere prayers I know of was given by the king of the Lamanites after Aaron taught him the gospel of Jesus Christ. Seeking to know the truth, the king “cried mightily, saying: O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:17–18).

To pray with real intent means we are willing to do whatever the Lord asks of us. When you pray, remember you are talking to your Heavenly Father. He loves you. Be honest with Him. Tell Him about your fears, your mistakes, and your weaknesses. Tell Him you want to be good, that you’re trying to do the right thing. Tell Him you are sorry for your sins. Ask for His forgiveness. Then ask your sincere questions. Listen for the promptings of the Holy Ghost and have the courage to follow them.

8. Keep the Commandments

The Savior taught that obedience to the commandments is a prerequisite to receiving the companionship of the Holy Ghost. He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, . . . even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:15–17).

We cannot withhold our obedience from God and then claim we’ve done our part to receive answers to our questions. Abandoning our covenants and justifying sin are the worst things we can do during a trial of faith—the time when we most need the companionship of the Spirit.

Amy shed tears of relief when her bishop helped her realize that because she was keeping her covenants, she could go to the Lord with confidence that He would respond to her sincere questions.

Conclusion: Be Believing

Over several months, Amy learned to look to the Lord for answers to her sincere questions. As she sought the Spirit through sincere study, prayer, and obedience, she was gradually blessed with a bright, rekindled testimony. After joyfully returning to the temple, Amy recorded, “God is so good. The Savior has reached down to lift and save me. I feel so humbled and blessed, and the faith and trust that I have in Him has freed my soul.”

If the Lord can do that for Amy, He can do it for each of us. May the Lord bless us as we look to Christ, overcome doubt and fear, and resolve to be believing. ■

The author lives in California, USA.

NOTES

1. Henry B. Eyring, “The Holy Ghost as Your Companion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 104.
2. See Robert D. Hales, “The Mantle of a Bishop,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 28–30; 2 Kings 2:9–15.
3. “Answering Gospel Questions,” Gospel Topics, topics.lds.org.
4. Tad R. Callister, “What Is the Blueprint of Christ’s Church?” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Jan. 12, 2014), broadcasts.lds.org.

