



By Travis Ewell

Several years ago, I was following a conversation on social media between two of my former mission companions. These were men whom I loved and respected.

They were discussing questions they had about the Church and its doctrine. It soon became clear that they both had left the Church. It shocked and disturbed me. I had never heard of some of the things they were discussing. I felt like I had to know if these things had any merit. So I began looking into the arguments of those who had concerns about the Church.

Some of the things I read over the next two years led me to question everything about the Church. Some who go through this feel sad. They grieve for the loss of their faith. I became angry. I felt that the Church had deceived me. I wasn't sure what was real or whom I could trust.

I had a difficult time going to church. I asked to be released from my calling. My relationship with my wife, Cheri, and my family was strained. I continued to go to church, but it was really just for show and to try and keep my family together. Life was a mess. I couldn't feel the Spirit and questioned whether or not I had ever really felt the Holy Ghost.

When my oldest child, Kayson, was leaving on his mission, I cast a gloomy cloud over what should have been a joyous occasion. After two years, most of my family knew what I was going through. When they all went to the temple with Kayson for his first time, I was not there.

Through all of it, I felt so alone.

Support All around Me

One day my brothers got together to talk to me about what I was going through. I don't really remember what



When I Felt Deceived about the Church

Why I left. And why I came back.

they said, but I knew it was done out of love. As we talked, I started to realize what I was missing. It became the catalyst for change. It should have been me to ordain Kayson an elder. It should have been me to escort him through the temple. It should have been me to give him a father's blessing before he left. Those most important events in his life were meant for me to be there, not someone else. I remember asking myself, "What am I doing?"

Shortly after, a good friend felt inspired to introduce me to a member of his stake presidency. This kind man listened intently to my story and seemed to know what I was going to say before I said it. We talked for hours. My story, my questions, the logic I had been exposed to were so similar to what others had shared with him. I began to realize that there were reasonable answers for many of my concerns and that many of my questions, while sincere, had been planted by people intent on damaging faith.

Were all my questions and concerns immediately resolved? No, of course not. But my heart was softened enough to realize a great truth: questions are good, but some questions are more important than others.¹ Was losing my family and standing before God worth a few unanswered questions? When I focused first on the questions that were most important and put God back in first place in my heart, I began to find answers that reassured me that I was getting back on the right path.

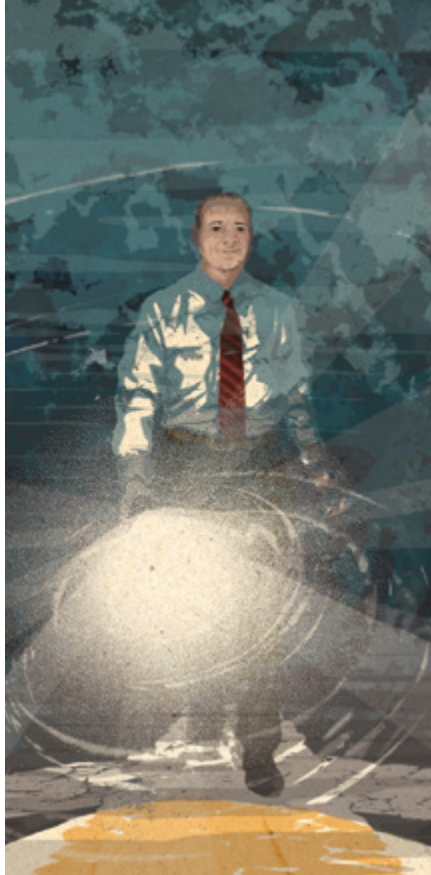
My stake president and bishop also reached out to me. They were a great help to me and Cheri during some dark times. They never gave up. They and my family on both sides of the veil were instrumental in helping me. I know that Heavenly Father knows and loves us. He puts people in our path when we need them. We just need to be willing to accept their help.

What to Do If It's You

I know there are others out there who may be going through something similar. It may be you or someone you know.

I know that the Savior established His Church with the authority to provide the ordinances and covenants we need to return to Him. Satan is working overtime to discredit the Lord's Church using any means possible. Raising questions and creating doubts is easy. Falling into his traps can happen to anyone. Relying on the information and answers that others provide can be far easier than doing the work of discovering truth for ourselves “by study and *also* by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118; emphasis added). But ultimately, that's what God requires.

If you are struggling with questions or doubts about the Church or your faith, you won't find truth by reading blogs or listening to podcasts from those who disagree with the Church or have left it. But you



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also probably won't be satisfied with shallow answers, and you might not like the suggestion to “put your questions on the shelf.”

I learned that we cannot always live on borrowed light, but instead we must turn to God who is the source of all light and truth (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:26). We must study it out in our own minds, but we must also ask God if what we are thinking is right (see Doctrine and Covenants 9:8). We must learn for ourselves, as Joseph Smith did (see Joseph Smith—History 1:20), and be patient in our searching (see Alma 32:41). But learning by faith means we must prove the truth by living it (see John 7:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

When I was studying things antagonistic to the Church, I felt like I was literally in the mists of darkness (see 1 Nephi 8:23–24; 12:17). When I grabbed hold of God's word and took that first step toward Him, that was all He needed to send His Spirit to touch my heart.



UNANSWERED QUESTIONS VS. DOCTRINAL CERTAINTIES

“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 seemingly 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. That is the choice we face—a few unanswered questions on one hand versus a host of doctrinal certainties and the power of God on the other.”

Elder Tad R. Callister was serving in the Presidency of the Seventy when he gave this address, “What Is the Blueprint of Christ's Church?” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Jan. 12, 2014), broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.



Is Hope Enough?

A few weeks after Kayson left on his mission, my stake president visited me. I caught him up on what had happened during those weeks after my brothers had talked with me. I said I would like to get a new temple recommend. He asked if I could answer the recommend questions properly. I confessed, “President, I don’t think I can say I know that the Church is true yet, but I sure hope with all my heart that it is. And I am going to live my life in accordance with that hope. Is that enough?”

He paused for a moment then said, “Travis, that will always be enough.”

There are some things I’m still waiting to understand, but some things have become very clear to me. I know that Heavenly Father loves me. I know that we might wander and struggle for a time. But I know that through Christ, His Atonement, and the hope it brings, it is possible to return to the path that leads back to Him. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. See Lawrence E. Corbridge, “Stand Forever,” (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 22, 2019), speeches.byu.edu.

IDEAS FOR HELPING SOMEONE YOU LOVE

Like me, many people who have questions or doubts feel like they don’t belong in the Church. But we can’t afford to close the door on them or others. The Savior commanded His people to “continue to minister” to them because we never know when they will return to Him and be healed (see 3 Nephi 18:22–32).

Here are five ways we can continue to minister to those who are wrestling with doubt so that they will feel welcome, whether or not they choose to come back.

1. **Continue to love.** Throughout my wrestle, I felt like I was alone. Of course, Heavenly Father had not given up on me, and neither had my family or Church leaders. Feeling His love through them helped me know I could go back.
2. **Continue to reach out.** Loving others shouldn’t depend on their beliefs, their participation at church, or even how they feel about us. Jesus asks us to reach out to more than those who are already in our circle (see Matthew 5:46–47).
3. **Continue to hope.** We fast, we pray, we watch and wait patiently, and we never give up hope. “God has devised means to save each of His children” (Henry B. Eyring, “To My Grandchildren,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 71).
4. **Respect their agency.** Have hope but respect their decisions. We don’t need to convince them or argue doctrine with them. Like the prodigal son, many of us need some event in life that will soften our hearts first.
5. **Treat them with dignity, not like they’re bad.** Avoid statements that are judgmental, critical, or belittling. Reasonable people can have beliefs different than ours, and we should give them the same respect we hope they’ll give us.

I don’t think I can say I know that the Church is true yet, but I hope that it is and I am going to live my life in accordance with that hope.

