Why you should stay a Latter-day Saint

by Conflict of Justice

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Dear [Name redacted],

Many years have passed since that night you explained to me why you were leaving the Church. I did not know how to react or what to say. I was a young child, and so I listened. That’s probably the best thing I could have done. You told me of the hypocrisy you witnessed while studying at BYU. You listed scientific and historical evidences against the Church. You told of the difficulties growing up and how the life you want to lead was incompatible with the Church. Well, you have lived that life and through all the ups and downs you have been a successful person. It’s true you didn’t need the Church to accomplish the great things you have done. I admire your strength, intelligence, and moral virtue, and I have always looked up to you. I appreciate also that you have always been very respectful and accommodating to my religious choices, and you have forgiven me for my times of careless behavior.

Your words that night opened new possibilities and sparked my own journey. As I explored every corner of information I could find, I hoped maybe one day we could sit down again and I could say something in reply. I am not a persuasive person. I just want to explain why I chose to stay in the Church.

Mainstream Christian sects are dying out in America while The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints remains at a steady growth of 2% per year, a Pew poll found. This means the Church in the U.S. is growing at the same rate as the U.S. population. Around the world the Church is growing much faster. Our temples are springing up far and wide as membership steadily increases. As we continue to gain ground, increasingly more churches look to us as leaders of the Christian community. Yet by becoming recognized as leaders, we also become the object of attack. I see the complex dynamics of cultural division in politics and society settling as a battle between Christians and secularists, and our church leads the Christian side. We are the image of wholesome, traditional society to which many aspire.

Because of thick anti-Christian antagonism and pressure to conform to popular culture, I am not surprised when I see young Latter-day Saints lose their faith. You can only take so much before you cave to this unrelenting influence. Yet anti-Mormon propaganda is the same nonsense that bigots have been saying since the days of Joseph Smith—the same tired talking points and lies. Often when I answer an ex-church member’s “sincere” question, they repeat the question as if I had said nothing, and I repeat my answer, and round and round we go. It’s like they need to believe the hateful rhetoric against the Church. They aren’t happy and there is a reason they can’t let go of the church. The real reason is something deeper.

Doubts are only a problem if you refuse to accept any answers. Doubt can lead to greater wisdom if you don’t get hung up on hateful rhetoric and if you open your mind to possibilities. It’s never too late to truly consider the reasons for staying in the Church and to create your own independent testimony of truth. Please consider the following reasons:
Evidence Joseph Smith Was A Prophet

See: 133 Archaeological Evidences For The Book Of Mormon

How Could Joseph Smith Make It Up? - The Book of Mormon is physical proof that Joseph Smith was a prophet. Anti-Mormons have invented some absurd theories for how Joseph Smith could have made up the Book of Mormon, but those theories fall apart once you apply critical thought. Skeptics persist with these theories because there needs to be some kind of explanation for how Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon, otherwise all the rest of their anti-Mormon rhetoric falls flat.

How did a teenager with a third-grade education from the backwoods of the wild frontier come up with 530 pages of profound and consistent ancient scripture: The complex war chapters, the flashbacks, the interwoven narrations, the different writing styles, the widely varying cultures, the geography, the geopolitics, the hundreds of names, the poetry, the Hebraisms, and the consistent inter-references... all written on a single draft in 65 days?

According to witnesses, Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from gold plates using an ancient device called a “Urim & Thummim.” He looked through the attached seer stones through which divine inspiration provided the correct translation. Skeptics laugh at this story and call it ‘peep stones in a hat,’ but stop to consider this: Were those witnesses who described seer stones lying about what they saw? If they were lying, why make up such a hokey story and why didn’t Joseph Smith say anything about the hat himself? If they really witnessed this, how could Joseph Smith make up scripture with his head plunged in a hat? How did he know ancient Hebrew literary styles that hadn’t been discovered yet? How did he know so much about the Arabian Peninsula and Middle Eastern life? Once you get past emotional ridicule and critically consider what actually happened in history it gets much harder to explain how it could be a fraud.

Archaeological Evidence - Archaeologists continue to find new physical evidences that support claims in the Book of Mormon. Skeptics believe the similarities of Old World and New World architecture, language, religious beliefs, and cultural customs are just coincidence. However, the fact is that there are profound similarities which cannot be explained except with the Book of Mormon. This evidence did not exist in Joseph Smith’s day, and everybody thought he was crazy for claiming it.
More recently, scientists uncovered huge networks of elevated highways concurrent with the Mayan civilization, defensive fortifications, and domestic animal farming—all things which anti-Mormons had called out as anachronisms. Church researchers continue to uncover Hebrew and Egyptian literary styles and textual evidences that associate the Book of Mormon with ancient literature. Every time they do, skeptics shift the goalposts to something more improbable. Skeptics try to downplay the literary genius, theological profundity of the Book of Mormon, and make excuses for its physical evidences, but, until they can give a solid narrative for how an uneducated teenage boy from the Appalachian frontier could author a profound and complicated book of scripture with his head in a hat, they have no case.

The Bible Supports The Book of Mormon – Years ago, anti-Mormons argued that it would have been unthinkable for Lehi’s group to leave Jerusalem:

“Every person, well read in the history of the Jewish nation, will see, in the history of the pious Jews, which shows plainly that God required them never to leave the place of their fathers, on no account, but their trust in God, and that the temple in Jerusalem was the place assigned them and their children to worship.” (Mormon Fanaticism Exposed, Tyler Parsons, 63)

Then in 1946, a little something called the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered proving that Lehi’s group was not the only Hebrew group to depart into the wilderness before Babylon’s invasion. The Qumran people focused on Isaiah like Lehi did, prophesied of apostasy and restoration, and wrote striking parallels to Book of Mormon content such as the quotation of Zenos. Qumran verifies many unique Book of Mormon elements as authentically ancient. These ‘mistakes’ skeptics use to attack the Book of Mormon keep turning into evidence as new information is discovered.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus declared he would soon visit “other sheep” who were “not of this fold.” Who were those other sheep? Mainstream Christian scholars call this a “mystery in scripture,” but the Book of Mormon solves this mystery: the other sheep were the Book of Mormon peoples and other break-away groups from Israel.

Book of Mormon Corrects The Bible – The CES Letter criticized the Book of Mormon for changing Isaiah 9:1 from “the way of the sea beyond Jordan in Galilee” to “the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in Galilee.” How could Isaiah have been talking about the Red Sea when it is 200 miles away from Galilee? Scholars claim the verse is talking about the Sea of Galilee and call this a blunder by Joseph Smith, but further investigation finds the opposite is true. There were two main trade routes in ancient Israel: the way of the Red Sea and the way of the sea. Both roads went up from Egypt, proceeded through Israel, and converged in Galilee. The way of the Red Sea went east to “the land beyond Jordan” known as Peraea, but the way of the sea did not. Isaiah
therefore must have been talking about the way of the Red Sea. This correction is especially significant in the context of Nephi’s story, as he was taking the same road Moses took from Egypt and Jesus Christ would take in his ministry. Young Joseph Smith from the edge of the American frontier knew nothing about ancient Israel’s trade routes, so why did he happen to pick exactly the right name for one? How is it the very ‘mistakes’ skeptics use to attack the Book of Mormon turn out to be evidence for it?

Skeptics complain about discrepancies such as this, but they always end up being further evidence in favor of the Book of Mormon.

**Sticks of Joseph & Judah** – In Ezekiel 37, God instructed the prophet to engrave the names of Israel’s sons Joseph and Judah onto two “sticks” which would “join together” as “one in your hand.” Mainstream Christian scholars say this symbolizes Israel unifying at Christ’s second coming and nothing more, and that the “sticks” were simply rods. But if that were true, why doesn’t the verse use the word for “rod,” such as in Num. 17:2? The Hebrew word for “stick” here is ets, which actually translates to “wood.” Wood tablets were used in the scriptures to memorialize future events—in Luke 1:63, Zechariah inscribed the name of his unborn son John the Baptist upon a wooden tablet. The wooden diptych tablet sounds very much like what Ezekiel was describing, with one “wood” being bound to another “wood.” These two tablets “approached” each other as the two flat pieces which were bound by a hinge swung against each other like a book. This symbolized the fate of Israel’s tribes being bound to each other. The two tablets further represented the two volumes of scripture that would come together in these latter days, as the Book of Mormon explains:

> Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.” (2 Nephi 3:12)

How did Joseph Smith know about the ancient diptych tablet? Lucky guess? I have not seen any skeptics or mainstream scholars give any other explanation for how “sticks” are supposed to be a symbol for the tribes of Israel unifying in the last days—why would the symbol be sticks?

**Joseph Smith’s Civil War Prophecy** – Three decades before America’s Civil War broke out, Joseph Smith prophesied of a great impending bloody rebellion against the United States government (see D&C 84). He even provided correct details the Civil War, including the location fighting would begin and that slavery would be the main
issue of contention. While many people guessed fighting between states may eventually occur, nobody predicted such details and with such surety as Joseph Smith did. Skeptics point to the Nullification Crisis that was going on at the time of Joseph Smith’s prophecy, but the Nullification Crisis was a mild, local affair and did not center on slavery. As time went on and tensions between states seemed to cool down, skeptics laughed at Joseph Smith’s prophecy: “little hope of the fulfillment of that prophecy... no chance of its verification.” (see “The Golden Era San Francisco”, 1857) But instead of backtracking, the Church canonized the prophecy and Joseph Smith gave further details of the rebellion (see D&C 130), describing how it would eventually affect a great world war: “and then shall war be poured upon all nations.” Indeed, historians agree the American Civil War contributed to World War I as ideological conflict between democracy supporters and aristocrats spread throughout Europe.

See: **42 Evidences For The Book Of Abraham**

**Book of Abraham Evidences** – Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham is full of details about Abraham’s life that are not in the Bible but do show up in recently-discovered ancient texts. This story of young Abraham being bound and sacrificed to idols but miraculously saved by the Lord is backed up by various ancient books which Joseph Smith could not have known about. How is it possible for Joseph Smith to coincidentally come up with this unique story on his own? Unique details in the Book of Abraham match up to recently-discovered and reliable ancient texts. How did Joseph Smith know about these details?

Yet skeptics say the Book of Abraham is the “smoking gun” that disproves Joseph Smith! They say:

*Joseph Smith’s papyri fragments have turned out to be a non-related Egyptian text.* This is not true. *Descriptions from witnesses of Joseph Smith's translation source do not match* the papyrus fragments which have been recovered from Joseph Smith’s collection, so they could not have been his source. Joseph Smith’s source for the translation is still lost.

*Well, what about Joseph Smith’s “translation document” that shows hieroglyphs from the recovered papyrus fragments side-by-side with his translations?* Joseph Smith’s comparison was a separate investigation into what he called “the records of Joseph” son of Jacob. He considered the papyrus fragments which have been recovered to be a record kept by Joseph and sought to decipher them through this study. There is no way this could have been a translation for the Book of Abraham, as numbered citations
for hieroglyphs match up to only a few of the words in the Book of Abraham text, and most of the text has no hieroglyphs to match up to.

Then why does Facsimile 1 appear in the recovered papyrus fragments? The Book of Abraham text makes reference to a “fashion of” the idols that were involved in the attempted sacrifice, but this reference is to “hieroglyphics” and not a facsimile illustration. Also, there are considerable differences between the Book of Abraham’s description of this scene and what Facsimile 1 shows. If Joseph Smith were going off this vignette, why would he add obvious discrepancies? The reason this vignette looks similar to what Abraham described in the text and the reason Joseph Smith provided an explanation of Abraham’s experience based on it is that this Facsimile 1 lion couch scene is it derived from the same Egyptian sacrificial ritual that Abraham experienced, called the Sed-festival. Joseph Smith found this vignette in a different scroll than the Book of Abraham source and explained the symbolism it contained as it involved Abraham in this earlier ritual.

Joseph Smith’s explanation for each figure of each Facsimile matches correctly to the Egyptian meaning. He got every figure of every facsimile correct. Skeptics cover up for these similarities by comparing Joseph Smith’s explanation to the Egyptian names, but that is comparing apples to oranges: Joseph Smith was interested in how the symbolism related to Abraham, not their Egyptian names. The zig-zag lines in Facsimile 1 indeed represented the firmament over our heads, and the vertical lines represented the pillars of heaven. The four sons of Horus in Facsimile 2 indeed represented the four quarters of the earth like Joseph Smith said, and Amun-Re’s staff indeed represented the creative key of power.

Prophecies by Today’s Prophets Fulfilled – As with Joseph Smith’s Civil War prophecy, Church leaders continue to warn us about future events that turn out to come true.

- In November 2000, prophet Gordon B. Hinckley repeatedly emphasized to young Millennials the importance of college. It wasn’t just typical financial advice; it was prophesy of an unprecedented competitive economic climate:

  “You are moving into the most competitive age the world has ever known. All around you is competition. You need all the education you can get. Sacrifice a car; sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of the world. That world will in large measure pay you what it thinks you are worth, and your worth will increase as you gain education and proficiency in your chosen field... These are not my words. These are the words of the Lord who loves you.”
Since then, the cost of college has more than tripled and college diplomas have become necessary for almost every job. Millennials have found that corporations only pay what they have to, whereas previous generations enjoyed plentiful social benefits.

- In 1998, prophet Gordon B. Hinckley counseled families to get out of debt: “Be modest in your expenditures. Discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid debt to the extent possible.... The economy is a fragile thing,” he warned. It seemed weird that he emphasized this more than anything else, but in the ensuing years many people were getting into bad mortgages and predatory lending practices from banks became common, until the entire financial system collapsed in 2008 and millions were foreclosed with ruined credit.

- In 2001, Gordon B. Hinckley again urged members to prepare for a future financial disaster in “uncertain days that lie again.” “I cannot forget the great lesson of Pharaoh’s dream” of 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine. Well, exactly 7 years later the great recession hit.

- In 1995, when Gordon B. Hinckley produced *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, traditional family and gender roles were customary. Yet Church members were asked to display the proclamation in their homes and distribute it to friends. Many questioned why the Church was making such a big deal out of something already accepted by almost everyone. Efforts to redefine marriage had been going on for decades and there was no indication of change. But in the immediate years that followed, the campaigns to redefine marriage gained steam and the Proclamation enabled the Church to defend traditional marriage every step of the way. More than a decade later, the courts of the United States redefined marriage in a nontraditional way, and since then the Family Proclamation has become a fundamental tool and statement of our beliefs during a climate of radical confusion over family identity.

- Challenges to traditional family go all the way back to the decadence of the roaring 1920’s. Before that, in 1915, Joseph F. Smith emphasized the need to strengthen families as a traditional unit. He instituted the “Family Home Evening” tradition of setting aside one night each week to strengthen family ties and harmony in the home. This has become vital for Latter-day Saints in today’s age where the family is all but meaningless. Yet in 1915 it seemed unnecessary.

- In 1968, Thomas S. Monson prophesied that a temple would soon be built in communist-controlled East Germany. It was unthinkable that an ostensibly atheist Marxist country would allow any religion to exist, much less a temple, but ground broke for its construction in 1983.
• In 2005, Gordon B. Hinckley and other church leaders emphasized opposition to gambling. This advice seemed mundane, as online gambling was little-known back then. But it has since tripled in business and become a terrible vice to many. Likewise, Gordon B. Hinckley’s repeatedly stressed his warning to avoid tattoos in 2000. It seemed out of place, but since then tattoos have become much more popular, and now almost everybody in popular culture has at least one.

• In 2019, President Russell M. Nelson announced that temple square would be closed for expansive seismic upgrades, despite there being recent no earthquakes in the Salt Lake area. A significant 5.8 earthquake struck the city a short time later as work was underway, the largest earthquake in recorded history for Salt Lake City.

• On October 2018, President Russell M. Nelson urged church members to prepare for 2020 by practicing health: “Wait till next year, and then the next year. Eat your vitamin pills. Get some rest.” On October 2019, President Russell M. Nelson repeatedly promised that the 2020 General conference for the First Vision bicentennial would be “different from any previous conference... prepare for a unique conference.” He said, “general conference next April will be not only memorable; it will be unforgettable.” Then, when 2020 came around, the Covid19 pandemic quarantine forced the Church to hold conference in a small auditorium with only a few speakers in attendance. Vitamin and resting were among top advice heath workers gave during the outbreak. Church-wide fasts are held in cases of large-scale disasters. President Nelson announced two fasts “that the present pandemic may be controlled, caretakers protected, the economy strengthened, and life normalized.” Church members often talk about the immediate efficacy of such fasts so I decided this time to keep track:

![Coronavirus New Cases vs. Latter-day Saint Fasting in United States, 4/14/20](Coronavirus_daily_new_cases.png)
Just Coincidence? - Skeptics would probably say I’m cherry-picking evidence and digging for patterns. But just one improbable piece evidence is compelling proof of Joseph Smith’s bold claims. The human brain tends to believe negative bias before it believes positive bias, and that makes it easy for skeptics to shine the spotlight on their tired old narratives against the Church. The human brain’s inability to process probability further makes it convenient for them to dismiss my evidences as “just coincidence.”

Yet, as I debunk each of the skeptics’ narratives against the Church, I almost never explain it as “coincidence.” I provide solid reason, context, and history. That’s because I understand what it means when scientists say the probability of life forming on earth is 1 in 700 quintillion. I understand how very unlikely it is for Joseph Smith to imagine up ancient people writing on golden tablets before any archaeologists had discovered metal tablets. But with skeptics, everything is coincidence! The altar discovered on the Arabian peninsula where Lehi was thought to have traveled which shows the name Nahom—the very same name Lehi gave for that region—just coincidence. The ancient raised highways discovered in Mexico that match Mormon’s description—just coincidence. Skeptics never explain why we should consider these things coincidence. It’s like a wave of a magic wand for them. Until you can provide solid empirical evidence, you shouldn’t ignorantly dismiss what you can’t explain. Until you develop a solid logical basis for truth we can see, how do you expect to handle truth we can’t see?
How To Know The Church Is True

Indisputable Proof Not Possible – Go ahead and try to dismiss these physical evidences as coincidence. Maybe Joseph Smith just guessed about the Civil War? Just coincidence that Native Americans practiced baptism? There is no smoking gun proof to exclude some alternative explanation, after all.

Shouldn’t such an important claim be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt? Why would there be so little physical evidence for such a profound truth?

In the Dark Ages, irrefutable physical proof was exactly what the crusaders sought for as they searched the Holy Land for relics. You can see the cross of Jesus or wine spilled on a blanket in the shape of the apostles in European cathedrals, proof of the Bible, yet we aren’t all flocking to these cathedrals, are we? Only members of those churches take those relics seriously because they could just be pieces of wood somebody came across or wine somebody spilled to make the shape of twelve figures. If tomorrow our church produced some gold plates, would scientists be able to fully verify that they were legitimate? They could gather clues, but no amount of scientific evidence could prove it without a doubt. There could always be some alternative explanation.

It’s the same with any science. Bones have been found to support the model of human evolution but there is no smoking gun. There are missing pieces of the puzzle, and it has not been reproduced in a laboratory or fully demonstrated. Evolution is just a scientific model for what could have happened. The Book of Mormon likewise is a model for what may have happened with many physical pieces of the puzzle that have been found, but there are always going to be missing pieces. We are talking about an ancient civilization that got totally wiped out. Skeptics used to say there were “frequent” anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, and now the list of real anachronisms is three or four. Skeptics fall back on a few missing puzzle pieces to claim “no archaeological evidence exists.” Oh, plenty of evidence exists! But no smoking gun.

Physical evidence is scant, I admit. Joseph Smith gave the gold plates back to Moroni, the original Book of Abraham source is missing, etc. But the more I research into the details of each issue I find greater evidence that the Church’s narrative is true rather than evidence it is false. Investigation into the Book of Abraham likewise provides physical evidence Joseph Smith was a prophet. With European relics it is the other way around—they seem to be legitimate at face value but the more I research the details the more they seem to be fake. With Joseph Smith, the recovered papyri fragments at first glance have nothing to do with Abraham and the whole thing appears to be a fraud. But the more I look into it, those recovered fragments were not what Joseph
Smith ever claimed to translate from, and Joseph Smith exhibited knowledge of Egyptian that nobody in 1842 could have known. For example, recently discovered Egyptian papyrus shows the same scene as Facsimile 1 and mentions Abraham right below it. Just coincidence?

Avoid Superstition – And it’s okay that there is no smoking-gun proof. It means we need to have faith and avoid superstition. We are not a church that deals in relics. We base our spiritual belief on a spiritual rather than physical premise.

Imagine if you were an ancient person seeing lightning for the first time. A superstitious person would think: *It must be a manifestation of the gods!* A spiritual conclusion from a physical premise. Physical proof for the Church likewise would be a phenomenon that may be inexplicable now but could always be debunked with more advanced science. I think the answer is to make physical conclusions based on physical evidence and spiritual conclusions based on spiritual evidence. If there were physical evidence that made the Church undeniably true it would shift our belief to a matter of physical evidence and therefore it would no longer be a spiritual issue. If something is undeniable from the outset then there is no need to explore details and test for unseen truth. The entire point of faith is to explore truth that has not been physically verified.

Anti-Mormons define faith differently. They say faith is a bridge between fact and what someone chooses to believe: “faith is an instrument to bridge that gap between where science, history and logic end, and what you hope to be true.” *(CES Letter)* Just look at how the *CES Letter* uses dubious quotes to make false claims about the Church—they themselves practice this definition of faith to justify their beliefs! Skeptics dig up something some anti-Mormons said hundreds of years ago as their only evidence and suggest Book of Mormon witnesses only saw the gold plates in their imagination rather than in real life. Where is the physical evidence that these quotes are legitimate? It is just what some website said somebody said somebody said. Why should the Church be expected to produce physical evidence if the skeptics’ entire narrative for what really happened is devoid of physical evidence? The tremendous logical fallacies and lack of evidence in their narratives requires their version of faith—a bridge to what they want to believe. A wave of the magic wand.

Some members of the Church likewise treat faith as a magic wand. For example, some compare patriarchal blessings to Harry Potter’s “sorting hat.” They treat miracles and blessings like a magic trick because they strain desperately for validation of their beliefs where no validation is to be found. Then, when these members leave the Church they continue to dismiss all that is unknown as a matter of faith, only now they do it to attack the Church rather than be part of it. They continue to ignore unseen truth and they never rise above being superstitious. This is why many skeptics instantly
believe anything they read online that aligns with their narrative against the Church yet demand undeniable proof from us for our narrative.

Anti-Mormons always insist they knew everything about the Church when they were good active members. But I always find they misunderstood the faith process. The first step is to change this superstitious mindset. Start with a spiritual premise and gather evidence objectively, inductively, and in good faith; beginning with the premise of the existence of God. Admit when physical evidence is lacking, especially with historical issues. Do not jump to conclusions.

"The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their understanding of their history."
-George Orwell 1984-

**Historical Facts** - We cannot travel back in time and know what really happened. As Napoleon said, "History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon." Well, there is plenty to disagree upon when it comes to our church history. Websites, media corporations, and academia continuously skew our history because history is such a convenient tool for social control and it is extremely important to our belief system. We need to know if Joseph Smith translated the gold plates, if Jesus was resurrected, and if Adam was the first man. These are real tangible events that either
happened or didn’t happen, and if they didn’t happen then our belief system is myth. Such history is easy to manipulate due to its uncertain nature.

As powerful groups convince us of their version of past events, we start to resent our past. We strain to confront historical issues, but the anti-Mormon bias and vitriol is so intense it’s near impossible to sort out truth. Scholars rely on dubious quotes, poor sources, and biased research. They propagate salacious gossip, and the mainstream media repeat their narrative over and over until it becomes accepted as fact, until suddenly all we are ever talking about is polygamy and racism.

Philosopher Leo Tolstoy called history: “nothing but a collection of fables and useless trifles, cluttered with a mass of unnecessary figures and proper names.” Why bother basing anything on history, he argued, when there’s a good chance evidence has been concealed, fabricated, or manipulated? Context is everything, but context will always be missing, making it impossible to really know why something happened the way it did. Context determines whether Nephi’s slaying of Laban, for example, was justified self-defense or cold-blooded murder. It all depends on who is telling the story.

This is why anti-Mormons tend to snip quotes out of context. They allege Brigham Young taught Adam and God the Father were the same person—a doctrine which we obviously do not believe. When you look at Brigham Young’s entire sermon and the other quotes they bring up, it is clear all he meant was that Adam had a role in the creation of earth. A simple difference in the intonation of his voice alters the meaning of the words, which goes to show how unreliable the historical narratives can be. The same skeptics who demand physical proof for God rely on something as ethereal as history and snippets of quotes from some website for their evidence. They cherry-pick and spin history to reinforce their confirmation bias.

Skeptics often disregard historical context and judge history by modern standards. For example, they scream: Joseph Smith married a 14 year old girl! But they ignore how social expectations were different in the early 1800’s, the dynastic nature of the arrangement, and evidence it was a temple sealing “for eternity only” which means it did not involve physical relations or any relationship until the afterlife. But just the allegation is enough to destroy a man. Most do not bother looking into what actually likely happened, and the purpose of the claim is to discredit Joseph Smith.

**Faith Is Pragmatism** – With both religion and science, determining facts is not what is really important. What is important in science is usefulness. A scientific model is formed based on what consistently works. For example, we believe in gravity because that is the most useful and consistent explanation for why things fall, but there is no smoking gun evidence that disproves all alternative explanations. We gain spiritual knowledge likewise by testing for consistent good or bad results, and we form a model
of spiritual, moral, or unseen reality from data of what functions best, just as we do in science for things we can see. Pragmatism thus enables us to explore unseen truth despite having little or no physical evidence.

Even scientists do this. What physical evidence is there for quantum physical properties? The theoretical framework for quantum engineering goes beyond physical observation, because quantum properties alter with any observation—you literally can’t have physical observation. If scientists were stuck with only what they could see, quantum theory would never have developed, and we wouldn’t have MRI machines to detect diseases and help heal sick people. MRI machines demonstrate quantum theory to be a useful model even though there is no proof for the model being true, making the use of MRI technology a product of faith. Faith demonstrates unseen reality as either a useful or not useful model of reality. Religion likewise makes some bold claims that we can’t test. But each time we exercise faith it demonstrates our model to be either reliable or unreliable as reality. Take any commandment—abstaining from alcohol, paying tithing, etc.—and demonstrate whether or not the promised blessings will come true from following it.

Many scientists agree that almost all of our universe is filled with “dark matter,” but dark matter only exists as a theoretical lynchpin to allow a bunch of astronomical theories to match what we observe of the universe. Why didn’t scientists just change their theories to match what they observe instead of concocting this dark matter theory? Nobody has detected the existence of dark matter and dark energy, yet scientists say it makes up 95% of the universe! Now that’s faith. Even if dark matter were detected, there would be all sorts of alternative models possible for whatever they were detecting. Dark matter is a model scientists believe because it is useful.

There are unseen truths in which we all must exercise belief in order to survive. Everyone needs a set of morals, yet morality cannot be placed under a microscope. Science cannot answer moral questions of abortion, discrimination, capital punishment, capital gains tax, etc. We can use scientific testing to inform our moral decisions, but ultimately it is up to the human conscience. How are we supposed to develop morality if we do not explore unseen moral truth?

**Discovering Immaterial Truth** – Every seminary student is familiar with this pragmatic process. The hypothesis is a seed that you try out in good faith to see if it is good:

“And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good... for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.
“O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good.”

(Alma 32:33-35)

Have you ever considered that this as a pragmatic process? Greek philosopher Plato said there are four degrees of knowledge, gained pragmatically, which he explained with a parable of someone born inside a cave:

1. Knowledge starts with mere allusion to truth, like actors casting a puppet show on shadows on the wall. This puppet show in the cave provides a basic understanding of truth, though there may be untruth scattered in there as well because the actors can say whatever they want.

2. But then you turn around and see a fire projecting the shadows, and you gain a higher understanding of truth because now you see the source behind the allusions. As you understand the source of everything you’ve been told you question the validity of it.

3. Next, you explore the cave and discover real sunlight and shadow at the exit of the cave, something you’ve never seen for yourself.

4. Then finally, you exit the cave and discern objects and the sunlight which makes the world visible and discernible. You realize final truth through reason and direct intuition.

A child in Primary class receives knowledge like shadows on a cave wall, and it isn’t until he discovers a dark underbelly of the Church—the things we don’t like to talk about—that he turns around and see who is projecting the shadows and finds that the Church more complicated than he previously thought. We are all jarred by this realization and some even leave the Church over it. But that puppet show was not lies. They were allusions to immaterial truth, and there are additional steps to be taken after looking at the actors before you get to final truth.

Plato’s point was that anything physical is a mere allusion to truth. To dwell on the physical as atheists do is to remain inside the cave. To leave the cave is to rise above all physical evidence and to find truth through intellect rather than only through senses.

Alma in his discussion on faith likewise said expansion of intellect and enlightenment of understanding are the final degrees of knowledge. Like Plato, he said this enlightenment gives us the power to discern things around us and see things for what
they are. This is why we in the Church seek for spiritual principles behind cause and
effect, testing dialectic and nurturing the source of enlightenment to discover truth.
Those lessons in Primary class and the stirring testimonies we hear at church are seeds
of knowledge that allude to the spiritual truth which we must discover for ourselves.

I’m not asking anyone who has discovered the dark corners of the Church to return to
the puppet play inside the cave. Coming to that realization is a necessary step. What
I’m suggesting is you should explore the cave some more until you find the exit. The
cave’s exit is a spiritual journey, and the puppet play is useful as a seed of truth. It’s not
something to discard. The hypothesis that God exists will reveal ideal immaterial
principles upon further discoveries.

**Bearing Testimony** - This is why we bear testimony at church. Skeptics ridicule us for
bearing of testimony, but bearing testimony is like giving a presentation in school. You
go up in front of the class and present a subject to give everyone a basic overview and
to gain a better understanding of it yourself. When the teacher asks you to solve a
math problem on the board, you don’t reply: “But I can’t because I don’t know this is
true.” That’s the whole point of solving it on the board! Scientists likewise develop an
understanding of their subject by publishing research papers and review journals. They
don’t refuse to bear testimony because they have never seen a quark particle or the
geological formation of the earth. We publicly bear testimonies in church in order to
increase our understanding. We do not repeat prescriptive lines or say prayers out of a
prayer book, because you truly understand something only when you can explain it in
your own words and by your own volition. We are all just trying to figure it out.

**Spiritual Evidence Is Not Emotional Feelings** – Evidence for God can be both
spiritual and physical, and evidence is received inductively—which means we gather
evidence and theories after we begin with the notion of God’s existence. This spiritual
evidence is not emotional feelings. The Holy Ghost affects our emotion, but we cannot
be sure based on emotion alone if what we are experiencing is the Holy Ghost, as other
things affect our emotions too. Many who leave the Church dismiss their earlier
spiritual feelings as mere emotion. But the Church has never said truth was confirmed
through emotional feelings. Truth is confirmed through enlightenment and positive
effects of following scripture’s model for truth. This means one must recognize how he
spiritually changes during the experiment of faith. Some truths of the universe are
demonstrated in an obvious manner, like gravity, but such things as the Holy Ghost are
less obvious. With some things you must look for what makes you happy, empowered,
and free. Faith is very simply demonstrated. It’s okay to start with small acts of faith to
test unseen truth—small tests—things like the Word of Wisdom. See what results by
behaving as if the spiritual principle in question were true. Have the humility to admit
when a belief you were so sure about turns out to deliver bad results. Be open to
possibilities you haven’t considered. By their fruits ye shall know them.
Self-Destructive Lifestyle of Anti-Mormonism

What makes opponents of the Church so angry? Some ex-church members move on with their lives and remain respectful, and that’s fine, but others get more hateful over time. These anti-Mormons explore hate sites, combine on chat sites to share their misery, and with burning hatred slide downhill and never find solace. The saying goes: “you can leave the Church but you can’t leave it alone,” right?

If the Church really “just wasn’t for you” you would just forget about completely. Do you still think about the Church? Are there things you resent from your life in the Church, or are there church policies you find damaging? Do you seek to glean some of the good aspects of the Church while expelling other aspects? Anti-Mormons take negativity to the extreme, and you are certainly not like them, but by studying their hang-ups perhaps we can all introspectively learn something about our own relationship to the Church.

**Perfectionism** - The complaint I see all the time from anti-Mormons is that the Church demands perfectionism. Their parents wanted them to avoid porn, dress modestly, and avoid sex outside of marriage, and *it is just cultish to make someone feel unworthy!*

Well, if the Church became permissive toward “small” sins, then people would demand more allowance until church becomes nothing more than happy social hour where we all sing in a circle with a guitar. Is that what ex-church members want? If so, I would expect them to be joining churches like that. But few ex-church members join other churches. Most people understand that a church should require discipline and the sacrifice necessary to make a person godly. The Christian God requires perfection in heaven. The Book of Mormon explains why “no unclean thing” can be in the kingdom of God: it is the nature of justice, and this is where our system of morality begins. We like to talk about mercy, but we must first understand the need for eventual perfection—there is right and wrong and we seek to be right.

This moral absolutism makes many feel inadequate, because no matter how hard you try you are going to fall horribly short. If somehow you manage to avoid all unclean acts, what about your thoughts? And if you manage to purge all unclean thoughts, what about your dreams at night? Desires? What about innocent mistakes?

**Avoiding Contradiction** - Many anti-Mormons say as members they tried to purge all impure thoughts from their mind—not just sexual thoughts but anything that conflicted with the gospel. I find this unfortunate because it prevents us from
considering taboo or unconventional ideas. After all, many people dismiss our gospel as a “bad thought,” so how many converts would be open-minded to the gospel if they suppressed every thought that conflicted with their accepted beliefs? The problem with fencing off your belief system is that there are plenty of good ideas that get locked out. We need to use some other strategy to avoid impurity than the measuring stick of contradiction.

Anti-Mormons say they treated commandments like a checklist of what is allowed and not allowed, a template of perfection—measure up something to the template in order to determine whether to accept or reject it. I do not find this to be a healthy approach to morality, for two reasons:

1. Not all sin is of equal severity. There are different levels of consequences—jaywalking is less serious than robbing a bank. Likewise there are different levels of righteousness.

2. Perfection becomes a matter of following orders like a soldier, instead of developing strategic wisdom like a commander. We want to be growing independently in intelligence, gaining self-control and mastery over our identity, and not blindly mimicking what someone else thinks we should be.

I find that the anti-Mormon delusion started with a demand for immediate perfection while they were still members, that they expected to become perfect by blindly following orders. They found themselves being forced into “righteous” behavior before they could understand the rationale behind it or develop the fortitude necessary to sustain that behavior independently. By the time they finally partook of the forbidden fruit and violated moral standards for the sake of thinking for themselves, their attitude toward commandments had soured to the point that they rejected the basis for commandments even once they started to understand it. They were afraid to follow commandments because they feared becoming the soldier again blindly following orders.

But has that mindset changed after they become ex-church member? Are they still perfectionists and still treating perfection as a template you follow, purging anything that contradicts it? After all, isn’t this how mainstream society sees it? If you break a law, you go to jail. If you don’t follow proper etiquette, you get shunned. Karl Marx held that contradiction in dialectical materialism is what fashions society and he therefore sought to purge anything that contradicted his ideal vision for society. This is how most people today treat ideology. But if you are a perfectionist, this leads you to flip out at the slightest mistake and to desperately hold on to your template for success. Lack of confidence makes a person beat themselves up and eventually blame someone else in order to find the courage to keep on going. That is why anti-Mormons
project their insecurities and assign responsibility where it doesn’t belong. *Everything is the Church’s fault.* Time ticks on, and they don’t get any better. Their resentment swells as they hate themselves and blame family or church. It’s not healthy, and I don’t believe it is the Christlike way to seek perfection.

**Need for Redemption** – There are three ways to seek perfection:

1. Whip your back over every little sin until you become the perfection soldiers.
2. Adjust your moral framework to fit your behavior so that it is “perfect” as it is. (Moral relativity)
3. Humbly admit your fallible human nature and confidently seek redemption through an atonement.

The perfectionist gets overwhelmed with option 1 so he goes to option 2. Like Elsa from the movie *Frozen*, he excitedly sings “Let it go” as he rejects the standards of his parents, ignores the pain he inflicted on loved ones, and embraces the self-isolation and shame of his human nature. He finally allows his fallible human nature to do what comes naturally, which is better, but like Elsa he realizes there must be *some* kind of control. After the old moral framework of the gospel is deconstructed, what takes its place? Without God, survival and the social contract become the deciding factors of morality. He shifts toward a new, easier moral framework.

The problem with relying on the social contract is that it doesn’t repair sin. Sin is anything that contradicts the ideology, and it must be removed and destroyed. Repentance now means adapting to the standard set for your social class in order to equalize classes, for equalization is the final aim of perfection. Sin becomes a class-based trait rather than individual fault. Ever notice how news media is filled with shaming language over this group guilty of doing this, these people’s ancestors are evil for this reason, and that group victimized those people? They judge you by the group to which you belong, and you can never excel above the standard for your class. There are sins within your group which they believe you can never rise above. Did your ancestors own slaves? According to an ideology built on the social contract, you must pay a lifetime of restitution for it. Think about it—isn’t *this* cultish social control? Objectively look closely at how popular culture and mainstream media influences social behavior and beliefs. For all their blaming, denials, and careful framing, those who espouse an ideology built on social justice place us in a cruel box from which we cannot escape.

The social justice propagandists bully, shame, and cajole people into equalizing, which is really just universal salvation. But equality, after all, is an illusion. The person in charge of forcing everyone to become equal is the authority above them all. It is a dictatorship. There are two dominant social influences in Utah: the Church and a certain newspaper run by an elitist billionaire. Why do alternatives to Christian social influences just happen to often lean in a pro-Socialist direction? I believe it is because when it comes down to it. Socialism is the only alternative moral framework to the gospel.
I find it interesting that many of the skeptics who dismiss religion go on to pursue a model of Socialism for our society that has been proven time and time again to be a damaging social structure. They replace the gospel with this horrible ideology because they are clinging to only truth they can see. Many tell themselves they are free, but I find spiritual empowerment or spiritual retrogression lead to changes that can be seen in a person—whether their eyes are full of life or are dead, and whether their life choices are liberating or degrading. They can keep telling themselves they are happy and free, but the way they live their life demonstrates the truth.

**Items on the Shelf** – Another frequent saying among ex-church members is that they had “items piling up on the shelf” that became so heavy that the shelf collapsed. This is their metaphor for unresolved doubts and complaints about the Church that pressed on their mind. They pushed those doubts into the back of their mind and “had faith,” but the unresolved issues won in the end, and their whole testimony fell apart. In this metaphor, “faith” sounds like an anti-virus program on a computer that scans for threats and then cordons them away. It follows the contradiction-style version of perfection and uses an incorrect definition of faith that blindly creates a bridge between what they can verify and what they hope is true. When the contradictions become too numerous and the blind faith stretched too thin, the computer reformats the entire hard drive and starts fresh with a new ideology.

It is a liberating feeling when the “shelf finally breaks” because then a person doesn’t feel the pressure of those neglected issues. There is a lifetime of intense emotional anguish that has been begging for sunlight, and even though it doesn’t actually get resolved just admitting it is there is hugely relieving.

**The Process of Losing Faith** - Here are the steps of losing a testimony:

1. **Faith Challenges** – Personal experiences such as bullying, parents’ divorce, and unfulfilled promises are always tugging at the back of our mind. Without us even knowing it, these experiences lead us to espouse values that conflict with gospel values. These foreign values are found in popular culture, peer influence, or school, and they sound great and make total sense. But it is only a matter of time before the they come head to head with the gospel, and then praying and reading scriptures doesn’t seem to help much with the intellectual confusion and emotional strain we feel, because we are too afraid to confront those painful experiences that started it all.

2. **Read anti-Mormon Website** – We come across a website or Facebook group, or maybe it is the words of a friend or family member we love. At first it appears mainstream “Mormon,” intellectual, and well-researched. But then it turns toward a strange narrative that we have never heard before, and we feel dirty reading it. But we can’t seem to look away. And we don’t want to be ignorant, after all.

3. **Self-Justification for Investigating Anti-Mormonism** – This prideful desire to not look ignorant leads us to read further. We tell ourselves that we “just happened across” this website. We tell ourselves that our testimonies are strong enough, and we have the right to
“know what is really going on.” We are just learning the facts. But subconsciously what is really happening is we are being driven by the powerful latent emotions of our personal faith-challenge experiences. Emotion is an incredibly powerful thing, and we never want to admit that many of our decisions which we think are logical and intellectual are almost completely driven by the undeniable urges of our emotions. Much of our research and logic are justifications for what we have wanted all along.

4. Internalize Anti-Mormon Narratives – After curiosity, the next thing we feel is panic. What if some of this is true? The anxiety of those repressed experiences and underlying issues come crashing down, and then we feel shame. How could I be so stupid? The truth is so undeniable! Panic and shame are the results of those experiences finally coming to the surface, but we mistakenly associate them with our testimony of the gospel. Our deep emotions have finally found the justification they need, and we consider this undeniable proof that the anti-Mormon narrative is valid. But it is just a narrative wrapped in fragments of truth, and that is what makes anti-Mormonism so powerful. The more we delve into the anti-Mormon website the more justification we find for emotions, and each minor point solidifies our absolute persuasion that the big lies are true. The alignment of intellect, emotion, and spirit gives us a sense of knowledge—even if it is based on falsehoods. As isolated points, it doesn’t matter whether Joseph Smith was polygamous or if he tried to translate the Kinderhook Plates, but when these arguments bolster a larger narrative, that narrative becomes the wedge that deconstructs our entire testimony.

5. Blame the Church – After feelings of panic and shame, the next thing we feel is betrayal. How could the Church conceal the truth from me? Mormonism has ruined my life! The anti-Mormon narrative turns the Church into the whipping-boy of those unresolved painful experiences. It’s the Church’s fault my parents got a divorce; I was bullied; etc. We then look for anything else we can blame the Church for, as victimization now feels like such a relief. No longer do we need to feel responsible for things that have tortured us for so long. No longer do we need to accept moral values from opposite sides. Many doubters start off by making excuses for the Church: it is just a couple of apostles who have the wrong idea, or it is the human fallibility of priesthood leaders that God can’t get through to. But inevitably that leads to acceptance that the Church is plain hurtful. Eventually, anything that goes wrong in life is because of the Church.

6. Deep Investigation Against the Church – So far, all of this has happened in the space of a few hours tops. The brain is racing full speed to deconstruct the testimony and replace it with a new narrative. It interweaves with political ideas and personal attitudes toward other issues: coffee, tattoos, modesty, etc. Everything we have ever felt ostracized about, and everything we ever felt limited because of suddenly becomes reconsidered in light of the new narrative. This is really what “the shelf breaking” is about. We assume these are just more repressed issues that finally we are getting “answers” to, but when the “shelf breaks” it is really giving ourselves permission to cave into false anti-Mormon narratives. Years of soft persecution come flooding into the subconscious as well, and suddenly you are buried by all those years atheists mocked your faith, your friends enjoyed immoral things that you weren’t allowed to, and society in
general ostracized you for your “Mormon” identity, push you strongly. For so long we felt ashamed about polygamy. We felt ashamed about racism. We felt silly believing horses existed in America. Even though these issues may not relate to the original painful experiences, the ostracism from mainstream culture that has always repressed us is another painful experience unto itself.

This is why we feel great relief as we “research” more anti-Mormon material and find the justification we want to start drinking coffee, swearing, getting tattoos, playing on Sunday, and all the other things we always wanted to do. Effective anti-Mormon propaganda is to be found throughout mainstream news media, popular entertainment, the education system, music, and elite American culture which shames us until we cave in.

7. Deep Bitterness – Doubters find immediate gratification, and like Elsa in the film Frozen they sing “Let it go!” But over the following days and months, doubters entrench deep bitterness against people in the Church and anything having to do with the Church. They may have finally recognized those deep underlying issues, and their intellect may finally be aligned with their emotions, but the root cause of the pain has not be resolved at all, and their intellect and emotion is aligned consistent to falsehood rather than truth. It is as if they have finally realized that they have been shot but the bullet fragments are still in the wound festering. And the more they make the Church their whipping-boy and avoid personal responsibility, the less likely they are to truly confront those experiences.

8. Find New Ideology – With each part of the testimony deconstructed, few doubters go on without a new ideology taking its place. They often sever relationships with family, friends, and neighbors in search of a new community. Cult leader Jim Jones underwent this kind of transformation when he turned against American ideals and espoused Marxism. Anti-Mormons speak of being born into the Church much the same way: “If you were born in capitalist America, racist America, fascist America, then you’re born in sin. But if you’re born in socialism, you’re not born in sin.” Jones cursed his American family every chance he got: “Son of a b*tchin’ no good lousy *ss anarchistic capitalist b*tch: That’s what I say about my relatives.” Jones further sought to liberate others the same way many anti-Mormons try to “help” members “still stuck in the Church”: “My whole life I have suffered from poverty and have faced many disappointments and pain, like a man is used to. That is why I want to make other people happy and want them to feel at home.”

A lot of ex-church members talk about depression, sadness, and their brain keeping them up all night. This is the result of intense brain activity, as the mind is busy making new explanations, forging new relationships, conceiving new morals, and creating new goals in life within a new moral framework. Each corner of the gospel is forcibly deconstructed, like a construction crew demolishing a house, and new beliefs reconstructed to fit the new ideology. During this process, the mind always forms a lot of logical shortcuts. There is nothing wrong with that—it is human nature. But the problem is that it establishes cognitive bias, and cognitive bias makes their new beliefs unyielding in the face of any and all evidence to the contrary. In church terms this is known as “a hard heart.” When cognitive bias is forged on
animosity, it always leads to very dark places. Anti-Mormon rhetoric encourages these mental shortcuts, with quotes taken out of context, history skewed, and all kinds of other logical fallacies peppering their literature. It closes off the mind and heart.

**Authoritarian Personality** – ex-church members develop what is known as an ‘authoritarian personality’ when they blame their family and church community for problems and cut off relationships. This stems from their solider-like obedience, blind faith, and perfectionism when they were church members. But they lost their trust in the church to provide that authoritarian role in their lives, which is why they feel so betrayed that the Church covered up its history of polygamy and left them high and dry when they needed the Church’s help; now they look for a strong dictator to direct every action in their life and keep them safe from all harm. The more they avoided confronting those “items on the shelf” and the more they had clung to blind faith, the worse the desire for an authoritarian gets after they leave the Church. The perfectionism is still there, and the misguided attempt to get there hasn’t changed, and they still do not explore on their own, and they are still afraid to doubt. They avoid talking open-mindedly about their doubts with family and church leaders, and now with the shelf crashed they are further isolated.

Here are traits of the authoritarian Anti-Mormon:

*Seeks direction on every little matter* - The Church is about empowering people with correct principles so they can govern themselves. But what this anti-Mormon craves is a textbook for life—a Wikipedia entry for every minute of every day—and that is why they complain that the Church does not provide “official answers” to every little thing. When they complain that the Church didn’t tell them about something, what they really mean is the church didn’t tell them what to think. The anti-Mormon websites that led to their faith crisis becomes their script to follow, and the very phrases in the rhetoric become a mantra that repeats in their mind a thousand times a day. They become robots repeating the same phrases.

*Divisive* - Authoritarian personalities divide everything by “ingroup” and “outgroup” and blame all problems on the outgroup. At its extreme, they will avoid doing business with “Mormons,” avoid hiring “Mormons,” avoid spending time with “Mormons”, and tear down “Mormons” every chance they get. Their persecution of the community they once loved is much like what Goebbels said of the German people: “full of devotion under the care of a strong hand.” The rhetoric against the Church itself is the ensign to which they throw their devotion, and with it comes a sense of safety and superiority. They gossip about their TBM family member in a private Antimormon Facebook group to cover up for the ugliness they feel about themselves. They spread conspiracy theories and folk legends about the Church, unfounded accusations of perversion and illegal behavior. They petition the government to remove our freedom of religion, including taxing the church. They demoralize Church members with online attacks.

*Scapegoating the Church* - While most people move on with their lives after losing faith, anti-Mormons morph into warriors fighting against the Church. Not only is the Church wrong, they consider it a dangerous threat that needs to be eliminated. This is why they consider Church
membership as a matter of life and death, and why they attack members of the Church. They scapegoat the Church in the same way Nazis scapegoated religious minorities.

They frequently portray members as dangerous fanatics willing to murder and rape because we think God tells us to. Anti-Mormon CES Letter takes on a Nazi-like tone:

“To believe in the scriptures, I have to believe in a god who endorsed murder, genocide, infanticide, rape, slavery, selling daughters into sex slavery, polygamy, child abuse, stoning disobedient children, pillage, plunder, sexism, racism, human sacrifice, animal sacrifice, killing people who work on the Sabbath, death penalty for those who mix cotton with polyester, and so on.”

(CES Letter, 2015)

“Yes, the same god who tested Abraham is also the same crazy god who killed innocent babies and endorsed genocide, slavery and rape.”

(CES Letter, 2015)

Nazi rhetoricians likewise portrayed religious minorities as the incarnation of evil, because authoritarian personalities prop themselves up by tearing others down. CES Letter proudly declared, “Do what is right; let the consequences follow now holds a completely different meaning for me,” now that they have shifted to this Anti-Mormon frame. To the authoritarian, doing right means associating their whipping boy with every atrocity imaginable, blaming them for economic ruin and alienating them from mainstream acceptance.

Portray church as threat to intellectualism – These anti-Mormons portray church members as a threat to science and intellectualism in order to claim superiority and make up for their shoddy arguments. CES Letter declared: “It was only after I lost my testimony and discovering, for the first time, the... anti-intellectualism going on behind the scenes that I could clearly see the above cultish aspects of the Church.”

Portray church as selfish with money – Yet another one straight out of the Nazi playbook. They portray us as money-grubbing elitists who hoard our ill-gotten gains. From the City Creek Mall to the mystical $100 billion church investments, we can see how anti-Mormons and the media use Nazi-like tactics in their portrayal of church members. They frequently tie this into a class-based warfare where the Church becomes a caricature boogeyman oppressing the working class.

Appeal to disgust - Authoritarian anti-Mormons associate disgusting imagery with the Church, such as the fake news about the ‘MTC rapist’ that recently spread across the mainstream media without any retractions by the fake news organizations.

Dehumanizing - They often use dehumanizing language, comparing us to inhuman monsters or assigning numbers to Joseph Smith’s plural wives rather than calling them by their names. They dehumanize members of the Church in the same way Nazis dehumanized their enemies.
They hold a special disdain for Latter-day Saint women, ridiculing them for their moral standards, calling them "baby-makers" and less than a modern-day woman. They likewise stereotype Latter-day Saint men as heartless abusers out to victimize women.

*Portray members as undercover* - In the same way Nazis spoke of religious minorities as shifty infiltrators, authoritarian anti-Mormons accuse church members of lying about their beliefs to try to fit in. Not only does this sow bigoted distrust, it bolsters their strawman arguments about the Church which they have to make because they don’t have any real arguments.

The similarity of Anti-Mormon rhetoric to Nazis rhetoric should not be surprising considering the similar psychology in German history and the Anti-Mormon experience. The strong feeling of shock, panic, shame, and betrayal that was felt throughout Germany led to deep resentment, and some horrible people were able to exploit that fear. Shadowy powers likewise exploit the ex-church member pathology. The casualness of Anti-Mormon bigotry in the mainstream media, popular culture, and on the internet makes it all the easier to justify dehumanization of church members and violent acts. It happens all the time. Journalists concealed smiles as they reported that a man who broke into the Logan temple on Christmas week, reportedly swinging an ax because Latter-day Saint women wouldn’t date him. If this had happened to almost any other minority group it would have been headline news across the world, but most people didn’t hear about it because it happened to "Mormons." Incel violence is always red meat in the journalism world, yet when it was an Anti-Mormon incel being violent and resenting Latter-day Saint women there was barely a blip in the newspapers and TV shows. On the ex-church member Reddit site it has turned into a sort of game to vandalize hotel copies of the Book of Mormon, private property, and write hateful messages inside for other guests to come across. Yet the reporters who scour that hate site for news bits don’t seem to notice. During the Coronavirus quarantines, the famous ex-church member podcast Mormon Stories spread rumors that missionaries were targeting people quarantined in their homes, despite church bulletins that missionaries were no longer going door to door and many missionaries were being sent home. Such big lies and bigotry is common among ex-church member communities, and the level of extreme bigotry has become so commonplace that bullying is now a part of everyday life. Chapel buildings are regularly torched and members are targeted for blacklisting and other illegal hateful practices. The top musical in the United States is an Anti-Mormon satire. At General Conference, families with little kids have to walk through throngs of screaming Anti-Mormon protesters, hurling curse words and making vulgar gestures with sacred temple garments; it’s like a scene from Alabama public schools in the 1950’s, yet it is so common and accepted, nobody even notices.

The problem is getting worse, not better. Powerful organizations exploit what is going on, and perhaps the biggest victims is the ex-church members themselves who *would* move on with their lives if not for these hate groups recruiting them. It all goes back to the original painful experiences that led to the cognitive dissonance. We need to confront experiences in a healthy, positive, and honest way.
The Label ‘Mormon’ - “Mormon” as a nickname for the Church was coined in 1834 by William Chase in his bigoted book “Mormonism Unvailed.” Church members eventually adopted the nickname—kinda like how Americans adopted the nickname “Yankee”—though it never lost its pejorative meaning. How is Mormon a pejorative? “Mormon” is what is grammatically termed ‘metonymy,’ which is when one aspect or example of something is used as the label for everything generally associated with it. For example “Hollywood” is a metonymy for the film industry. The reason anti-Mormons coined “Mormon,” is because the Book of Mormon is the thing that separates us from mainstream Christianity. It’s like calling the only kid with red hair in class “copper top.” Indeed, the subtitle for William Chase’s book was: “It’s rise to the present time, with sketches of the characters of its propagators, and a full detail of the manner in which the famous golden bible was brought before the world.” The Book of Mormon is used as the wedge to divide us from Christians, and thus far the Church has been able to manage this by calling the Book of Mormon “another testament of Jesus Christ.”

But recently circumstances have changed. Now, when people hear “Book of Mormon” they think of a raunchy satire musical making fun of church members. Even though the Church has grown in size and power, media corporations that see this rising power as a threat seek to control it. Media persecution has gotten so thick that we have little influence over our own identity in the public’s eye. “Mormon” now symbolizes more than our separation from mainstream Christianity, it now symbolizes whatever negative frame they want it to.

When a kid bullies you at school with a slur, the first step is to ignore it. If the label sticks, let it roll off your back. Laugh it off. Don’t let your reaction further alienate you. But there comes a point when the bully goes too far and you need to stand up for yourself. Enough is enough. This moment comes when the bully gains control over your identity in the sight of others. That moment has come for our church. The divisive nickname has caused us church members, prospective missionary targets, and the general public lose all sight of what we are. We are followers of Christ, and the name Church of Jesus Christ makes that abundantly clear. The problem is not that mainstream Christianity rejects us. The problem is that the nickname has become so casual and hurtful that it affects our core identity as followers of Christ.

We all need to take charge of our identity. Do not define yourself with bias against anyone or anything—bitterness for parents, offense, political warfare, etc. Hate groups by definition center their identity around opposing certain communities of people. Above all else, the wish of my heart for ex-members is that they confront their original hurtful experiences, avoid anti-Mormon hate groups that exploit their pain, and come to peace with themselves. A person without an identity feels like a nobody, and when you transition away from the Church you lose much of your identity. Be careful what takes its place! Always be receptive to positive and liberating truth.
Blessings Of Living The Gospel

**Better Society, Better Life** - Big newspapers rake Utah over of the coals for its homeless population, yet Utah has one of the smallest homeless rates in the Western United States. California’s homeless population is 45 times larger, and yet Utah’s big newspapers promote the mindset popular in areas of California with high homeless rates.

The media cycles through a slew of issues, manipulating statistics, spinning facts, and framing everything with a negative narrative against the gospel. Why? Big corporations are trying to take away our moral high ground, and they are doing a good job with it—all this propaganda is making us think being a “Mormon” is awful. We are a bunch of racist, misogynist, humorless prudes, right? Well, if our moral values are inferior, why are so many people moving from California to Utah? Why is Utah consistently ranked among the states for well-being? Our high moral virtue establishes a healthy community and lifestyle, despite the constant ridicule from woke blogs and social media prattlers. You can’t just accumulate $100 billion and not expect the globalist elite to come after you for it, after all.

How happy is the average American who accepts social justice and rejects faith? The average American today goes heavily into debt at a young age, wastes his best years partying, gets divorced—if he ever gets married at all—has one child at the most, slaves in a cubicle all day for his upper-class boss, consumes drugs and phone games to keep from falling apart, and goes through life without knowing what community, culture, and family ever is. That’s the secular lifestyle of today’s progressive society.

If the worst thing about being Latter-day Saint is that I look dorky on the dance floor and I don’t get to drink coffee, I’ll take being a Latter-day Saint. Moral decay is not only a betrayal of ourselves but a betrayal of our ancestors who sacrificed so much and worked so hard to make a life for us, and a betrayal of our posterity to come. Look, we all feel what’s going on in Western culture: quality of life is falling apart because it has lost the religious structure that guides life choices, and with quality of life goes culture. No cultural institution can replace church, and the oh-so “inclusive” and “progressive” big corporations that fill the void in people’s life are only interested in keeping the masses pacified as good little units of production and consumption, equal serfs on the farm, dependent on purchasing their products. Most don’t even see the homeless tents going up around them, but life is truly getting worse as these corporations replace churches in our city skylines.
For all the constant negative media propaganda against family, having children, getting married, traditional gender roles, worshiping God, praying, etc.—practices which used to be common but today are only to be found among Latter-day Saints and a few others—these are the things human beings have been doing for many thousands of years. Why would we change what has always worked in generations past? Do you think you can hold on to some things while embracing fashionable feel-good ideas? It just doesn’t work. Classic principles of healthy living don’t suddenly change now that we have cell phones and credit cards. Part of the joy of living the gospel is enjoying the rewards of these classic principles which the gospel naturally promotes. It’s not easy by any means to live as a Latter-day Saint, and there are times of trial and depression, but these are the principles of personal fulfillment and societal health. These are principles anyone can live, even if you don’t think you can. You just need to understand personal fulfillment and societal health is not compatible with much of what popular culture values.

As I study anti-Mormon forums, I find that lifestyle is pretty much what all their grievances about the Church boils down to. Matters of church history, contradictory doctrine, and everything else are justifications they use to feel good about themselves for the secular life they have chosen. They want to have sexual relations outside of marriage, have coffee with friends, feel they are part of popular culture, not feel bad about consuming porn, or so forth. They want to be one of the serfs enjoying our materialistic American culture.

I’m not saying church history isn’t important to skeptics, just that everything is top-down: lifestyle comes first and the foundation justifying that lifestyle comes after. A good analogy for this is found in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. The prideful masses construct a great and spacious building while the saints stand alone at the tree, humiliated and ostracized. But eventually the great and spacious building falls because it has no foundation while the humble tree of life stands firm and nourishes those who were faithful. Those who accept moral standards only below the point of exercising faith and no higher, those who cling to social justice and deny divine justice and redemption, and those who ridicule the saints who are humbly contributing to a better community will eventually experience it all come crashing down on them as well.

**Pro-Slavery Origins Of Anti-Mormons** – Right now the popular reason for hating Latter-day Saints is racism and homophobia. Woke skeptics say we retain a legacy of racism while they embrace a wonderful new age of equality. But this is based on revised history. The truth is our church ancestors were the pioneers of abolishing slavery and rewarding people by their merit rather than skin color, and we continue this beautiful legacy today. In fact, Antimormon opposition to the Church was largely motivated by slavery and forged into the KKK—a legacy that historians ignore.
In July 1833, opponents of the Church in Missouri published a manifesto demanding "Mormons" be expelled for opposing slavery of African-Americans:

“We, the undersigned, Citizens of Jackson County, believing that an important crisis is at hand, as regards our civil society, in consequence of a pretend religious sect of people, that have settled and are still settling in our county, styling themselves Mormons; and intending, as we do, to rid our society, ‘peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must,’... form ourselves into a company for the better and easier accomplishment of our purpose...

It is more than two years since these fanatics, or knaves, (for one or the other they undoubtedly are) made their first appearance amongst us, and pretended as they did, and now do, to hold personal communication and converse face to face with the Most High God; to receive communications and revelations direct from heaven; to heal the sick by laying on hand; and, in short, to perform all the wonder-working miracles wrought by the inspired Apostles and Prophets of old.

...We have every reason to fear that, with very few exceptions, they were of the very dregs of society from which they came, lazy, idle, and vicious... they brought into our county little or no property with them and left less behind with them... But their conduct here stamps their characters in their true colors. More than a year since, it was ascertained that they had been tampering with our slaves and endeavoring to sow dissensions and raise seditions amongst them... In a late number of the Star, published in Independence by leaders of the sect there is an article inviting free negroes and mulattoes from other states to become Mormons and remove and settle among us. This exhibits them in still more odious colors.”

The Secret Constitution, July 20, 1833, Independence Missouri

Phony historians claim the Missourians and others persecutors had legitimate grievances. But the mob’s own manifesto mentions only slavery. They assumed that church members faked spiritual claims and came from undesirable classes of society, but they cited slavery as the reason for their Anti-Mormonism.

When Missouri became a state in 1821, vast areas of land went up for grabs. Congress set a ridiculously low price of $1.25 per acre for land, which could be purchased on credit. Businessmen began buying up huge areas and flipping it at a higher price or renting it to farmers. These businesses saw the Church as a major competitor due to the Church’s communal system of land ownership. But slavery was the much bigger issue. Slavery was an absolute necessity for poor newcomers who needed to make a quick profit on their farms to pay back the purchase price. Ironically, the mobs called “Mormons” lazy and idle when in reality the Saints were willing to farm the land by
their own labor unlike the mobs. Anti-Mormon mobs saw abolition of slavery as an existential threat and that is why they tried to eliminate us with such ferocity.

The Jackson County manifesto quickly led to Missouri’s governor officially declaring an “extermination order” that said all “Mormons” must either be driven from the state or killed. Thousands were raped, tortured, and murdered. Hundreds of thousands were driven into the winter wilderness where many suffered and died, and millions of dollars worth of land and property was stolen. All because church members refused to compromise on their opposition to slavery of African-Americans.

Church members moved from place to place until they created their own city from the swamps of Nauvoo, Illinois. Anti-Mormons claim the Nauvoo city council destroyed the Nauvoo Expositor printing press, an event that directly led the Anti-Mormon assassination of Joseph Smith, because it exposed the secret practice of polygamy. But this is revised history as well. If you read what that newspaper was actually printed you can see for yourself that it was full of libelous allegations against Joseph Smith, libelous allegations against the Church, threats of violence, a threat to overthrow the Church, dehumanizing language (labeling us “demons in human shape”), and most shockingly, support for Missouri’s genocidal extermination order. The newspaper called for church members to be “amenable” to the genocidal laws of Missouri:

“The hostile spirit and conduct manifested by Joseph Smith, and many of his associates towards Missouri, and others inimical to his purposes, are decidedly at variance with the true spirit of Christianity, and should not be encouraged by any people, much less by those professing to be the ministers of the gospel of peace... While we disapprove malicious persecutions and prosecutions, we hold that all church members are alike amenable to the laws of the land, and that we further disapprove any chicanery to screen them from the just demands of the same.”

The Nauvoo Expositor, 1844

That is what anti-Mormons are defending today when they condemn Joseph Smith for shutting down that newspaper: libel, violence, threats, dehumanizing attacks, and support for genocide. The newspaper smartly did not specify slavery as their reason for hating the Church—aside from their ridicule of Joseph Smith’s abolitionist presidential platform and his plan to purchase freedom for all of the South’s slaves. You can detect pro-slavery sentiment beneath the surface, but the racist seed of Anti-Mormonism had by this time exploded into a host of other issues, and that’s what the Nauvoo Expositor offered. In fact, in this pro-genocide newspaper you find the genesis of today’s Anti-Mormon narratives, rotating from issues to issues which are so common on blogs and Reddit. It’s the same rhetoric. The same arguments; the same issues; the same accusations; the same hate. It is extremely telling that this is the basis for today’s anti-
Mormon rhetoric and this is what anti-Mormons defend in their justification of the cold-blooded murder of Joseph Smith.

**Joseph Smith’s Anti-Slavery Run For President** - In 1844, Joseph Smith ran for President of the United States on a political platform based primarily on abolishing slavery. He declared: “My cogitations, like Daniel’s, have for a long time troubled me when I viewed... two or three millions of people are held as slaves for life because the spirit in them is covered with a darker skin than ours... The wisdom which ought to characterize the freest, wisest, and most noble nation of the nineteenth century should, like the sun in his meridian splendor, warm every object beneath its rays; and the main efforts of her officers, who are nothing more nor less than the servants of the people, ought to be directed to ameliorate the condition of all, black or white, bond or free.” Joseph Smith was murdered by the Anti-Mormon mobs soon after taking this stand.

This marked what American in general thought of “Mormons.” After pro-slavery anti-Mormons had expelled the pioneers to Utah, newspapers whipped up a hysteria because the Church was importing immigrant converts from around the world and mixing races into a single society. Life Magazine published a political cartoon showing a “Mormon Elder” holding hands which his children which are depicted as Native American, Black, White, Chinese, and other races.

After the Civil War, this racism evolved into a moral crusade against polygamy, and the government started jailing Latter-day Saint men for having multiple wives. I find it interesting that now, as then, anti-Mormons slam the Church for consensual adult relationships. One minute anti-Mormons are preaching about tolerance, diverse
sexuality, “love is love”, etc. and the next they say Joseph Smith had his murder coming for deciding to love differently.

**Abolishing Native American Slavery** – But before the Civil War, back when Brigham Young arrived in Utah and got to work building a civilization from empty wilderness, one of his first orders of business was to abolish the slave practice among Native Americans. Phony historians claim Latter-day Saint settlers purchased Indian slaves, but the truth is they purchased them to set them free and adopt them into their families. It was a couple hundred pioneers versus 12,000 Native Americans and Brigham Young couldn’t just order them to completely change their economic system they had been practicing for many thousands of years, and tribes demanded that Latter-day Saints take part in trade. But in 1851, Brigham Young took a gamble and Utah legislature formally banned interstate slave trade. Powerful disgruntled corporations immediately sought retribution, and their appeals to federal government combined with the anti-polygamy hysteria led to the United State’s pro-slavery president sending on army to conquer “rogue” Utah.

There had to be compromise for the sake of survival. And so, further legislation allowed for indentured servitude with a limit of 20 years, which ensured that slavery would be totally eradicated in a short amount time.

**A History Of Civil Rights** - Have church members made mistakes? Of course. We wish the Utah legislature had taken a hard line against slavery and let the consequences, come as they may. It would have been heroic. But they needed to survive, and the anti-Mormons were a grave threat. I believe church-involved racial policies that historians love to attacks us with were pragmatic measures of survival, and that the policies were designed to erode the prevalent racism of the time so that we could enjoy a new age of equality of opportunity today. Instead attacking us, skeptics and news media should turn their microscope to the Anti-Mormon community which was founded on racism.

The bible tells us the Lord blesses all equally “that call upon him” (Romans 10:12), and “there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Yet slavery is never outright condemned in the bible and it never actually promoted social measures that were inclusive and racially just. The Book of Mormon condemns racism and promotes equality in a way the bible does not:

“...he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.”

2 Nephi 26:33
All are alike unto God, not just in the Church but in general. So then why were the Lamanites cursed with a skin of blackness? Skin of blackness was only the sign of the curse, not the curse itself; the curse was being born into a family and culture that did not believe in or practice the true gospel, exactly like ex-church member families today. There is debate over what “skin of blackness” has to do with that, and some theories are that it wasn’t referring to the people’s actual skin color. In any case, only a couple years later the prophet Jacob strongly admonished the Nephites for being racist, saying skin color has nothing to do with righteousness, and spiritual filthiness will be determined at final judgment day:

“O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.

Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.”  

2 Nephi 26:33

One of the prophets who cried repentance to the Nephites proudly introduced himself as a Lamanite: “Behold, I Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord.” He prophesied of an imminent “curse” upon the people, flipping the idea on its head that Lamanites were cursed and had no business telling Nephites what to do. Here it was a Lamanite being called by God and the Nephites being under a curse. Samuel the Prophet indicates the Nephites were racist in their reaction: “And now, because I am a Lamanite, and have spoken unto you the words which the Lord hath commanded me, and because it was hard against you, ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me, and have cast me out from among you.” But none of the arrows could touch him as you stood boldly upon the wall. Throughout the Book of Mormon, racism is strongly condemned. It thoroughly explains why quality and inclusiveness are effective in bringing souls to Christ.

Well what about the racial priesthood policy?

We do not know why races were temporarily prevented from priesthood office in early days of the Church. Brigham Young said African-Americans were effected by some kind of “curse” that prevented them from holding priesthood office which he incorrectly associated with Cain. He remarked that others were born into a circumstance that gave them more privilege—something we call “white privilege” today—and he cited language in the federal Constitution that prevented African-Americans from being
seen as equal as the cause. When he instituted the temporary policy he prophesied that once general society eliminated much of the racial inequality in America, then the policy would be lifted:

“That slavery will continue, until there is a people raised up upon the face of the earth who will contend for righteous principles, who will not only believe in but operate, with every power and faculty given to them to help to establish the kingdom of God, to overcome the devil, and drive him from the earth, then will this curse be removed... That time will come when they will have the privilege of all we have the privilege of and more.”

Brigham Young, Feb. 5, 1852

The Civil War which fixed much of the structured societal inequality went on to affect change throughout the world, as Joseph Smith prophesied they would. National inequality apparently restricted church policy, and I suspect the pro-slavery politicians sending armies to wage war with Utah had something to do with that. But reaction to immediate circumstances can be seen throughout the bible: in the Old Testament, priesthood was restricted to the sons of Aaron and Jesus instructed his disciples to avoid preaching to Gentiles at first. It is unfortunate history and we can only speculate why it had to be that way, but we can always learn from history and pledge to stand true to our legacy of equality through meritocracy, as our ancestors labored tirelessly to provide us with circumstances where societal inequality and inborn privilege would not be such a worry, and we can press forward to even greater circumstances for our children. I think it is a mistake to condemn our ancestors when we weren’t there to witness the constraints they were under and what they produced for us was a world free of many of the problems they were given.

There is still racial inequality and inborn privilege to deal with. If we would just stick by our principles—let the armies come, let the newspapers print cartoons, let mobs publish manifestos—we would always be on the right side. Media corporations spin historical narratives against us, but we must remember racism came from the doctrines of popular culture, and popular culture continues to sow racism today.

Modern Socialist philosophies intersect racism with other forms of inequality, but we must always value meritocracy. Refusing to administer sacred ordinances to those who commit sinful actions, for example, is not the same as racism. Equality without merit is Lucifer’s plan, and achievement through personal righteousness is God’s plan. Divine revelation is superior to social justice, and those today who tear down statues, give unmerited rewards, and spread racial division in the name of equality are perpetuating racism. Those who demand “equality” for people regardless of behavior are not basing justice on divine mandate; and because justice is the foundation of the rest of the gospel, their entire entire testimony of God must fall apart.
The True Definition Of Justice

Divine Justice vs. Social Justice – Plenty of atheists are good people and plenty of Christians are not, but only faith provides the foundation for morality because faith is how we discover immaterial truth. Without faith, logical to attempts to form systems of justice never work out, because mankind is not capable of establishing justice without faith. Humanity always falls short because greed prevents us from getting along. There is no motivation to stop someone devoid of faith from doing everything he can to increase his personal wealth at the plundering of society. Non-believers insist they are not out to plunder people, and that is no doubt true. But when an atheist feels a moral commitment for his fellow man, what is that moral commitment when it comes down to it? Isn’t it a feeling of family for each other? Isn’t it a belief in human potential and responsibility to help each other progress? These feelings and beliefs are intangible. If you take this moral behavior to its Socratic extreme, this is the very reasoning behind why God the creator of the universe must be a person. The atheist’s basis for morality is therefore the logic for God taken short of its natural conclusion. There would be no reason for a sense of human family or societal progression if there were no God. There is no human family without a Father, and you are only limiting justice by limiting the moral logic that extends to a need for God.

In order to avoid belief in God, the atheist’s moral tectonics shift toward social justice. Lately, I have realized that not only is justice the foundation of the gospel, it is the foundation of apostasy as well. If we could sum up the difference between the gospel and worldly philosophy—going back to the pre-mortal plan of Lucifer versus the plan of the Father, and if we could describe the paradigm shift of most who fall away from the Church—it could be summed up as a matter of social justice versus divine justice. Justice is the first piece of the puzzle in understanding the gospel.

Iterations of these competing systems of justice return throughout human history and they continue to clash today. Lucifer wanted a system where everyone could be saved by forcing people to conform to a central ideology, while God’s system was one of personal agency. Without faith to discover moral truth, morality becomes a product of popular consensus under Lucifer’s plan, and without a divine authority we require a dictator to equally distribute resources. Divine justice, on the other hand, considers truth to be an eternal law of nature and looks to God to distribute rewards for our progress based on merit rather than equality.

The Social Contract Is Not Enough – This social contract goes back to the caveman days. One tribe slaughtered a mammoth and had more meat than they could eat, so it gave some to the neighboring tribe. That tribe then slaughtered a mammoth and
shared some back, and soon they had an alliance that mutually benefited each other. This alliance then extended to economic trade and a system of laws that kept members of the allied tribes from hurting each other. The social contract has been a fine basis for some basic things—it’s the reason we stop at red lights and pay for things at the store. But the social contract alone could never be enough to provide the most basic civilized society because it does not recognize spiritual commitment. There is no motive for the tribe with meat to share to a tribe without meat if they don’t expect to receive something back in the future. Affectionate commitment does not come from a political alliance, as Lehi learned the hard way when Egypt failed to keep their commitment to protect Israel from Babylon. Social justice therefore requires a central government to force everyone to redistribute, but there never seems to be anyone virtuous enough to play the role of manager who does not plunder resources to benefit themselves. In order to provide a necessary level incentive, a Socialist government must become incredibly oppressive and controlling, and never seems to avoid collapsing under its own weight.

Social justice is forced to treat resources as a zero sum, like a pie that has only so much to go around and needs to be split up equality. This limits an individual by the class to which he is a member, because if one tribe has all the meat and the other tribe has no meat, how could a member of that other tribe possibly be well-fed? Makes sense, right? But if people were unable to break from the limits from their class, real progression would not be possible, because economic distribution does not incentivize a person to evolve beyond any previous point of progress. It does nothing to empower a member of the other group to successfully hunt for food. It treats individuals as units of production and consumption and does not recognize their human potential. We become cows in a field each getting our turn in the green part of the pasture.

**Merit, Mercy, & Commutative Justice** - Social justice treats morality the same way as it treats economics: a never-ending crusade for equality.

Equality! Equality! Equality!

Now, equality as a concept is a good thing, but the problem is that when it is achieved through redistribution it turns into an ideology that makes everyone the same. The fact is everyone is not equal, nor should everyone be equal. Some people are more virtuous than other people within their class, and some people have more resources because they have earned it, not because it was stolen. Real justice is not realized through equality. Real justice is a chasm between the virtuous and the unrighteous, and people who are miserable are usually to blame for their own misery. The gospel rewards merit while social justice punishes it.
We get mixed up about justice because the word “justice” has literally been revised in our dictionary. Today’s dictionary only recognizes social justice, but in centuries past the dictionary talked about commutative justice. The legal definition of commutative justice is “exact reparation... for an injury that has been done to another.” It basically means you have a responsibility to be civil and do good to those around you beyond your expectation of receiving reward or being compelled to behave well. This is justice beyond the social contract. Since this has been removed from our dictionary, incentive to behave well has become a matter of distribution, and that just doesn’t work. Distribution is not enough to repair an injury. As Elder Christofferson said: “Without His Redemption from death and sin, we have only a gospel of social justice. That may provide some help and reconciliation in the present, but it has no power to draw down from heaven perfect justice and infinite mercy. Ultimate redemption is in Jesus Christ and in Him alone.”

‘Mercy’ comes from the Latin word *merced* which means “wages to be paid.” This is a different concept than how Hollywood portrays mercy. There are wages to be paid for all behavior, the consequences to our actions, and “mercy” is the act of paying them. That’s how mercy satisfies justice: it produces the reaction that the action demands. When someone murders, justice demands that mercy provide wages for the perpetrator as well as the victim. What is social justice’s alternative solution to murder? How does it provide mercy? It ignores the crime. Rather than believing justice can be given in the afterlife, recompense is something most people simply don’t get. Social justice tells us the murderer must have committed murder because of some social inequality—everything is a class issue. And social justice takes away all weapons so that it is impossible to commit murder—it takes away the ability to commit sin rather than paying any kind of wage. Social justice is thus a wageless justice; it does not provide real mercy and people do not receive what they merit.

The question of merit goes back to Cain and Abel. Why was Abel’s sacrifice to God accepted and Cain’s was rejected? God explained to Cain that justice is a system of meritocracy: if you do well you will be rewarded and if you don’t you will get nothing. Cain understood sacrifice to be about the social contract—he thought he was giving up something now for the greater good, to receive a better reward in the future. But sacrifice was really about emulating God and recognizing the atonement of Jesus Christ as the basis for our redemption. Sacrifice must employ the faith process:

“That man was not able himself to erect a system, or plan with power sufficient to free himself from a destruction which awaited him, is evident from the fact that God... prepared a sacrifice in the gift of His own Son who should be sent in due time, to whence he had been cast out for disobedience. From time to time these glad tidings were sounded in the ears of men in different ages of the world down to the time of Messiah’s coming. By faith in this atonement or plan
of redemption, Abel offered God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered the fruit of the ground, and it was not accepted, because he could not do it in faith, he could have no faith, or could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the only Begotten to atone for man; for this was the plan of redemption, and without the shedding of blood was no remission; and as the sacrifice was instituted for a type, by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared; to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, because redemption was not purchased in that way, nor the power of atonement instituted after that order; consequently Cain could have no faith; and whatsoever is not faith, is sin.”

First Presidency Letter To Missionaries Jan. 22, 1834

The reason today’s ideology of social justice flourishes is because it is good for business. Big corporations want more consumers and cheaper production so that they can centralize economic control. Social justice provides greater profitability for big corporations as they become the authorities in power. Woke moral platitudes and media crusades are carefully designed to solidify their authoritative positions. A farm is productive when a central farmer is in charge and all the cows get equal access to green fields. But this is at the cost of everyone else: we become serfs working for oligarchical lords. Today, we live in an age where economics is a golden idol, where morality is a product of the social contract, and faith is not encouraged. Growth comes when individuals are treated as more than mere units of production and consumption—when people are empowered to reach toward their divine potential. The limitations of social justice reduce us to the effects of entropy, where all members of society are certainly equal but devolving to less complexity, not more.

**Why God Must Exist** – In his youth, the prophet Abraham struggled to logically determine spiritual truth, living in an idolatrous society. He couldn’t find the value in worshiping pieces of clay, and he decided God must be whatever the ultimate creative force of the universe is. But how do we determine what that supreme force is? Is it fire? Water puts out fire. Is it rain clouds? Wind blows away rain clouds. Is it wind? A human can stand against the wind. Through this rational exercise, Abraham determined God must be a human being because human beings have the potential to be the greatest power in the universe. We create, therefore God is a person who creates. If God is a person, there is seemingly no limit to our potential as living beings with free agency if we progress far enough. God therefore must be either a person, either that or God is death and everything is up to chance. Abraham was so sure of this hypothesis that he was willing to be placed on a sacrificial altar to test it.

Later, when the Lord appeared to Moses, He proved His godliness by showing Moses the vast creations of his hand. This enabled Moses to later look upon the devil and
question, “Where is thy glory that I should worship thee?” The character of God as a creator gives us structure and direction in life and establishes the reason why we should worship Him. This relationship provides a path for us to progress, as children growing up to be parents of our own.

Why would a person worship the workmanship of his own hand when his hand is clearly the superior element having created that thing? Idolatry has it backwards. Yet idolatry was what many in ancient times practiced. Don’t people today also worship the workmanship of their hands? When people place top importance on their jobs, houses, cars, and other such physical things rather than valuing the creative human mind that has power to shape those things and invent greater things, they are idolatrous. People look to physical wealth to provide for their needs and to dictate their moral structure instead of valuing their potential as a creator. A man who believes the universe happened by chance will thus reject his role as a purposeful creator and turn to hedonism and short-sighted pleasures.

Belief in God is the struggle to be masters over our environment and discover the ultimate purpose in life. Because God, the source of spiritual discovery, is our father, we approach Him as any son or daughter would approach their parents. We communicate just as people communicate with each other, except spiritually, through prayer.

**Accessing Truth Through Prayer** – The method to gain knowledge we all learned in primary was to search, ponder, and pray. All the prophets, like Joseph Smith, searched the scriptures with specific questions in mind, pondered them, and approached God in fervent prayer. We do not have prayer books in the Church to prescribe what people should say in their prayers, nor do we suggest what questions they should ponder. Yet many who leave the Church do: of the many skeptics I have come across, I have yet to find a single one who came up with their questions on their own and who searched, pondered, and prayed sincerely and fervently and received no answer. Skeptics parrot the same talking points they read on a website or heard from a friend, speak the same lines, and ask the same questions, because skepticism is mimetic. They find it difficult to attempt prayer because prayer is not mimetic, in fact it enables a person to break away from the cultural norms and life conditioning and truly address spiritual needs in an original and independent way.

Here are the steps for prayer:

1. Throw away the skeptical rhetoric you saw on that website or heard from a friend. Come up with your own concerns and ideas.
2. Write down your personal spiritual questions. Such questions may come down to something like: *Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?* If you feel silly doing this, remember the importance of these questions.
3. Gather information for these questions from a variety of sources, as you find them from scripture, tenets of various denominations, friends, popular culture, etc. Do not exclude any source without first considering what they have to offer. Ponder each answer humbly.

4. In a peaceful setting, speak to God out loud in the name of Jesus Christ. Ask God to answer the questions or confirm that the answers you are leaning toward are correct. Remember, spiritual questions have spiritual answers, which produce a warm feeling in the heart, an enlightened mind, a profound experience, etc. As an answer, look for anything that is positive and good, as that which is good comes from God.

The hardest part of prayer is listening. We listen and feel for the warm feeling and enlightenment, closing our eyes and concentrating. Through repeated practice we get better at discerning thoughts, impressions, and feelings that did not originate from ourselves. We must then judge whether this spiritual intervention is from God or an evil spirit.

I think we would all be shocked to discover how little of our behavior is a direct result of our own will. Most beliefs, thoughts, and behavior are conditioned into us, and psychologists could accurately predict decisions we will make based on the environment we grew up in. Probably less than 1% of an average person’s thoughts are truly original thoughts. From the day we first stepped into Kindergarten, the duties of social justice have been drilled into us: be a civil member of society, be a good producer and consumer, etc. Through prayer we can shed the influence of culture, family, school, and everything else to get to the core of our identities and gain control to be agents over ourselves. This process is what is known as “humility,” and usually it requires painful experiences to get us there. We can avoid humbling experiences if we on our own let go of preconceptions and justifications, distractions that are so important to us. Remove all biases from the experiment so that you can achieve a truly accurate result. You can only recognize influences of the Spirit of God when you get down to the core of who you are.

The adversary tells us we must not pray to progress, but the truth is prayer is necessary to understand God. There are all kinds of influences, and there are evil spirits leading us astray just as there is the Holy Ghost affirming our role as children of God. To deny the reality of these spiritual influences is to give yourself up to that spirit which promises material reward and pleasure, which is Satan. To explore spirituality through prayer and find the source of light is liberating, for freedom is knowing your true identity.
Restore Your Testimony

**Constant Re-evaluation** – It feels cataclysmic experiencing a faith crisis. It is terrifying and relieving at the same time. For so long you have denied simple reality, like a log jam in a river, and so many other things have jammed up behind it, building pressure, and when the log jam releases it is an explosion. So what now? Well, what is to prevent another log jam from immediately building? As I explained, perfectionism and resentment lead to some pretty awful places, and whatever it was that made the Church a problem for you didn’t just evaporate once you left the Church. You are still the same person. The way to avoid future log jams and shelves crashing is to avoid any issues from going unaddressed in the future, and that means constantly addressing problems. Constant evolution.

I think this is what Lehi meant when he urged his struggling sons to be like a river, ever flowing toward the source of all righteousness. Eastern philosophies treat people like rivers that are constantly in a state of change, and when it comes to you personal identity it’s not so much what you are as it is where you are directed. This kind of outlook allows a person to be flexible and take control of his pursuits.

This is what the process of repentance in the Church is all about. Taking the sacrament is a death and rebirth process, like a reptile shedding its skin, where we become new people, and there is no limit to how radical the change we undergo if we allow it. This weekly ordinance includes constant re-evaluations throughout the week, but the longer we go refusing to self-evaluate and seek change the more hardened we become in a weak and inferior state. The longer we refuse to bring to the sacrament table our hurtful experiences, doubts about the gospel, and unhealthy lifestyle pursuits, the messier the log jam becomes—and it inevitably will burst.

A faith crisis is thus the body demanding repentance happen. *Well isn’t that a good thing? Isn’t repentance good?* Sure. The problem is when things settle back to the way they were before, like a fault line in the earth’s crust after an earthquake building up for another seismic cataclysm. That’s when the ground gets torn to pieces. Periodic explosions of re-evaluation tear a person apart while constant evaluation and aspirational pursuit, slow and steady, is healthy.

**Control Of Self-Identity** – A person who fashions his identity and ideology based on contradiction will always be a mere soldier following orders. If you judge the value of something based on a template of perfection, whoever handed you that template of perfection will always have control. The recent “NPC” meme that has swept the world illustrates our desire to take control of our lives. NPC (Non-Player Character) is a pre-programmed character in a computer game that thinks and acts exactly as it has been
programmed to. The phenomenon of huge mobs of people online repeating the same messages and phrases leads many to wonder if the majority of people in the world behave and think exactly as controlling powers have conditioned them to. Most people repeat memes and consider themselves original and edgy. I’m sure skeptics would accuse me of behaving and acting as the Church has programmed me to. Yet nothing in this TBM letter has been copied or based on anything else—I can veritably claim that it is original and objective. We do not have prayer books, we do not chant vague slogans, and we do not meme off each other. More to the point, our ideology does not hold people to a template of perfection or deconstruction of conflicting values, as Socialism and other philosophies of men do. The gospel treats the individual as a potential god with an independent will and agency for his own actions. They parrot mimetic slogan; we bear personal testimonies.

This is why the redemption of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ is important. Rather than solving human imperfection through compulsion and adherence to a template, the plan of salvation redeems sin through the mystery of Christ’s grace after we practice faith and endeavor toward greater righteousness. You do not change the core of your being into something else but rather refine and build upon the original identity of who you are. The word “temple” has the same root as the word “template”, because pagan Greek temples were all about deconstruction and copying. But that’s not what our holy temples do. Our ordinances encourage us to see with spiritual eyes and evaluate our eternal goals, to see the direction we are flowing like a river. This is why the temple uses so much water imagery of rivers.

How are you supposed to fix something if you don’t recognize imperfection, and how are you supposed to find imperfection if you don’t look at yourself critically? The faith crisis can be good for your testimony if you take the opportunity to grow humility, but that is only the first step. Whether a faith crisis leads toward better faith or toward NPC-like behavior depends on whether you criticize yourself by comparing yourself to a template or whether you evaluate eternal goals for yourself. It’s one or the other, and comparing yourself to a template will turn you into an NPC. Evaluating eternal goals will liberate your soul as you utilize your faith crisis as the first step.

**Reconstructing Your Testimony** – The testimony you rebuild will be different from before. There will be some things that you considered fundamental to your world before that will need to be radically altered, and the deeper you fall into humility at this stage the more open you will be to changing things that need to be changed. Be open to anything. The process of rebuilding a truer testimony is parallel to the process of losing it.

Consider each step of losing your faith and see how that can be turned around to something positive.
1. Faith Challenges – Anti-Mormon rhetoric touches on those life issues that have festered in the heart for so long, pushing ever stronger for some justification. A person’s intellect, heart, and spirit need to be in alignment; if the head says one thing while the heart says something else, this is how you know there is a life problem that needs to be addressed. The heart is like a telephone pole that becomes loaded with more and more wires until they become hopelessly heavy and entangled. Isolate these personal issues and untangle them from association with the Church. Is it about the Church? Talk about the issues in terms of you rather than them.

In order to untangle the issues you need to look at where the wires run. How does each small issue form into an overall narrative? Follow the small twigs back to the large branches of the tree. Anti-Mormon rhetoric isn’t so much about correct information as it about narrative. They present a small handful of big lies—“Joseph Smith victimized women” or “The Book of Mormon is made-up”, etc.—and they back up those lies with a bunch of smaller narratives.

- What are the big narratives you have accepted? Write them down, and then make a list for each one of the reasons you accept the big narratives. For example, under “The Book of Mormon is made-up” you might write down: “quotes incorrectly from Isaiah 9:1.” Make your reasons detailed and specific.

- Next, isolate each of those reasons detached from the overall narrative. No longer think about the Book of Mormon quoting from Isaiah in terms of whether it makes the Book of Mormon legitimate or not. All you are asking is whether it actually quotes from Isaiah correctly or not.

Then, research extensively. Some tips as you research: Don’t judge people’s motivations, consider historical bias in your sources, consider your own historical bias, consider the possibility of fabricated sources, look for context, always look for the other side of the argument, use raw information sources rather than someone’s interpretation, and keep it as simple as possible. On my site ConflictOfJustice.com I address many common reasons ex-church members accept the big narratives and how to see past their deceptions. There are many other helpful resources out there.

- Before you piece this all together, you need to confront your own cognitive bias. What are your emotions saying? Maybe you were taught in primary class to be tolerant and accepting, but now you see a bunch of mean and hateful church policies that exclude people. Why would the Church teach kids to be inclusive yet have policies that exclude entire groups of people? Intellectual research will only go so far—you need to consider what your heart is saying. Write down your specific emotional opinions on a separate sheet of paper and address each one independently and objectively. As you do so, write down what all possible alternatives to the church’s solutions are. What is the alternative to the Church’s restrictive definition of family? Consider those alternative plans objectively and fully. Maybe those solutions sound nice in this one little aspect but are they really better as an overall ideology? What are the end results, for individuals and overall society?
The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, and it is easy to be critical of "Mormon culture" when you have lived in Utah all your life and taken advantage of the benefits. Escape the Mormon bubble and critically analyze what other systems are doing. Friends and family can give you all the reasons in the world to appreciate the Church but it won't make any difference at all until you decide the gospel will change your misery into happiness. How does each ideology truly satisfy you emotionally?

- Now, form your own narrative independently of what you have heard from someone else. What does all of this mean? If you follow the twigs back to the branches and then those branches back to the trunk of the tree, is it a good tree or a bad tree? What about alternatives? Have you put alternative ideologies under the same microscope? A lot of ex-church members seem to throw their hands up in the air and exclaim, "Oh well I'm agnostic!" But you can't go through life without some moral structure and belief system. That is just lazily refusing to scrutinize the new ideology you have accepted, probably because you are scared of what you will find. Scrutinize every argument, every connection to a narrative, and every narrative back to your belief system, and scrutinize boldly and humbly.

- Reconcile your original faith-challenging experiences with what you now know in your heart, mind, and spirit. Accept what happened and understand why it happened.

2. Read Pro-Church Websites – My humble website Conflict of Justice will be helpful in gathering information and perspectives. Of course, understand that it all comes with a pro-church bias. ex-church members are stereotypically defensive about their understanding of the Church—many go on and on about how they know more about the Church than anyone and were more involved than anyone. But maybe you actually didn’t understand something correctly. In any case, it is hard to hate someone once you really listen to them and understand why they believe the way they do.

3. Justify To Yourself Investigating The Church – It may sound silly to consider yourself an "investigator," but this is important as one way to overcome your anxiety about the church. You are just investigating the truth, like a detective. What kept you from confronting those items on your shelf all those years? What is keeping you now from really getting answers and considering the issues objectively and un-entangled from the church?

It’s tough to get over the emotional block that keeps you fearful of gaining a testimony. It’s a lot like deciding to date or marry someone, there is fear of commitment. The most hardened anti-Mormon at times takes a second look at the church and starts to feel like maybe the church isn’t so bad, when their conscience strikes and they reconsider some of the vitriol they had convinced themselves about Latter-day Saints. They take the first few steps toward rebuilding their testimony, but then the emotional block shows up. They freak out about it and snap back into anti-Mormon mode, afraid they are like a victim of abuse returning to their abuser. They find someone or something to convince them not to let it happen. They often have some anti-Mormon buddy or “therapist” talk them out of it. They cannot justify to themselves investigating the belief system they decided to reject, and they cannot admit that
there might be some merit to it, all because they don’t have the confidence to investigate truth.

It helps to get advice from a wise objective third-party friend, from someone who knows little about the church. In order to proceed, you need to be able to explain why it is valuable for you to seek fuller understanding of the church and find something good about it.

4. Internalize Your Own Narratives – Literature such as my site are helpful, but the most important source is the raw original historical information, and fundamental scriptures. Read the scriptures. I know, you’ve read the scriptures before, but just do it again with this new mindset in place. It will be both spiritually and physically straining, but you are healing and that is never easy. You cannot claim to objectively know about something if your basis is Wikipedia, Antimo hate sites, and your own bitter experiences.

5. Stop Blaming The Church

6. Deep Investigation Into Church – At this point your investigation into the Church will involve reading raw historical documents, world history, and complicated theological issues. You will begin to finally tackle deeper issues such as eternal progression.

At this point you should try to talk to God as if you are a new investigator. Pray. Just try it. If nothing results then you can finally know it was all delusion, right? Just try the experiment of faith, on any level of profoundness and in regards to any small issue, and pray to God about it.

7. Heal Bitterness – Maybe you won’t accept the gospel and you will continue being an atheist. Either way, this process will help you feel profound peace. You will finally conquer your demons and feel no need to hate groups of people. Maybe there is at least a part of the gospel you can accept. Maybe you can use faith productively in some areas of your life. You won’t get to this point right away but eventually you won’t be afraid anymore to consider it.

8. Find Correct Ideology – Your beliefs will end up being something different than you ever imagined. They will be different than before when you were a good faithful church member. Beliefs can be different yet reach the same conclusion. But now you can be confident and your reasons will be decided by yourself. The relationship is between you and God. Remember, you don’t truly know something until you can explain it to someone else in your own words, so testify.

This is how to start believing in something again and feeling again. No longer will you be reliant on others. You will no longer be defensive or need to feel like you are something you are not. You will start to see a lot of things you didn’t before—corporate greed driving our corrupt popular culture, the necessity of posterity and heritage in personal fulfillment, priesthood as an empowering source of personal confidence, wisdom to be found in classic societal principles, etc. You thought being skeptical of the church was like Neo in *The Matrix* taking the red pill, but the twist is there are more red pills for you to take until you accept truth as whatever it may be.
The iron rod is not a safe space. The iron rod does not dictate every little thing for you to do or believe. It is not the Church’s job to train you like a soldier. If you feel that the Church kept things from you it was because you failed to do your own research and think for yourself. Clinging to the iron rod is not easy, and it does not make you reliant on others for strength. Sure, you can feel safe and self-fulfilled as you enter the great and spacious building because of the fancy aesthetics and mighty imagery it presents, the loving and moral high ground it claims to hold. But those who accept that facade are foolish themselves. Atheists who think everything happens by chance are ignoring simple reality. You do not need to be the most learned professor who ever lived to understand why we need to believe in God the Creator.

Please Communicate – “The evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.” It is sad that pretty much everyone who leaves the church gives up on God, and it’s because they stop communicating spiritually. It doesn’t have to be that way. Times of faith crisis are when we should be praying the most and growing spiritually independent in our personal relationship with our Heavenly Father, whichever direction it might take us. Likewise, the evil spirit teaches us to avoid communicating with family and friends. The evil spirit separates us from those who support us here on earth, and it is the classic debacle that always seems to doom mankind: failure to communicate.

Even the skeptics on Facebook who go off about their criticisms of the church aren’t really communicating. They are ranting but never really listening. When I try to talk to such skeptics they block me. Experts advise people suffering from depression to try to talk to loved ones—to overcome the hurdle that leads a person to retreat from everyone—and I think those who are spiritually depressed likewise are helped by talking to those they love. Have faith in your loved ones, that they aren’t out to brainwash you but that they truly respect your opinions. Have confidence in yourself to be capable of spiritual maturity and to be worthy of communication with the divine Creator of spirits. Have faith that your spiritual Father loves you enough to answer your prayers and guide you in paths of success.

It is not in hopes of some distant reward in heaven that we in the church love and help those around us. It is not because of expectations of others that I served a mission, or that I pay my fast offerings, or that I spend countless hours providing answers on my website to questions about the church. It is not out of fear of damnation or to fit in to the crowd. I do not self-righteously consider myself the knower of all things; I am a person of no greater potential than you. The reason I do this is because I now know who I am and what I want. I have worked very hard to research existential questions and face my own human fallibility, to find my place in this universe and understand why I do what I do. I have gazed into the abyss of life’s awful realities and accepted the incredible capability of evil I and others possess—I am now more able to perform
either evil or good, but I am more determined to choose good. I have knocked down the fake stage-sets that most in western society accept around them; I see what is really going on, while most people move along with the herd and follow their programming. This independence enables me to achieve what others have not even imagined.

I want the fabled western dream that is a mirage to most Millennials: to be a parent in a happy functional family, and I recognize that modern atheistic humanism is no basis for a family. What is romantic about two people satiating their evolutionary urge to propagate the species? That’s love? What is profound about parents training their offspring to be civil producers and consumers in an economy? That’s parenting? What is achieved by the typical routine of waking up, grabbing a Starbucks, working a job, and then coming home to play video games? My destiny is to be a pioneer like my ancestors who as orphaned small children walked step by step across the American continent to establish their Zion. While most people go along with what’s expected of them, there are two types of people: those who create and those who destroy, and my purpose is to design and create. The potential for what I create is limitless, and though it is not easy at times, it is real and this is me. It begins with the relationship I create with the love of my life and my children whom I love more than anything. That is a dream few these days get to realize, yet I have achieved it. It extends in my influence on my community and the world in general, as I do my small part to improve the environment around me. I am a pioneer, and my purpose is to create Zion. Though the opposition is impossibly thick, I will persist and I will win in the end. I will rejoice in my posterity and dwell in the village I have created, while those in the great and spacious building who choose to be dutiful slaves to popular culture oppose me every step of the way.

This is why I stay in the church.