

Well folks, buckle up and strap in. Prepare yourselves for another story about a true believing Mormon discovering the truth.

I was born into the church, into a family of 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> generation Mormons. My family helped to found Mesa, Arizona, by way of commandment from the brethren in Utah. There are plenty in Phoenix's "East Valley" that share my surname.

**My life was the typical LDS affair.** I was baptized, received the priesthood, baptized my cousin because her dad was a cheating, lying S.O.B. I held various callings as a youth, and for the vast majority of my teenage years I was president of the various priesthood classes, or first counselor to the Bishop in the Priest Quorum. Boy Scouts was important to me, and I earned my Eagle Scout and Faith in God (or was it Duty to God?) awards. I was trusted, and people knew they could count on me. I prided myself on being loyal and dependable.

My testimony on the truthfulness of the gospel was not created in one fell swoop. I had countless spiritual experiences throughout my life, including firesides, scout or father and son campouts, and hearing the testimonies of others. I've always been quick to trust and have found it easy to believe the testimonies of others. There was never an instant where I "knew" the church was true; **just a culmination of experiences**, feelings as I went through the motions.

In high school I wrote a fantasy novel. I enjoyed reading and writing, and was particularly fond of the science fiction and fantasy genres. On my mission, I used this as a testimony to validate the Book of Mormon. I knew that an unlearned farm boy could not write such book, for if I, being educated, struggled to write a 200 page novel without contradictions or errors, then surely **he couldn't write 531 pages of inspirational awesomeness**.

My mission was in Brazil. It was constantly said that the degree of suffering and hardship we experienced on the mission would directly correlate to the hotness of one's wife. My wife is absolutely a 10, so they weren't wrong there. Each day was a struggle. It was hot, humid, and the chafing was unbearable despite my best efforts to treat the affected areas. Within a few months I had a decent grasp of the Portuguese language. It was a testimony to me that the gift of tongues was real. Except, **why did other Elders struggle with the language to varying degrees?** It appeared that different Elders experienced the same gift to different degrees. Could it come down to worthiness? I had "fooled around" before my mission, and had even waited until 6 months in to disclose some of the greater sins to my mission president....clearly it wasn't down to worthiness.

My mission president saw fit to keep my in the mission field. I doubled down and worked harder. **I obeyed the rules to a T.** Out by 10am, back by 9:30pm...because coming home at 8:30 or 9:00pm would be considered shameful. I worked hard. I baptized a lot of people. I felt persecuted. I was empowered by that persecution. I read the Book of Mormon eleven times. I studied and planned with my companions each day. I never left the mission boundaries...partly because we couldn't, being surrounded by jungle on all sides.... With less than a year under my belt, I was "promoted" straight from senior companion to Zone Leader. I skipped District Leader, and figured that my hard work had paid off. At the end of my mission, I trained two different newbies. It felt good being able to leave them as my legacy.

After the mission I went out of state to attend school (not BYU). There was a small Mormon population...only a few dozen active members. We gathered weekly for institute, but going to church became difficult. I couldn't connect with any of them, unlike my ward back home. I still believed everything the church taught, and I knew I was rebelling against God.

While at school I met my wife. Being two young, attractive individuals with previous...ahem...experience...we quickly fell in love and found ourselves getting physical. I lost my virginity to her. She was LDS, and we both felt guilt for the things we'd done. We decided to confess our sins. Her bishop was

understanding and loving. My bishop, **who I didn't even know**, led me straight into disciplinary action. I felt no love from the men who were there. I felt exposed, unwanted, unworthy of God, and unworthy of their time. I was disfellowshipped...nearly excommunicated, according to the bishop, who had seen fit to be "merciful" towards me. I left feeling more lost than I'd ever felt; but I knew I loved my wife-to-be.

To the dismay of my controlling father, I left school and got married in an LDS chapel. My dad was not pleased, and couldn't put on a happy face for our wedding. His words of encouragement were: "See you at the Temple in a year." Pretty lame, dad. But here we are, 7 years in and happier than ever!

Long story short, we did get sealed a year later. We both believed in the gospel. We went to the Temple often. We had callings and attended our church meetings. We were faithful in our tithes and offerings. We home taught and did visiting teaching. **We were happy, in our own sterile sort of way.**

It wasn't until years later, two children in, that we experienced our first stumbling block. For about 4-5 months straight, our family passed illnesses around like a hot potato. For whatever reason, **we ended up missing church most Sundays**. We went maybe 2-3 times during that period. It was just SO much easier staying home rather than try to absorb something spiritual from sacrament meeting with two fussy babies to deal with. What was the point of going if I couldn't learn anything or feel the spirit?

We started to say "Hey, it's kind of nice not having to go to church!" We spent time as a family and did things together! I was working a rough schedule and going to school full time, so Sundays became our family day. We relaxed. We played. **We enjoyed doing things together!** I was at odds with this...the Church teaches that happiness resides within the gospel, and that we're blessed when we obey the commandments...yet here I was **finding more joy** in my new-found Sundays than I'd found in years.