

# Why I Left the Mormon Church

*by Brandon Pearce*

May, 2011

If you know me, it may surprise you to learn that I have left the LDS (Mormon) church, and you might be wondering what would cause a fully committed 100% active member of the church to do such a thing. Let me put your mind at rest and say that it's not because of sin, greed, being offended, or reading anti-Mormon books. It's also not because I stopped reading my scriptures and going to church. I loved the church, was very happy in it, saw almost no wrong in it, and tried to live my life as much in compliance with its teachings as I possibly could - and I have done so my entire life. I served an honorable mission to Japan, was married in the Temple and started a family soon after. I was serving as the 1st counselor in a branch presidency at the time, and almost all my family and friends were members of the church, and had been for generations. At age 30, leaving was certainly not an easy decision, and I did not make it lightly.

In this letter, I'm going to share with you the events and thought processes that led me to leaving the church. Then I'll discuss the beliefs I have abandoned and kept, things I miss from the church, as well as the benefits I feel I've gained from leaving. Finally, I'll discuss my current belief system and how it is evolving.

Don't worry, I'm not going to use this letter to try and convince you to leave the church. This is a personal story about me. And I believe the church does a lot of good for many people, so if you are happy there, stay. However, if you are a believing member of the church, this document may be difficult for you read, and may stir up some uncomfortable emotions as I go into detail about what caused me to leave.

Also, you may have a tendency to judge my decisions based on your experience, and place negative and untrue labels on me (lost, delusional, anti-Mormon). Doing so doesn't really affect me, but it does place a barrier between us. Of course it's difficult to put yourself completely in someone else's shoes, but I invite you to try to understand my story from a fresh perspective, not the one you've always had. For just a moment, if you can forget what you think you now know, and examine the evidence yourself with an open mind, you will have a better understanding of where I'm coming from and how I arrived at where I did. This may also give you a deeper understanding of what you believe and why. If this idea scares you, then you may want to stop reading here. I have no desire to tear apart anyone's faith.

## Part I: What Caused Me to Leave?

### Drawing Closer to the Spirit

Those who know me, know that I have always tried to live my life according to the Spirit. I never

used to listen to music or watch movies if it brought a negative feeling. I didn't even like church dances for that reason -- I was very sensitive to the heavy beats and felt it took the spirit away. I kept my Sunday clothes on all day Sunday to remind me to be more reverent. There were periods of my life where I attended the Temple multiple times per week. The church was my life, and gospel perspectives influenced every decision I made. Sometimes to the extreme.

I also loved the peaceful feeling I felt when I read my scriptures, attended church, the Temple, and did service. And I loved receiving guidance from the Holy Ghost in my life. However, like most people, I found it difficult to interpret my feelings and to know whether what I was feeling was simply my thoughts and emotions, or whether it was God talking to me. Regardless, I loved the peaceful feelings of the spirit and constantly sought to increase their frequency and intensity in my life.

I've also had a few key spiritual experiences in my life that were very powerful, and were an anchor to my testimony for many years. Each of these experiences included tingling all over my body and an incredible feeling of joy, which I absolutely "knew" was the Spirit, even though, interestingly, one of the experiences never brought forth the promised fruit. Still, I wondered why I was so blessed to have these spiritual experiences, and how I could have similar spiritual experiences again.

I was taught in church, and subsequently taught others as a missionary, that the warm peaceful feelings you feel (ie. the burning in the bosom) are the Spirit of God communicating to you that whatever you are doing, thinking, or feeling in that moment is "true". We taught Moroni 10:3-5, which teaches that if we read the Book of Mormon and ask about it with sincerity, the Holy Ghost will tell us if it's true. As a missionary, if we could get people to feel a peaceful feeling when they pray (or at any time, really), we were eager to point out that it's the spirit telling them that our message, and our church, is true. These feelings are the foundation of a testimony for many members, as it was for me.

In 2010, my family (wife and two kids at the time) had just moved to Costa Rica, and I found myself in a beautiful and relaxing environment, with more free time than I'd ever had. Not one to be wasteful, I decided to use much of that time to improve myself spiritually. Specifically, I wanted to increase the influence of the Spirit in my life, to learn to understand it better, and to have more of the "constant companionship" we're promised.

I read several books about feeling and understanding the Spirit, receiving revelation, and understanding God's will for you in your life. These books were written both by members and non-members of the church, and from them I gained some wonderful insights that helped me understand these feelings more thoroughly, and better tune in to my body and its messages.

However, I also started to become aware of some contradictions in what I had been taught my entire life concerning the spirit. I realized that there are people of other religions who have experienced just as strong spiritual feelings as I have, and have also taken this as a witness that their church is true. What's more, there are people without any religion or belief in God at

all who have similar feelings. I rationalized that they must not be feeling the spirit in the same way, or perhaps they are misinterpreting their feelings. But reading their stories, I couldn't see any difference between what they had felt, and what I had felt, despite having received the Gift of the Holy Ghost. So how do I know which one of us is misinterpreting the Spirit? If the Spirit is truly a testifier of absolute truth, then He wouldn't be contradicting himself by giving conflicting messages, such as telling one person that the Baptist church is true and another person that the LDS church is true. This made me start to doubt the source of the spiritual feelings I had felt and always understood to be the Spirit, and I realized I had much more to understand.

So because of the contradictions in the revelations received by people of different faiths (or even of the same person in the same faith), I began to think about the possibility that maybe the Spirit doesn't necessarily testify of absolute truth or what is eternally "right", but instead, maybe it tells us what is "good" or right for us at the time. For example, someone being prompted to join a protestant Christian church, as a stepping stone to the true gospel. But this still doesn't reconcile the many times I have felt the spirit while in nature, reading a non-LDS book, watching a touching movie, performing or listening to music, driving, or even working on my computer - things that have little to do with testifying of truth, giving direction, or providing comfort. What causes these wonderful feelings?

Are these feelings really coming from a divine being outside of myself, communicating a specific message that I (and it appears even the leaders of the church) struggle to interpret correctly? Or is it more of an emotional response that helps point out to me what it is that I truly want or what I believe is right (ie. conscience or intuition)? Or is it coming from within my brain, as a psychological response to my surroundings or how relaxed or balanced I'm feeling at the time? And how can we know?

If you've seen the church movie, "The Testaments", there is a scene where the little girl is watching a man testify of Christ. You see her breathe heavily, in and out, with a glow in her eye and a smile on her face, and you know she is feeling the spirit. The first time I saw this image, it hit me hard because I realized that I breathe like that when I feel the spirit! I find myself breathing deeper, taking in and sighing out more air than normal.

I have since learned that through certain breathing exercises, I can now reproduce at will the exact same tingling sensations I felt during my most powerful "spiritual" experiences. You can try it if you want. Breathe in slowly and deeply, like you're smelling a rose, then breathe out like you're blowing out a candle. Do this for 5-10 minutes and you will start to feel tingling in your hands and feet, legs, and even your mouth. You may start to feel light, like your arms are floating. You may feel warmth all over. Even if you only do it for a few breaths, you will feel more relaxed. But do it long enough, and you will experience effects similar to those produced by hyperventilation. Of course, this has nothing to do with God speaking to you. But it feels wonderful and it's a great natural high. Next time you are feeling the spirit, pay attention to how you are breathing, and see if there may be any correlation.

Now, I'm not saying that every time I've felt peaceful or had a spiritual experience in my life, it's

the direct result of my breathing. But I think it had a bigger influence than I realized at the time. Breathing does have a huge effect on how we feel. I've also noticed I feel peaceful whenever I take time to simply pause and slow down my mind, appreciate my current circumstances, and smile. But none of this is unique to Mormonism. Promptings and guidance from intuition come to people of all faiths, and some people seem especially tuned into it, even those without religion.

Likewise, when we feel negative feelings, does that mean it's the Holy Ghost trying to warn us? Or is it the devil trying to deceive us? I felt a lot of this during the time I was engaged to my wife, but never really knew if it was the Holy Ghost trying to warn me to not marry her, or the devil trying to stop me from doing something right. (Obviously, I settled on the latter). Perhaps these negative feelings are simply the common emotions of fear, anger, or disgust. As human beings, we have a very wide range of emotions we can feel. Often, our emotions come from what thoughts we choose to think. Perhaps you are feeling some negative feelings as you read this letter. I think it's helpful to examine where those feelings are really coming from, and what thoughts might be provoking them. Are you feeling attacked? Scared? Shocked? Outraged? These emotions are normal, but not always pleasant. If you don't like them, take a few deep breaths, relax your body, quiet your mind, think more positive thoughts, and you'll feel better in no time!

Obviously, since the method I had relied upon for understanding truth was now in question, the very foundation of my faith was shaken. I wasn't quite sure how this issue could be reconciled and how I could know truth. I could pray about it, and when I pray I feel good. But does that really mean that what I'm praying about is true? I seem to feel good regardless of what I'm praying about. I even feel good when I do things totally unrelated to religion. I was confused because I found the "spirit" to be an unreliable way to measure truth.

It seemed strange to me that a perfect God would expect us to base our testimonies on spiritual feelings, which are so subjective, so prone to misinterpretation, and so often contradictory. Why didn't he choose a more efficient method of discerning truth? Yes, he sent a prophet, but we're supposed to rely on the Spirit to know if He is a true prophet, and we're left again with the same paradox. He also gave us our minds, to reason. And we're taught to use both. (D&C 8:2) So I began using my mind more, in this regard. I thought through many issues, studied church history, as well as spirituality in general, and I made some very interesting discoveries, including other contradictions and logical errors which disturbed and confused me even more. I'll briefly go over the ones that bothered me most.

## **The Myth of Perfection**

We are told that in order to be saved, we must be "perfect" (Mat 5:48). However, the definition of perfection seems to have continued to change throughout history. What was required of members of the church in Old Testament times is very different from what was required in Jesus' day. And that is very different from what was required in Joseph's Smith's day. And that is very different from what is required today. If you doubt this, just look at the temple recommend questions before the 1900's.

If God and Heaven are eternal, shouldn't the process to reach them remain the same? In our scriptures and history, there are many doctrines, commandments, and even saving ordinances that were taught, and then later abandoned (ie. animal sacrifice, circumcision, blood atonement, second anointing, polygamy, blacks and the priesthood, etc.) You could say that perhaps these changing commandments aren't necessarily eternal laws that must be followed to get into heaven. Perhaps they are simply requirements for obedience to God's earthly kingdom, which obedience, in whatever age, will somehow lead to salvation because God honors his earthly kingdom. But to me, this contradicts God's eternal nature. Perfection is perfection, and it is not of this world. Yet we are taught different requirements for perfection depending on the age we live in. And if a commandment isn't required for salvation, then why teach it as such, even if only for a short time? This makes it difficult to distinguish between commandments which are eternal and necessary for salvation, and which ones are just the temporary commandments of the day (like maybe the Word of Wisdom, which wasn't added to the Temple recommend questions until the early 20th century).

I think it's impossible to define perfection in exact terms. People are different. They have different wants and needs and abilities. And having things not be "perfect" is part of what keeps life exciting and unpredictable. Otherwise, we would all stagnate in boring sameness. I believe that the idea of achievable perfection is a myth, and an unhealthy one at that. Striving for perfection causes many people unnecessary guilt and unhappiness because they have not yet reached an undefinable and unattainable image of who they think they should be. If there is such a thing as perfection, then perhaps we have it already. Perhaps as children of a perfect God, we are already perfect as we are, and we just need to recognize and accept ourselves for who we are. Who knows?

## **Understanding the Origins of the Temple**

One day, I found myself reading on Wikipedia about Freemasonry (not sure how I got there), and discovered many similarities with the LDS Temple ceremony, from the symbols used, like the square and compass, to the signs and tokens (handshakes) and verbiage used, to the clothing worn. I knew some similarities existed before, between the Masonic Temple and the Mormon Temple, but I never knew the similarities were so pronounced. This led me to search other sources, including LDS apologetic works (such as FAIR and FARMS), to discover how this is justified. I learned that LDS Apologists basically admit that yes, the LDS Temple Ceremony was copied from Masonry (which has origins in the 1700's - not from Solomon's time) soon after Joseph Smith became a Freemason. But that there are other parts of the Temple ceremony that are still revealed and important, and that God can use whatever means he wants to teach his ordinances.

To me, that's a weak answer. The church claims the temple ceremony has been the same in the true church ever since Adam (even though it keeps changing, interestingly...). But how can that be if the majority of the ceremony has recent origins? If only parts of the Temple ceremony are essential to my salvation, and the rest are simply Masonic rituals, then why continue teaching the non-essential parts, especially since they're so strange? And why were they included to begin with? Was it a mistake? We're taught that these masonic rituals and handshakes are

required for us to pass by angels and get into heaven. If so, then how do you explain that the masons invented them just a few hundred years ago? This also seems to contradict the scriptures which teach that we're judged by our actions and the intents of our hearts (Alma 12:14), not by what handshakes we remember. And what about people without hands?

These questions totally shattered my faith in the Temple. As a youth, I loved the peaceful feeling I had doing baptisms for the dead. However, my first experience with the Temple endowment was not as pleasant. It was a strange and uncomfortable experience, as it is for many, and I remember crying that night, once I got home, feeling confused and overwhelmed. However, I quickly forgot that experience, and came to appreciate performing the rituals of the endowment ceremony, even though they still didn't make sense. I had heard and perceived possible meanings for the symbols and signs, but with all my years of temple going, they never revealed anything life changing. Now I understand that these symbols and rituals are man-made, copied from the Masonic order, and have nothing to do with salvation.

## **Polygamy / Polyamory**

The church's own genealogical website and records show that Joseph Smith was married to at least 33 women, some as young as 14 years old. I already knew that and was okay with it. What I didn't know was that at least 11 of those women were already married to other men! There are accounts of him sending men on missions, then marrying their wives while they are gone, threatening the woman that she will not be saved if she does not marry him. Some women refused and were ostracized. Many accounts also tell of Joseph's sexual encounters with these women, and 13 women testified in court that he had done so with them. Oliver Cowdery called Joseph's "marriage" to his house maid, Fanny Alger, "a dirty, nasty, filthy affair".

Joseph was very secretive about polygamy, and lied about his extramarital activities to Emma and to the church as a whole, yet admitted it to others. The church condemned polygamy while Joseph practiced it. It was also against the law in the United States. Brigham Young obviously also had sex with multiple wives, too, which is apparent in his 50+ children. Some of these wives were previously married to Joseph. Brigham was much more open about polygamy than Joseph. However, polygamy was still illegal, even in Utah at the time, so living it violates the 12th article of Faith (ie. obeying the law), as well as several scriptures and past revelations Joseph himself had given which condemn plural marriage, some of which have since been removed from the D&C. (For example, see 1835 edition of D&C Cl: 4, p.251, where polygamy is called a "crime"). Sure, they're prophets. They can do whatever they want right? Even if it's an immoral lie, and against the law? Mormons don't believe that prophets are infallible, but this seems beyond a simple mistake.

## **Smaller Things**

There are several other small items that caused me concern, but weren't a major factor in my choice to leave. Some of these include:

- Unreliable results from Priesthood Blessings. Receiving a "blessing" seems to make no

significant difference when compared to how many people are healed in other religions. There are also times when you feel you will be healed, but you aren't. Or a blessing is promised which never comes to pass. If we really have the true Priesthood, it seems like it would be more effective than a placebo.

- Modern prophets contradict the scriptures (and each other) on numerous occasions, and we're told that modern revelation trumps old revelation. Yet, in the Temple, we make covenants to follow the scriptures. So which do we follow when there are contradictions?
- If God wants all of us to return to him, and follow him in this life, he's done a very inefficient job of spreading his message. Only .002% of people alive today are members of his church, and throughout history, this number is much less. It seems he would have chosen a more efficient way to at least let his children know about the message so they could decide if they wanted to follow him.
- Over time, the church has changed many passages in the Book of Mormon and other scriptures. They have taken many controversial documents out of publication, rewritten the curriculum to remove stories and doctrines that would put the church in a negative light, and rewrote others to put the church in a more positive light. Many of the points I mention in this letter are found in out of print church publications. Yes, the church has an ugly history, and of course they wouldn't want to promote that part of it. But it seems deceptive to me that the church history presented in Sunday School today is a gross misrepresentation of the truth. In the recent Joseph Smith manual, for example, there was only one vague reference to the fact that Joseph practiced plural marriage. Yet it was a major part of his life, and members are encouraged not to discuss it. I think members deserve to know the truth.
- Joseph Smith used a stone he found to perform treasure digging for people in his early days. He would lead people around the hills looking for treasure, yet never found any (often because "spirits" took it away at the last minute), which is another reason why many people were upset with him, and why he spent so much time in court. Joseph Smith used this same stone (not the "urim & thummim") to "translate" the Book of Mormon.
- Why were the lost 116 pages not re-translated? If Joseph's enemies would have changed the words, it would be pretty obvious to see that the words had been changed, and Joseph could call them on it as well. How convenient that the next section of the Book of Mormon contains basically the same story, but written differently, so Joseph didn't have to reproduce the same words.
- Joseph Smith claimed to translate the Book of Abraham Papyri, but the same papyri found in the Pearl of Great Price has since translated by Egyptian scholars and found to be an embalming ceremony having nothing to do with Abraham.
- The Book of Mormon has many contradictions with itself, the Bible, and modern revelation. It also has a lot of content copied from other books, including many verses from the King James Bible that have since been shown to be incorrect translations. I have personally traveled to many archaeological sites and museums in Central and South America, and have seen no conclusive evidence that civilizations like the ones described in the Book of Mormon existed. Actually, I have seen evidence against it, from the dates of cities being outside of Book of Mormon ranges, to records and artifacts that

have no correlation to Book of Mormon events. Much of the Book of Mormon seems influenced by what was going on in 19th century New York at the time, and contains inaccurate descriptions of ancient meso-American life, as well as impossible population growth. DNA evidence also rejects the idea that these people are the “principle ancestors of the American Indians”. When you look at all the evidence, it is completely possible, even likely, that Joseph wrote the Book of Mormon without divine guidance, despite what we are told by church leaders.

- The stories of the first vision and restoration of the Priesthood evolved over time, as is evident by the various accounts Joseph gave of them. At first, there was no mention of angelic visitations in either the first vision or in the Priesthood restoration. But the stories got more grandiose the more they were told.
- The church does not disclose how they use their tithing funds, except in England and Canada where they are required to. However, it is estimated by some that the church has over \$100 billion in assets. Interestingly, they have only spent \$750 million on humanitarian aid over the past 22 years! (Only ¼ of what they’re spending on the new mall in Salt Lake City). They also own numerous cattle ranches in the U.S., and own more land in Florida than Disney - used primarily to raise cattle for beef. Whatever happened to meat only in times of winter or famine? And the hymn that states “We eat a very little meat?”
- Many stories in scripture are impossible, and conflict with much scientific evidence. For example: Noah’s Ark, the Tower of Babel, three days of darkness, the Jaredite migration, and the age of the earth. However, the LDS church implies that these stories are historical accounts and should be taken literally.
- The idea of eternal families doesn’t make sense. Everyone in the family has to basically be perfect to reach the highest level of the celestial kingdom. If one person isn’t, then the family isn’t together, and how sad is that? This causes many people to divorce if they think their spouse isn’t perfect enough in this life, which is actually destroying a family in this life. In the end, a “family” just ends up being a husband and wife (or wives) anyway since children grow up and have their own families, and their children have their own. You can’t all fit into the same mansion.

At first, it was difficult for me to accept that these things were true. I really wanted the church to be true. I enjoyed it and was comfortable with it, and I tried to rationalize away these ideas and find answers to them. But none of the answers I could find addressed the problems satisfactorily. Often, it just turned back to “have faith and everything will be explained later”. If there were just one or two issues, I could probably overlook them. But with so many problems pointing against the church, I could simply no longer deny the logical contradictions and the damning evidence I had discovered.

For several weeks, I felt lost and confused. My whole perspective on life and my purpose had changed, and I didn’t know how to view the world. I also felt jipped that I had lived my whole life ignoring so many issues that show how church isn’t all it claims to be. I felt like I had wasted so many years of my life serving a lie. That was a tough fact to face. Then again, at the time, I only saw the good in my experiences, and they are part of me and helped make me who I am,



so I was not resentful for long. I was also grateful that others in my family, including my mom, had already left the church before me, so I was able to receive help from them in knowing how to cope with these huge changes. Their love and understanding was very helpful through this transition.

## **Part II: Changes in Beliefs and Lifestyle**

Finally realizing that Mormonism is a man-made religion has freed me to reassess my beliefs and abandon those beliefs which no longer serve me. I have started with a fresh slate, looked at my own life experience, and created a belief system which works for me and allows me greater freedom and happiness.

In many ways, I feel like breaking out of Mormonism was like hatching out of an egg and being born again, emerging as a new and better “me”. I never even realized I was in an egg before, and I was happy there. But now I see so much more, and my joy is even more full.

Below I will identify some of the beliefs I have abandoned along with religion, some things that I miss in the church I left behind, and the benefits that have come to me as a result of leaving the church. These lists aren't necessarily comprehensive, but should give you an idea of where I'm at.

### **Beliefs I have abandoned**

- That God exists in the form of a man in a physical body and lives in outer space near a star called Kolob
- That God speaks to one person in order to control another person or group of people.
- That you must receive ordinances from a specific church, believe in certain doctrines, or follow specific practices in order to be “saved” and enter Heaven.
- That a man and a woman offended God by listening to a talking snake and eating a magic fruit that made them smart and caused the whole earth to fall into a lesser state that could only be restored to its perfect state by having God's son suffer and die, and then come back from the dead.
- That we are here because God decided we needed to grow, get a body, and be tested to see how worthy we are of living with him for eternity (even though we were supposedly already living with him before we came down here...)
- That Satan exists and seeks to tempt and destroy us and keep us from eternal happiness.
- That after we die, we will be judged for all our actions and thoughts and placed in a kingdom from which we can no longer progress unless we have already been as perfect as we can be.
- That Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and died so that God could forgive us of our sins. If there is such a thing as sin, and if God is actually offended by it, God can forgive us whenever he wants, just as we can forgive those who offend us, without having to have someone die to make it happen.

## **Things I miss in the church**

- Having an easy place to go to make friends with similar beliefs
- A weekly chance to publicly use my musical talents
- Built-in opportunities to serve and help others in different ways
- Having a “sure knowledge” of how I came to earth, why I was here, and where I’m going after I die

## **Benefits that have come to me through leaving the church:**

- I don’t judge people. It’s such a relief to be able to look at somebody and be their friend without having to worry about their salvation, or somehow turning the conversation toward the church to help them find the “right” path. Consequently, my relationships are now more genuine, I am filled with even more love for people, regardless of their religion, sexual orientation, or race. And I find it easier to make new friends in new ways.
- I don’t feel guilty or judged by God for every mistake I make. Now that I have abandoned the idea of “sin” and a judgmental god, I am filled with more love for myself and others. I no longer condemn or feel condemned for acts I used to see as wrong. I am more able to focus on living my life for the highest good of all, rather than worrying about little sins and practices that don’t seem to hurt anyone anyway. I’m also more able to forgive others, because there is nothing to forgive. This doesn’t mean I have no moral compass. Quite the opposite. I don’t believe there is much benefit in doing harm to others. But if I or someone else chooses to drink wine, go shopping on Sunday, swear, or masturbate, I no longer shudder at the thought. (By the way, I tried wine and thought it was pretty gross. But I have no problem if my friends want to drink it.)
- I have more free time. No more church on Sunday, meetings and activities throughout the week, Temple attendance, callings, family home evening, home/visiting teaching, ward building cleanup, service, scripture study, and all the other responsibilities we feel we need to do as members of the church. I still like to read spiritual books. We still spend time together as a family (even more now). And I love helping others whenever I can. But I no longer feel bound to do all these things, and I feel no guilt for not doing them according to a prescribed schedule. It’s liberating!
- An open world for me and my children. I no longer live in a bubble thinking I know the answers to all of life’s questions. Anything is possible in this world, and there is so much to learn. We don’t know what’s going to happen when we die, and that’s exciting. We don’t have to follow the path of school, mission, marriage, and kids. Other paths are equally as valid and can be even more joyful and fulfilling.
- Things make sense again. I am finally able to see myself and the world more clearly, without shutting off a part of my brain. From dinosaurs and evolution, to aliens and Kolob, I am now able to make decisions based on my experience and what makes sense to me, rather than filtering out ideas that didn’t mesh with what I thought the prophets had taught. I don’t fear new ideas or worry about protecting my faith. I’m more open-minded and am learning more because of it. However, I’m also more skeptical about new and sensational ideas that do not make sense or have evidence to back up

their claims.

- I can donate to any charity I want without wondering where my “charitable contributions” are going. Since the church does not report their finances, you never know exactly how your charitable contributions are spent. Now I can have more control in that regard and put my money toward specific causes that I am passionate about.
- I have an open mind concerning the concept of God and appreciate hearing others’ views of Him. I do not know for certain whether or not God exists, but I believe he does. However, if God exists, I believe it is in the form of a creative force or power, rather than a single physical, human, male form. For example, God is love. Or perhaps God is everything, the good and the bad. Or perhaps all life is God, including you and me, and we are the spiritual creators of our universe. I do not know, and how can we really know? Hopefully some day we will all understand how we got here. This mystery keeps life interesting.
- There is so much joy to be had outside of the church, that I had often ignored. Now I feel free to find my own path to fulfillment and accomplish what mission I feel I have in life, even if it is outside of the church context. I can use my talents and abilities to serve others in ways that are most fulfilling to me (rather than simply looking forward to a church mission). I can make new friends who contribute to my life with their own unique experiences. And I can experience great joy in my personal growth and achievements, as well as that of others, whether or not that growth has anything to do with the church.
- Appreciation for this I life. Since we don’t know what will happen when we die, this life may be all we have. That gives me all the more incentive to make the most of it, to take care of the earth, and do all I can to make the world a better place for my children and grandchildren. I no longer think thoughts like, “It doesn’t matter. The world will be destroyed in a few years anyway when Christ comes back.”

## **Ex-Mormons Aren’t “Bad”**

I used to think that people who don’t have a religion, or who leave the church, become “bad” people, and have little desire for good or to do good things. Without a moral compass, or commandments to follow, they’re quickly taken captive by the influence of the devil, and learn to hate the church, and eventually, everything good.

How wrong I was! Ethical principles and social norms do still exist, regardless of religion. Kindness, love, generosity, and friendship still prevail, and the majority of people across all cultures and religions choose to live by these principles. I am the same good, loving person I always was, and hopefully even more so. What causes people to be bad is a whole other discussion, but I have met so many good, non-religious people now, that I believe religion is not the answer to a healthy society. In fact, the vast majority of wars and mass murders in our earth’s history were performed in the name of religion which so often teaches people that they are “better” than others. I believe that is an unhealthy way to view the world.

I recently found a wonderful series of videos with interviews of people who have left the church and found greater peace in their lives because of it. It is easy to see that these are not people who want to hurt anybody, but are good, honest people of integrity. You can watch the videos at

<http://www.iamanexmormon.com>.

## **What Now?**

My beliefs continue to evolve each day. As I learn of new ideas and gain new experiences, my beliefs change along with me. I think this is natural and the only way a belief can really be mine - we must learn from our own experience. I no longer say that I “know” something is true, but after reading this document, you probably have a good idea of my current beliefs. Although they may change tomorrow.

## **What If I’m Wrong?**

Yes, what if I’m wrong about all this? What if the church really is true, and I’m throwing away my eternal salvation by writing this letter? If I’m wrong, I believe God will understand and forgive me. I have used all the mental and spiritual capacities he has given me to make the best decision I can with the evidence he has provided me up to this point, including church historical records and scripture, my own reasoning ability, and the influence of spiritual promptings and intuition. If I end up being wrong, how could God possibly condemn me for doing my best to follow what I determined to be true? A just and loving God would not do that.

## **Leaving the Church**

Thousands of people have left the church over the years, and everyone has their different reasons. Now that so much information that was previously hidden up is available for free on-line, more and more members are leaving each day. Inactivity rates are extremely high all over the world (in any ward I’ve been in, usually less than 40% of the ward actually attends each week). Perhaps out of the 13 million members on the church records, only 5 or 6 million are active church goers.

It doesn’t matter. I have seen the church do a lot of good for a lot of people, helping people get off drugs or get through a hard time. The church can provide a great support network as well, and it does encourage service and thrift and other principles that make for a good society. The church did a lot of good for me as I was growing up, too. Of course, I was blind to the negative effects I was receiving at the same time. But some people really seem to need the church, and others just really like it (I sure did). And I encourage anyone to stay who is happy there, as long as they’re not hurting someone else by doing so.

Many people who are aware of the issues I have mentioned in this letter, still choose to overlook (or deny) them, and focus on good they enjoy in the church. Others acknowledge them and remain in the church in the hope they may be wrong. Some accept the errors in the church, yet stay “active” for social or family reasons, for tradition, or for fear of being ostracized if they leave. Others simply may not have found anything better, and are comfortable where they’re at. We all must choose to do what works for us.

To me, these reasons were not strong enough to keep me in the church. Either the church is all it claims to be, or it’s not. And if it’s not, I am not going to feign belief in a deception, nor commit

my time and money to it. I had to be true to my integrity and follow the truth as I understand it through my own experience.

Since I had already left my home in Utah, I didn't have many of the same ties or community that held me to the church, which has made my transition out of it much easier. I was also very fortunate to have my wife come to the same conclusions as I did, at about the same time, so we have been going through this together. Our children were also glad they no longer had to go to church, especially since it was all in Spanish and often boring for them to sit through.

I can now say that we are happier as a family and as individuals than we have ever been in our lives, for so many reasons. And I believe our happiness will only continue to increase as we grow in knowledge and experience, and find ways to make the world a better place through using our gifts and abilities to bless the lives of others.

## **Respecting the Person**

Regardless of how you feel about my story and my beliefs, I hope that you will still respect me as a person. It's possible that this letter will cause me to lose a few friends. Hopefully I won't be too ostracized by my family for it. But in order to stay true to my integrity, I had to express what I was feeling. If you decide to shun me because of what I have said, it is your choice. Just understand that you are placing a barrier between us. I am still willing to be your friend because I love you for who you are, regardless of your beliefs. And hopefully, as a true friend, you feel the same about me. But I also understand if you are afraid, concerned about me, or don't want to be with me anymore. If so, perhaps our friendship wasn't as solid as we thought and was based on something more shallow.

I have no intention of attacking others because of their beliefs, but I do feel there is great value in examining beliefs and ideas themselves. That said, if you would like to continue our relationship, but don't want me discussing religion, don't worry, I won't bring it up if you don't. But if you want to talk to me about any of the issues I've addressed, or if you see errors in my reasoning, I welcome your response. I try to remain open to new (and old) ideas. Of course, if your goal is to prove me wrong, just be sure you have some good data to back up your claim. :)

If you are interested in learning more about the specific issues that led me to these conclusions, along with their original sources in church records, one of the most comprehensive websites I've found on the subject is <http://www.mormonthink.com>. This site is written by members of the church, and explains many of these issues thoroughly, from both sides, and in great detail. Of course, it is always a good idea to check the sources on your own, and research both sides of an issue thoroughly before drawing any conclusions.

Thank you for reading, and remember I love you.

Here's to a happy life!

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