

A Great And Spacious Title



Lone
Will Be
The Night

How to Communicate with
Believers After a Faith Transition

A Guide by Logan B. Hill

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Dedicated to my wife:
For her patience and longsuffering during my transition.

Dedicated to my future children:
May they never know pain or struggles in the church.

Dedicated to my parents:
For their love and support through excruciating heartbreak.

Introduction

Those who know me might find it absurd that I have written a book on how to efficiently communicate with believers. If you've been privy to my Facebook posts, you might share the same sentiment. Coming through my anger and bitterness has made me realize there's a better way than the way I did things. I've had time to look back and analyze all the mistakes I've made in this process. I realize now that I should have been much less hostile towards people when discussing my beliefs. I've written this book so that people in similar situations won't make the same mistakes I did.

I can't tell you how many posts I've seen online from people asking for advice on how to tell their loved ones that they're leaving the church... or that their faith has changed... or that they have issues with church history but are going to stay for their families... or that they don't agree with current church policies.

What may seem like a horror story to some is very often a reality to others. People are afraid to tell their spouses that their faith has changed because they know it can change their marriage. Often, people are threatened with divorce when they tell their partners they're leaving the church. Sometimes, the believing parent tells their doubting child to leave the home. Leaving the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is hard enough on a person when the only person they have to worry about is themselves. When a spouse, children, and family are added to the mix, it becomes a much more complex situation.

If there's anything I hope to convey to the reader of this book, it is this: You can't control the outcome, but you can control yourself. If the conversation escalates to a shouting match, you don't have to reciprocate. If someone accuses you of being deceived, you don't have to accuse them of being brainwashed. If there's anything in the Book of Mormon I believe has value, it's the words of King Benjamin recorded in Mosiah 4:30.

“But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds ... even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.”

While I’m not expecting anyone to perish for telling people about their decision to leave the church, I do expect it to be hard. Please be careful with your words. Watch how you say things to others. Words can cause emotional wounds that take much longer to heal than physical wounds.

I would also like to point out that I am not a licensed physical or mental health care physician. I do not have all the answers. Please don’t think because I wrote a book that this is the cure-all end-all to your relationship problems with those in the church. These are words and stories from my own real-life journey in coming out of the church. There are many more people out there who are better qualified to give advice on the issues I bring up.

This book is written with the assumption that you have already decided to go public with your unbelief, resignation, or apostasy. As for when to announce your faith change, I cannot and will not make suggestions for that. I can’t decide when the time is right for you. Know that my words are in no way attempting to sway you in coming out as a non-believer to the world. If my work gives you the courage and the strength to do so, you must still be the one to decide when the time is right.

This book will not apply to every individual, every family, every friend, or every situation. There is no perfect thing to say to make this easy. There’s no smoking gun that will automatically make your problems go away. However, I do sincerely hope that these words will prove helpful. You may want to use the section on parents but not the section on spouses or children. You may just want to tell your spouse and not your parents or local church leaders. You might want to tell only immediate family until you’re ready to tell others. Still, there is something here for everyone. I would recommend reading the entire book before revealing your faith transition to anyone. The suggestions

I give in most sections can be used and applied to other sections even though I've tried to contextualize them by chapter.

These are suggestions for common situations. This covers conversations that shouldn't deviate outside of the norm. If you are planning to have a conversation with someone who has violent tendencies, advanced physical health problems, or serious mental or emotional health issues, you may want to seriously consider the implications of telling that person about your faith transition. Sometimes it just isn't worth it.

What I won't be including in these suggestions is what to do if a situation turns violent or abusive. I do not want to give someone advice on what to do in a dangerous situation and they end up getting hurt or worse. Do not allow yourself to be subject to physical, emotional, spiritual, or any other form of abuse. If you feel that things could become violent, take steps prior to the discussion to ensure your own safety. If the discussion turns violent, or if you feel threatened, you should remove yourself from the situation and seek help. In these cases, I will only say to use caution and common sense.

The suggestions I have aren't based on a "turn the other cheek" mentality. I'm not suggesting that "my ways are higher than your ways" or "my thoughts are higher than your thoughts." I'm not saying that you must "love your neighbor" or live the "golden rule." I'm not suggesting to "bring peace rather than a sword" but I do advocate against "an eye for an eye" action. I don't believe "the wicked take the truth to be hard." I believe people take things as they will.

I don't condone "holier than thou" speech or action. What I have shared here with you is my worldview as it pertains to relationships, which I have come to build since my testimony shattered in 2016. Boiled down to its core, my message is this: There are over seven and a half billion people living on this planet. If you want to navigate through life successfully, you must learn to get along with other people. There are going to be people you don't like. There will be those whom you disagree with. There are going to be a few who hate you for your beliefs, your lifestyle, and your happiness. If you can manage to live alongside these people, life will be easier.

This is no CES Letter. I haven't written this as a tool to destroy the church or to spread light on hidden truths. In your discussions surrounding this book, please don't treat it as such. This book is meant to build, repair, and sustain, not tear down or destroy. My secondary audience is believing members. My work can help them almost as much as it can help you. This also isn't a guide on how to behave as an exMormon. This is a guide on how to improve relationships with people you care about. When I make a suggestion you disagree with, that's okay. You don't have to use it. I'm not telling you this is how you have to live your life. I'm not saying there's never a right time to use anger or lash out at someone. I'm not declaring this book as the "Unofficial Handbook of Post-Mormonism." I am just voicing my thoughts and opinions based on years of experience with believing members of the church. It's up to you if you want to use that or not.

I also want to acknowledge that I realize there may be a few people who read this book may not like the term "coming out" to be applied to leaving a church. Some may feel this takes away from or insults the LGBTQ+ individuals who "come out" as homosexual or otherwise. It is not my intention to degrade, insult, or marginalize those who are in that community. Though I would never pretend that coming out as a non-believer has the same effect on a person's life as coming out as LGBTQ+, I would like to suggest that this term has a place among exMormons. I hope this book will help you in your time of need.

Finally, I could not have established the emotional connection with the reader that I wanted to unless I had real life testimonies from actual people. Throughout the book you will see quotes in chapter headings from people who have gone through shared struggles in leaving the church, including emotional guilt, family troubles, and fears. I chose these quotes because they cut to my very core when I read them. I have asked their permission to use these quotes and I would like to thank them for their contributions publicly. A full list of quotes and attributions can be found in the back of the book.

A Note to the Believers

From the Author

Nearly everything I have written in this guide can be used to better facilitate conversations with your loved ones who have left the church. If you apply the principles taught in this book to your relationship with those who have chosen to stand away, your love for them will grow, your conversations will become more meaningful, and the overall quality of your interactions will dramatically increase.

Please do not write this book off as “anti-Mormon” material. Though the target audience for this book are those who have left the church, nearly every part is written so that someone like you would feel comfortable if they were to pick it up and start reading. This book does hit on some of the issues, but the wording is mostly non-aggressive.

The title of this book is meant to provoke emotion. Every member of the church knows the hymn “Abide with Me, Tis Eventide.” For those who leave the church, “lone *is* the night” when they realize all they knew and all they were has crumbled. When those you love discover that their faith has changed, they are scared. They feel alone. They feel as though they have no one else to turn to.

This guide is meant primarily to help the unbelieving reader combat “the shadows of the evening.” However, it could also bring you peace and comfort in trying to understand what your loved one is going through. If someone you know has given you this book, it means they desire to improve their relationship with you. Please allow them to do so by reading the words I have written.

Sincerely,
Logan B. Hill

Section One

Your Spouse

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

“Told my wife I no longer want to wear garments, now we’re talking divorce. This is just the straw breaking the camel’s back. Honestly, without the influence of the church we never would have married.”

From an early age, youth in the church are taught to look for certain qualities in a spouse. I was taught to look for a woman who loves the gospel, knows how to keep house, and who wants to be a stay at home mother. The Young Women in my ward learned how to make quilts and sew buttons while my Young Men’s group went fishing and played paint ball. The biggest difference in these lessons in my opinion is that Young Women’s classes are about breadmaking, and Young Men’s classes are about breadwinning, so to speak.

Different things are taught to different youth classes about chastity as well. Young Men are taught to avoid pornography to keep their minds clean. Young Women are taught if they dress immodestly, they become pornography. They’re also taught if they lose their virginity before marriage they become like chewed gum or a licked cupcake and no one would ever want to be with them after that. Both are taught if you really loved someone, you would never ask them to compromise their standards of chastity. They are also taught to strive for the ideal Mormon life of marrying in the temple, having children, and having a forever family.

Whatever the differences in their Sunday School lessons, the most important qualities they are taught to look for in a spouse are being active in the church and having a desire to raise a righteous

family. I was the one in my marriage to leave the church. Although I could not pretend to know what she felt when I told her I no longer believed in the church, this is what I imagined when through her head: For her entire life, she had remained clean and virtuous waiting to marry me. She had her sights set on a temple wedding from the time she was old enough to speak. In her Young Women's class, she wrote a letter to her future husband about how we're going to love the church and be happy in the gospel forever. I happened to be the lucky one who received that letter.

I have known several "part-member families" in both my personal life and in my duties as a missionary in the church. You probably know a few as well. You never wanted or expected to be one of those families. I can tell you what my thoughts were on those people growing up as well as my thoughts on them now. When I was younger, I would often hear the phrase, "Well, that's what they get for marrying a non-member." I remember wondering, if someone knew and understood the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, how they could marry a non-member. At the time, I thought less of their children. When they acted out, I blamed it on their part-member family situation. I used to say, "If both of their parents raised them in the church, they wouldn't be in this situation." I thought less of the believing member as they had not been sealed to their spouse in the temple and would never be exalted in the kingdom of God. I believed by marrying a non-member they somehow had an issue with their testimonies, or that they never really believed in the first place.

I never stopped to think about the struggle they must feel when they get up and go to church by themselves on Sunday mornings. I didn't realize that their children loved their non-member or inactive parent just as much as the parent who believed. I didn't know that when they attend ward activities that they just want to show up without the whole ward thinking, "I wonder if he used this activity as a missionary tool for his wife." I never understood (and I couldn't have truly understood), what it was like until I became a member of a part-member family myself. I had my own struggles leaving the church, but my wife had an equally difficult time in the church due to my actions.

I could tell my side of the story about the things I felt, observed, and went through, but I couldn't adequately portray what my wife went through with my own words. She is an active member of the church, and I have asked her to share her thoughts to help people better understand what a faith transition is like from the perspective of a believing wife. With her permission, I will share a few of her words throughout this chapter. She said the following on what it's like being a wife whose husband doesn't go to church with her:

“It's hard. It was hard to go to church and see my friends and family members sitting together with their husbands. I think it would have been easier if it was just me and the ward didn't know who I was, and didn't know my parents, and didn't know our entire life story from when we got engaged to when we got married.

It can be very lonely because you don't feel like you have friends, and all the friends you did have don't want anything to do with you because their husbands are still in the church and yours isn't. Any friendship you thought you had dissolves overnight. It turns into “there-there” pats and poor lost child looks.”

I know that you're hurting after leaving the church. I know it's not easy to give up everything you once knew and loved. It's already difficult enough having to go through it alone, but I urge you to consider your spouse's feelings in this process. I am speaking from experience here: You don't want to look back after years of struggle and wish you had done things differently. You don't have to sacrifice yourself or your well-being to appease your partner, but please try your best to come through this together. A quote I found recently says, “You are not required to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm.” You have to do what is best for you, but please be aware of the feelings of others in this life-altering process. In speaking of how my actions in leaving the church has affected her at church, my wife said:

“People forget that you exist at all. And the people who forget are the people you once thought were your friends. They exchange pleasantries but they don't care about you. What I see

is that people don't want to talk about my life. It's like they don't want to ask how everything is going because they just assume once you've left the church that things are bad and that there's no way you could have a happy life or a happy marriage with someone that's not in the church.

People don't know what to say around me. They don't know how to talk to me anymore. They don't see me as a real person and because of that I feel very excluded. It's not said. No one has ever said those things, but from the second that you stopped going to church, how I was treated drastically changed. I don't think anyone noticed the change but me."

In order to understand what your spouse might feel about your faith transition, you have to understand what the church is teaching about you. This is true of anyone you tell. Not only is the church teaching your loved ones the consequences of an eternally broken family, but they are also teaching them not to listen to you. In a talk given at BYU entitled, "The Love and Laws of God," President Nelson says the following on the topic of truth:

"Some things are simply true. The arbiter of truth is God—not your favorite social media news feed, not Google, and certainly not those who are disaffected from the Church."

The leaders of the church would have your spouse and other important people in your life believe that you are being misled, deceived, and misinformed. They want the people you associate with to believe that you aren't worth listening to. This is what my wife had to say on what it's like sitting through Sunday school when your spouse has left the church:

"You sit through lessons which deal with a loss of faith in the family. Then you listen to people talk about having family members leave the church and they're speaking about them like they've died. It's like everyone in the ward expects you to prove that you care more about the church than you do your spouse. You can't talk about your spouse. You can't talk about what's going on in your home life unless it involves something like

reading scriptures. You can't say, "I'm not going to church this Sunday because I'm going to spend time with my husband," otherwise they think you're leaving the church too."

In the January 2019 BYU Devotional, now-released Elder Lawrence E. Corbridge of the Seventy gave a talk called "Stand Forever." In this talk he spoke of all the different information out there that people use against the church. He warns the audience to be wary of such information and the sources it comes from.

"As part of an assignment I had as a General Authority a few years ago, I needed to read through a great deal of material antagonistic to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the events of the Restoration. There may not be anything out there of that nature I haven't read. Since that assignment changed, I have not returned to wallow in that mire again.

Reading that material always left me with a feeling of gloom, and one day that sense of darkness inspired me to write a partial response to all such antagonistic claims."

He begins his talk with a description of what kind of feeling he had when he read this material, which in turn tells you what kind of feelings you should be having it when you encounter it. He goes on to say how he had another talk planned with "stories more engaging than this one," but that he was led to give a talk on this topic instead. He tells how the scriptures speak of the last days, how the very elect shall fall. He reinforces that those days are today. He continues:

"Paul said, "We see through a glass, darkly." Similarly, one of the most prominent features of the vision of the tree of life is a "great mist of darkness in which they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost."

There are many who deceive, and the spectrum of deception is broad. At one end we meet those who attack the Restoration, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon. Next we

see those who believe in the Restoration but claim the Church is deficient and has gone astray. There are others who also claim to believe in the Restoration but are disillusioned with doctrine that conflicts with the shifting attitudes of our day. There are some who, without authority, lay claim to visions, dreams, and visitations to right the ship, guide us to a higher path, or prepare the Church for the end of the world. Others are deceived by false spirits.

At the far end of the spectrum we come to an entire universe of distractions. Never has there been more information, misinformation, and disinformation; more goods, gadgets, and games; and more options, places to go, and things to see and do to occupy time and attention away from what is most important. And all of that and much more is disseminated instantaneously throughout the world by electronic media. This is a day of deception.”

Over and over, he presses the idea that those who leave the church or have doubts are simply misinformed. What he doesn't mention is that many people who “fall away” do so directly because of information they find in the church's own materials. The leaders of the church do not acknowledge that the largest force driving people out of the church isn't the falsehoods and lies people tell about Joseph Smith. It's that people study church history, learn disturbing facts about old teachings, or disagree fundamentally with church doctrines or policies.

When Elder Corbridge and the rest of the church leadership stand up at the pulpit and declare that the problem is people being deceived by the adversary, that is what people believe. Elder Corbridge says there are a multitude of questions people could ask. He says there are primary questions and there are secondary questions. He says:

“Begin by answering the primary questions. There are primary questions and there are secondary questions. Answer the primary questions first. Not all questions are equal and not all truths are equal. The primary questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate. There are only a few primary questions. I will mention four of them.

1. Is there a God who is our Father?
2. Is Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior of the world?
3. Was Joseph Smith a prophet?
4. Is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the kingdom of God on the earth?

By contrast, the secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, polygamy, people of African descent and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, how the Book of Mormon was translated, the Pearl of Great Price, DNA and the Book of Mormon, gay marriage, the different accounts of the First Vision, and on and on.

If you answer the primary questions, the secondary questions get answered too, or they pale in significance and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't and things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship altogether."

What this kind of statement does is put up mental walls between you and believing members. It tells them the way they should think about the secondary issues. It tells them that anything else isn't important to their salvation, so it also isn't important to even consider. However, those secondary questions he mentioned are some of the major issues that lead people out of the church. People lose sleep over those questions. Couples divorce over those questions. Some ultimately lose their lives to suicide over those questions.

Your spouse is being influenced by talks like this to ignore those questions as well. They are taught that the information you have to share with them is dangerous, filthy, and unworthy of being considered. Elder Corbridge continues by giving four methods learning: The scientific method, the analytical method, the academic method, and then the divine method. He gives definitions and examples of each and says they are all important, though he finishes his thought by declaring the divine method to be the best and most important

method of learning. He claims this method trumps all the others, effectively shutting down intellectual thought. Perhaps the most disturbing part of his talk was when he said the following:

“So what was the gloom I felt several years ago while reading antagonistic material? Some would say that gloom is the product of belief bias, which is the propensity to pick and choose only those things that accord with our assumptions and beliefs. The thought that everything one has believed and been taught may be wrong, particularly with nothing better to take its place, is a gloomy and disturbing thought indeed. But the gloom I experienced as I listened to the dark choir of voices raised against the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ—the gloom that came as I waded, chest deep, through the swamp of the secondary questions—is different. That gloom is not belief bias and it is not the fear of being in error. It is the absence of the Spirit of God. That is what it is. It is the condition of man when “left unto himself.” It is the gloom of darkness and the “stupor of thought.”

If you haven’t studied up on logical fallacies such as confirmation bias or belief bias, I would suggest doing so. What Elder Corbridge said in the passage above redefines experiencing disturbing challenges to your worldview into the Holy Ghost telling you the information is wrong. Let me contest this teaching with one question to Elder Corbridge: If the Holy Ghost is the messenger of truth, why would anyone feel gloomy, anxious, or disturbing feelings when reading church produced materials?

Your questions and feelings about those secondary issues are valid. You realize that Joseph Smith being a prophet and the truth claims of the church rely on many of the secondary questions being answered. Long and lasting testimonies are built on the small things. There is a popular saying that applies here: You can’t unconvince someone of something logically that they only believe emotionally. Understanding this is the key to talking to your spouse. In doing so, your purpose shouldn’t be to deconvert them. It should be about having them understand why you no longer believe and then building back their trust.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

“I just told my wife I drank coffee yesterday. I was terrified.”

My wife was the first family member who knew about my unbelief. The first person to actually know was an old mission buddy of mine. In a conversation we had, I accidentally used an acronym popular in post-Mormon circles and he told me he didn't realize I was out of the church too. We talked about some things to catch up on our church statuses and he ended up asking me if my then-fiancée knew. I told him she didn't know that I didn't believe anymore and that I was planning on keeping it a secret for now. He then asked me one question that changed my life forever: “Would you rather tell her now or would you rather tell her when you're thirty and have a few children?” I decided I had to tell her.

The way I broke the news to her wasn't pretty. It was sudden and I was unprepared. I don't remember everything that triggered this event, but I do know we were getting married in a few months and I felt like I needed to tell her the truth. I felt like I owed her the chance to either get out of the relationship now or to embrace me and love me despite my beliefs. One night as I was dropping her off at her parent's house I broke down into tears. I could hardly make the words, but I got it out eventually: “I don't believe in the church anymore.” Here is what I recorded later that night:

“I told her how for years I've had doubts but through studies and the church essays and the CES Letter, I no longer believe. I told her it wasn't because I was bitter due to [other church related

events in my life] ... I told her it wasn't an easy decision and I understand completely the implications for her, myself, and my family if the church isn't true. That's the hardest part of all of it: coping with the understanding that there are no eternal families and that there is no heaven.

As a 20-something-year-old man I broke into tears in front of my fiancée, sobbing and crying hysterically about how I love her and how I'm sorry that I am not the man she needs me to be. I told her I was sorry for what I did to her life. I told her I wasn't going to tell her [of my faith transition], but I knew if she knew I was hurting this badly, she would want to know.

She is as good of a girl as they come. [She] is a smart, intelligent, loving, and understanding young woman. I've told her I've had doubts but never told her straight out that I don't believe. It was a huge shock to her, and after the initial yelling and fighting she calmed down and told me she loved me, and nothing will ever change that.

I told her I was going to be the man she needed me to be, and that if I had to, I would play the part my entire life. I also told her I just needed to be heard. That I didn't want to destroy her testimony or ruin her faith because that's one of the things that makes her happy. I just wanted to help her understand why I felt the way I did. I told her I didn't want to resign, and I don't want out, but I just needed to be able to be heard. She was so relieved and happy to hear that.”

This is the only experience in coming out as a non-believer that I would never want to change. As imperfect as it was, it still defines our spiritual relationship to this day. I consider myself to be a fairly decent public speaker and writer. When I have something that I want to tell someone (especially bad news) I like to be able to communicate as effectively and successfully as possible. But this moment was real. It was raw. It was unrehearsed and it was passionate. It was an emotional rollercoaster like no other. That's when I knew my fiancée truly loved me for who I was, imperfections and all. We eventually got married in the temple even though I was mentally out of the church.

Although everything turned out alright in my situation, I wouldn't advise you have a similar experience. Here is what she had to say about the revelation:

“It was a really big shock. I knew that you'd had struggles, but I didn't think you didn't believe. So, I immediately went to do what the church leaders have told us to do. I said things such as “We'll talk to somebody. Rely on my faith. I'll help you through this.” I know it put a lot of stress on you but it was really, really hard because I had been raised my whole life saying if I did what I was supposed to, if I followed the church's teachings, and if I did everything right, I would marry someone in the temple who loved the gospel. It felt like a betrayal.”

Of all the conversations you have with believers, coming out to your spouse is the most important one of all. Parents can disown you, the bishop can excommunicate you, and your children can hate you. But the one person you don't want to lose is your husband or wife. The conversation you'll have with them is delicate and needs to be handled with care. Just as an example, imagine if you had done something wrong. How would you want your spouse to address this with you? Would you want there to be a shouting match with hurt feelings at the end? Would you want them to go in guns blazing, full of accusations or would you rather they listen to your side of the story first? Would you want to feel small and broken, or loved and secure?

You've done nothing wrong in leaving the church, but you should treat this conversation with your spouse the same way you would any other discussion where you have to tell them bad news. Conflict is an essential part of any relationship, but conflict resolution is what you should always strive for. Respect is the key to coming out as a non-believer to your spouse. I know it is easy to want to shout, “You're brainwashed! You're in a cult!” Goodness knows, I had plenty of arguments with my wife initially, and we both said things we regret. Here are some phrases to avoid using:

“I can't believe you are dumb enough to...”

“You're so blind to the fact that...”

“How could you support a church that...”

“Don’t you realize how crazy you sound when...”

“Why do you always defend the church for...”

You need to realize that just because you’ve left the church, it doesn’t make your spouse “the bad guy” for not following along. This cannot be personal. You cannot blame your spouse for not automatically supporting you in your unbelief. This may be hard to understand, but this is just as painful for them as it is for you. You have to validate their pain. You should always express your love and let them know you’re on the same team. You want to come out of this stronger than when you go into it.

You have had some time to process leaving the church. They need the time to do so as well. You need to make this a safe topic to discuss rather than a stressful or emotional one. You don’t want to get to a point where your husband or wife groans every time you bring up the church because they know they’re about to get blown out in a two-hour argument. As I’ve already expressed, my experience in telling my wife of my unbelief wasn’t pretty. I want to help prevent you from making the same mistakes. I want you communicate effectively and efficiently. I want you to be accurate in your statements of how you feel, why you have left, and what’s going to happen from here.

It’s never easy to have a difficult conversation. I feel it would be best to tell your spouse the news in person. This is one of the most intensely personal things you could tell another person. Your husband or wife isn’t going to want to receive this information over a text message or an email. They’re also not going to want to hear this news after a long day at work, having just put the kids down for bed or putting away a batch of laundry. The best time for you might be on a Friday night when neither of you have to go to work in the morning and have this on your mind all day the next day.

Use your judgment on what to do to set the mood for the conversation. If I had to do it over differently, I would take my wife out on a date or cook a meal in our home to make her feel special. You are

the person that knows your partner best. You know their likes and their dislikes. You know their triggers as well as the things that calm them down. Use these things to your advantage to make this conversation go smoother for the both of you.

If you have children, I would recommend sending them off with their grandparents or a friend's house for the night if possible. You don't want to place your children in the middle of this faith transition at all, much less during the initial shock of it all. Your children are not weapons. They are never supposed to be used against your spouse emotionally in arguments or discussions about the church. You will need to decide on your own how you are going to raise your children, either in or out of the church, but the worst thing you could do for them while you are going through a faith transition is to get them involved in arguments with your spouse. They're not just your children. As your spouse, they get to make decisions about their religious upbringing as well.

Here is how a sample conversation might go:

“Honey, I want you to know how special you are to me. You are the person I cherish and admire the most. You make my life worth living.”

Allow them a chance to reply then say something like this:

“I have something I need to ask you. If there was something that has been hurting me, would you want to know it? Would you want to help?”

“Honey, I have something to say and I really need you to hear me out for a minute. Is that okay?”

“I am having some concerns about the church, and I need to tell you how I'm feeling about things. I am scared. I don't know what to do. For as long as we have been married, I've been a faithful, active member of the church. I have fulfilled my callings and done my best to be the best spouse I can be. I don't

want to cause an argument, but I just need you to know how I'm feeling."

This is the most anxiety provoking part. You don't know how they will react, so prepare yourself for the worst. After you break the news, you may want to have one or two simple issues to bring up when they ask what your "concerns" are. With most everyone else, you shouldn't delve into what your issues are on the first discussion. However, your spouse is supposed to be the person you can share anything with, so an extra expectation is there to be open and honest. Be prepared to answer their concerns even though you shouldn't drop all your information at once. Know your topic like the back of your hand. You don't want to say, "I don't know." If it's something big enough to lose your salvation over, your spouse will expect you to know.

Have you ever gotten a text where someone sends you an unsolicited link to a church quote and says, "I was thinking of you," expecting you to be grateful? You know how ineffective that is and you think, "Why in the world do they think sending me this would resolve my concerns? The same goes with sending back unsolicited links to the Gospel Topic Essays or anything else. You can't just throw the CES Letter in front of someone's face and expect them to appreciate it or find any sort of enlightenment from it. While the CES Letter (and other documents) can be a good basis for starting your deep delve into church history, it should not be the first thing you pull out as your reasoning for your faith transition.

You shouldn't just say, "I read the CES Letter and now I don't believe in the church." In fact, I wouldn't mention CES Letter or Reddit or anything else that has negative stigma in Mormonism. If there's a church source used, reference that rather than the document itself. Instead of saying, "In this book called the CES Letter, I read that Joseph Smith was married to at least 34 women," you should follow the reference and say, "In the church's essay on Plural Marriage, it says..." This way it is less likely to be considered "anti-Mormon" material. What makes something "anti-Mormon" is how you present it and in what context. Don't be surprised if there's some pushback on whether or not the church's own website is legitimate or not. Some people have

accused the site of being hacked rather than admit that the information is true.

Continuing with the example, if you tell your spouse that you're bothered by Joseph's Smith polygamy, be prepared to say why it bothers you: "I have a problem with Joseph Smith's polygamy because in Doctrine and Covenants Section 132:60 God gives Joseph instructions to marry only virgins and women who weren't already married. Joseph disobeyed God and married mother/daughter pairs and also other men's wives. This bothers me because the Book of Mormon says polygamy is an abomination unless God commands it, and even then it is only supposed to be used to raise up seed to the Lord. The essay says Joseph didn't have sexual relations with the girls he married but if that's the case why marry them?"

I'm not saying you have to, or even should, use this example. I do suggest being able to explain at least one or two issues in this kind of detail to your partner. With that being said, you don't want to overload them with information. You don't want to scare them. You don't want them to have the backfire effect and have them double down against your issues. That's why I suggest only having a few topics to discuss and then asking them if you can just have the rest of the night to recover from the conversation.

Something I didn't do well is clarify what my faith change wasn't. At the time, we had been having some major disagreements with our local leaders on unrelated issues. These issues I had with local leadership were the catalyst for embarking on my faith journey, but the reason I left the church wasn't because of those men. She thought my unbelief stemmed from our disagreements with leadership, not that I actually had issues with the church:

"At first, I just thought it was just because of our local leaders and I didn't think it was because of the teachings of the church or anything, so every time you tried to share your issues I didn't want to listen. I was very adamant that even if you told me I was still going to believe in the church because whatever you were showing me was anti-Mormon lies. It was really hard to

be willing to listen because I've been told my whole life that if I listened to anti-Mormon lies that Satan would have me.

Up until after we got married, I thought it would just blow over. I thought that after we got married and all the stuff with the church leaders settled down, you would want to go back and the stuff that had troubled you wouldn't trouble you as much since you didn't have that anger toward the local leaders as much.

That's why we were fighting so much about the church when we first got married—because I wanted you to go back. I wanted you to come back to church but I didn't get why you weren't. I knew you had doubts and had gone through this faith change, but I didn't understand how it could still be fueled after resolving the incident with our local leaders.”

Save yourself and your spouse a lot of hurt. Don't fight about things that don't matter. When you do argue, don't make it a “kitchen sink” argument where you bring in your whole arsenal of issues with the church. You may need to talk about these things eventually, but I would advise you to be sensitive to your partner's feelings. Talk about the right things so you don't argue about the wrong thing. If you have one thing you want to talk about, leave it at that. Don't let a discussion about the church's essay on race and the priesthood lead into an argument about the Kinderhook plates, then into a shouting match where you accuse your spouse of being “brainwashed” because they still believe the church.

You should also know when to pick your battles. You don't have to show your husband or wife that you're right all the time. In fact, I am confident in saying that you aren't right about everything 100% of the time. If your spouse comes home from church and mentions how great a talk was on man's agency in 2 Nephi 2, you don't have to make a flippant comment about how three chapters later the Book of Mormon has racist doctrines on how black skin is a curse from God. The best way to crush your spouse's self-esteem is to try to make them feel stupid by knocking what they have to say.

Here's a situation: Say my wife were to come home and mention how someone gave a talk on Alma 31 and how funny she thought it was that the people would get up on the Rameumptom and make those silly prayers. I could say, "Yeah? That doesn't remind you of a church conference that takes place every six months inside a great and spacious building?" I *could* say that, but that would do nothing but cause an argument or stop the conversation and hurt her feelings. Rather, I could say, "I'm glad you had a good day at church." This way I would be acknowledging what she said and in turn she would feel validated. There's no need to cause undue stress on your spouse as a way of coping with your own issues. Just be kind to each other.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

“I really opened up my search for truth this May and knew when I was researching, I was out. It's been hard on my marriage but luckily my wife is more focused on our relationship and we've been able to work through so much.”

As I mentioned before, I got lucky in telling my wife that I no longer believed in the church. She took it hard at first, but she was eventually able to understand my reasons for giving up my faith. The day after my meltdown occurred, she and I were riding in the car together. I distinctly remember the moment because that was when I realized my relationship with my wife was going to change forever.

We were about a mile from my parent's house. She was driving and I was in the passenger's seat. She wanted to make sure I was alright from the night before and told me again that she still loved me. She let me know this news wasn't going to change how she felt about me and that she still wanted to marry me. I told her I felt the same way. It seemed like the conversation was going well until she said, “Logan, we're going to get through this. We're going to get you into therapy. We're going to talk to people who can answer your questions about the church. Rely on me and I can help you regain your testimony.” My heart sank. I really thought she got it. I really thought she understood where I was coming from.

It hurt to hear her say those things. I didn't want to regain my testimony or get answers to unanswerable questions in that moment. I just needed her to validate me so that I didn't feel crazy. I needed

someone to tell me that my concerns were valid rather than shutting me down. I needed love and support, but not love conditioned upon regaining a testimony of the church. I told her what kind of support I needed from her. I told her that I needed her to read some of what I've read. Here is what I wrote about the conversation later that night:

“I told her in order for her to understand why I felt like I do I wanted her to read some things and let me show her my issues and concerns. At first, she said she refused to read anti-Mormon literature but then once I told her it wasn't to hurt her but to explain my hurt, she was okay with it. She realized that all along I wasn't trying to destroy her testimony but just have someone to listen to me.”

A lot of the concern and worry she had at the time was not realizing where I stood on things. She didn't know if I was still going to go to church, or if we were going to get married in the temple. She didn't know if we were raising our future kids in the church or what the future held for our family. I didn't understand why she was more upset that I was leaving the church than the fact that I was in pain. I thought she would want to know what had been going on in my life. In reality, she did want to know, but I don't think she was ready. It took months, but she was eventually able to understand. Here's another entry that I wrote about this:

“[My wife] and I had a breakthrough tonight. Basically, I told her what I do believe instead of what I don't. I told her I do believe there is a God and Jesus Christ did exist. I told her I believe the gospel is true, meaning faith, repentance, etc. However, as an organization, the church is false. That it is God's church, but the bureaucracy of the church is false.

[I told her] even though there's absolutely no evidence, I'd still like to believe there's something greater than me out there in the universe. But is God a person, a father? I really doubt it. An all-powerful father wouldn't allow his children to suffer like he does. But whatever. The breakthrough was that she actually understood it this time. It really clicked for her.

[She finally understood what I meant when I told her] that the church is undeniably false as an organization. I believe the gospel as taught by New Testament Jesus Christ. Pretty much "don't be a [jerk] unto others and they shouldn't be a [jerk] unto you." Just love, compassion, tolerance.

[She actually] said she accepted that as my belief and [she is] perfectly okay with me believing that. She was even partially okay with me telling her I wanted to resign because now she knows people don't leave just to sin... That we can be good people even without the confines of how the church wants us to be good people.

[This conversation] started with the [general authority paycheck] leaks. I told her about it, and she was really surprised... I told her that's why I don't want to pay tithing. She didn't agree but she at least understood why it is so hard for me to want to pay tithing.”

Over time, my beliefs changed and today I no longer believe any of those teachings. The victory at the time is that I was able to be honest while also curbing my wife's tendency to listen with her heart and not her ears. My wife puts it like this: “I'm not good with words, so I often express what I want to say through emotions. That's why I cry so much when I can't get it out with my words.”

It really hurts me to think I've caused my wife to cry over something I've done. I never wanted to drag her into my issues with the church. I never wanted this for my life, much less hers. We've had plenty of conversations which have turned into arguments which turned into crying sessions. But when I stopped thinking only of my selfish issues and realized that she is an extension of myself, I gained a new appreciation for her as my partner.

As much as my wife and I love each other, we don't have a fairytale marriage. Most people don't. I can't tell you how your spouse will react when you tell them the news. I can't tell you what to expect in the thousands of little conversations you're going to have with them over the coming months. I'm also not going to speak ill of my wife or

tell you of our private and intimate conversations we've had over the years. I will give you a few scenarios that have happened in my life and could happen in yours as well.

When I told my wife that I no longer believed in the church, she was just as alone as I was. She didn't have anyone to talk to until later, after I went public with my unbelief on Facebook. We received some foul treatment, but I am proud of my wife for how she handled these conversations with others. Whatever accusations or negative comments were said, my wife always defended me. She has never once badmouthed me to her parents. She has never once let the bishop speak to her about reconverting me, nor has she let the missionaries show up uninvited. When ward members told her they were "sorry" about our situation, she said they have nothing to be sorry about because we are in love and she supports me. She has been a bastion of courage in the face of public defamation.

Your spouse may take different action. Your husband or wife might go straight to their parents and ask their advice. They might go to the local bishop and seek counsel on what to do. They might stand up in the middle of fast and testimony meeting and tell the whole ward of your "disaffection" from the church. When I was a member, I used to refer to first Sundays as "Open-Mic Sundays" due to the personal nature of some of the things shared. We've all been there when someone gives too much information about their personal lives over the pulpit, and this isn't where you want your business shared. You should ask your spouse to keep things between you two while you figure things out so that things don't happen too fast. You don't want the bishop to call you in on charges of apostasy because of a spur of the moment freak-out call from your partner.

I remember a heated church-related argument I once had with my wife. It's been so long that I don't remember what our fight was about, but I remember storming out of our tiny one-bedroom apartment and slamming the front door. I didn't even know where I was going but I got in my car and just started driving. After a few minutes, I found myself in the parking lot of a local superstore. I walked in and wandered around, looking for nothing in particular. I walked aimlessly around the store until I reached the men's department.

My reason in visiting the store revealed itself. I was going to buy “regular people” underwear. I stood in front of the men’s underwear section for ten minutes trying to figure out what I wanted to buy myself. I didn’t know the difference between non-church produced boxers and boxer briefs. I didn’t know what materials would be the most comfortable. I also didn’t know what size I needed. I settled on some cheap 10-pack, held it under my arm, and walked away. I was ready to go home now.

Something else caught my eye as I walked to the front of the store: a six pack of smores-flavored bottled cold coffee. I picked it up and looked at it wearily. “I was going to buy that coffee,” I decided. My heart raced as I walked to the checkout line. I wondered if God would really preclude me from entering the Celestial Kingdom for drinking bean juice. The familiar phrase I had shared over and over on my mission entered my mind: “It’s not the coffee that will keep you out of heaven, it’s the disobedience.” For just a moment, I hesitated when I put the box on the self-service checkout. My mind was filled with my doubts of whether I should go through with purchasing my first coffee. Another phrase that I shared on my mission entered my mind: “Was Joseph Smith really a prophet? If so, nothing else matters.”

I regained control of my thoughts and emotions, and I reminded myself: “Joseph Smith was not a prophet, so the Word of Wisdom wasn’t inspired, it isn’t a real commandment, and I will not be punished for drinking bean juice.” I pulled out my debit card and made my purchase. I put my drinks in my bag and walked quickly back to my car, fearing that someone I knew would see me with coffee in my hand. I sat in my car for a few minutes to regain my composure. An everyday task for everyone else had induced a panic attack and emotional storm in me.

On my way home I was still upset over the argument I had with my wife. Even as I put my key in the door to my apartment, I didn’t know what I would say to her. But when I saw her, I knew what to say: “Honey, there’s going to be a few changes in this house.” I told her that I would no longer be attending church on Sundays. Then I pulled my purchases out of the plastic bag from the store. I told her I would also no longer be wearing garments and that I was going to try coffee. I

know her heart broke. I saw it in her eyes. But I was so foolishly selfish at the time, I didn't think about or care how my actions that day would affect her.

We did make up after that fight. We always did. We still do. Eventually, she didn't care about the coffee or the garments. For my birthday one year she even bought me a coffee machine to use in my office at work. There's been times where we've been pushed to our absolute limits, but through the refiner's fire we have come out infinitely stronger for it. We don't have a perfect life, but we work with the one we have. We don't have children yet, but we do have two puppies that we love more than anything else and they bring us untold joy. We love each other and support each other in our trials. It took two and a half years of fighting about the church to get to this point, but now that we're here we are finally happy with where we are.

I know some spouses may have the opposite reaction that mine did. Divorce and separation are scary topics, even if you don't ever see yourself getting to that point. If I'm being honest, one of the inspirations in writing this book was seeing a few stories online where people said their husband or wife decided to leave them after they said they were leaving the church. When I asked my wife to speak directly to the believing spouses of people like me, she spoke from her heart as she's had a lot of time to think about what she'd like to hear:

“They're still your spouse. They're still the person you got married to. They're still everything you fell in love with, and you can't be angry at them. You can't let that anger keep you from your best friend because they're going through so much. And while you're going through just as much, they need love just as much as you do, and they still love you just as much.

Nothing changes because they leave the church or don't believe. It doesn't mean they don't love you. It doesn't mean their love isn't as strong or as important. It doesn't mean that the family you have together isn't as important. Don't give up on something just because it doesn't go exactly as you planned. You can get through it. You can find the balance between your spouse and everything else... And it's worth it to keep your spouse in your life and keep

the love that you have for each other. It's not worth losing each other over and it never will be.

The church says if a loved one falls away that you don't get to have the eternal family. But I think if God loves us and someone leaves the church and follows their heart to do what they believe is right, I don't think he would keep someone from their family if they do the best they can. I believe that I will have an eternal family, and I believe that my husband will be a part of it."

You can get through this. There is a long road ahead, and you may already be experiencing the fallout of telling your spouse or others about your unbelief. It also might not work out the way either of you had planned—and that's okay too. You may not be able to reconcile your differences. You may decide to go different directions in life. But whatever happens, realize that your life can be rebuilt. You can be happy. You deserve to be happy. Don't give up hope. Change in your marriage may not come right away. It may not come even as you like it, but it can come. Things got better for my wife and I as we came together and made compromises. When I asked her when she thought things started to get better between us church wise, she said:

"It was after I stopped trying to find an excuse for everything. I realized that there were things that you had said that I did agree with, but I didn't want it to seem like I was falling away from the church as well. I knew we had conversations where you thought maybe I was doubting my faith and you got really hopeful that I would wake up and see the truth so to speak. I didn't want to give you false hope, but I wanted you to know I was willing listen to whatever you felt you needed to say."

I asked my wife if she had anything she would like to share with people like me who may be struggling in the their faith transition. She said this might not apply to everyone, but that she wanted to speak to those who feel alone. I can't think of a better way to end this chapter than by sharing what she said:

"Don't give up. I know it's hard. I know that you feel alone and lost and confused, or maybe you feel free. But don't go at it alone

and don't try to do this by yourself. There are people that love you and that want you to be happy. And they'd do anything for you to be happy. Even if it's just one person, find that person and after you give them a chance to get over the shock, ask them to be your support. Ask them to be your friend, your spouse, your loved one, your parent. Ask them to forget about everything else and just to think about you as a person. Just because you don't believe or want to take your name off the church records doesn't mean you're a bad person. You're not evil. You're not a sinner. You're a person that has people who love you. That love goes deeper than the church. You just have to remind them of that."

Section Two

Your Parents

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

“When they found out that I’m not paying tithing, my mom said, “You better think about what you’re doing.” Well, mom, I do think about it. I think about it a lot. In fact, it seems like it is all I can think about. I wish I could think about something else.”

Believing parents take the news of their children leaving the church hard. They’re going to take your decision or unbelief personally. In order to understand how to communicate with your believing parents, you must try to understand things from their point of view. You have to consider why they would be hurt by your actions.

They have raised their children in the church they love. They have poured their hearts and souls into making their homes a happy place where the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the center. They’ve taught their children true and correct principles. They’ve believed the words of the prophets and modeled their lives after those men. They have done everything they could to ensure that their children live good and honest lives.

They’ve said nightly family prayers and held daily scripture studies. They’ve planned and given lessons for Family Home Evenings on Monday nights. They’ve taken their sons to scout camps, ordained them to the priesthood, and watched them grow into men while serving missions. They’ve helped their daughters with their Personal Progress projects, watched them be sealed to a worthy husband in the temple, and seen them become mothers. They’ve attended church dances, temple trips, and mutual activities.

Your family experience may be different. Your parents may not have done all of the things I listed above. Your parents may be complete narcissists who only care about themselves. I realize that some people don't have living parents, and those that do might not have working relationships with their parents. Whatever your family situation is, one thing remains the same: When you turn your back on the most important thing your parents ever raised you to believe, it breaks their hearts.

Until recently, there was nothing to prepare parents for their children leaving the church. There are conference talks galore that warn people not to leave the church. There are talks that describe how terrible life is for those who have left the church or give stories about people who drink coffee and can't get into heaven now. But you know what wasn't talked about until recently? How to react when your children tell you they're leaving the church. Honestly, most parents don't know how to react, or what to do, or what to say when their children tell them they're leaving the church. There's no instruction manual that comes with that.

Unless they have personal experiences with someone close to them who has left the church, chances are all your parents know about your situation is what they hear in conference or Sunday School. All they know are the stories of people's lives being in shambles after they leave. What goes through their mind is that now that you've left the church is that you're going to start drinking or smoking or cheating on your spouse. They assume the worst will happen because the church tells them the worst will happen.

In order to communicate effectively and remove these concerns, you need to be able to set their minds at ease. You need to let them know that you still love them and that leaving the church will never change how you feel about them. Of my own experience in coming out as a non-believer to my parents, I once wrote:

“When it comes down to it, I know it was hard for them to hear me tell them. They weren't expecting it at all. I didn't expect them just to be like “Okay, cool no problem.” I knew it would be hard. I love my parents very much and they are being very

supportive. We are all okay now and life has resumed as normal. It seems all is well, but I know I have to prepare for the worst.”

You have to understand that this is world-shattering news to them. If you can't understand how your parents feel, or why they feel the way they do about this change, you will never be able to communicate effectively with them. I know you feel betrayed and hurt and scared and alone, but your parents will probably feel many of the same emotions.

You have every right to feel the way you do. You have every right to be angry. But like it or not, once you share your news with someone, you bring them into this process with you. They have the right to be angry as well. They have the right to voice their concerns. They have the right to attempt an intervention on the spiritual well-being of their children. You may not appreciate some of the ways they deal with these emotions, but the best thing you can do to show them that you're okay is to let them see you live a happy, successful, and genuine life.

It's difficult to convince people that you're happy outside the church, especially when leaders teach the opposite. In his April 2019 General Conference talk entitled, “Come, Follow Me,” current church president, Russell M. Nelson, said the following on families in the afterlife:

“So, what is required for a family to be exalted forever? We qualify for that privilege by making covenants with God, keeping those covenants, and receiving essential ordinances...

The Savior invites all to follow Him into the waters of baptism and, in time, to make additional covenants with God in the temple and receive and be faithful to those further essential ordinances. All these are required if we want to be exalted with our families and with God forever.

The anguish of my heart is that many people whom I love, whom I admire, and whom I respect decline His invitation.

They ignore the pleadings of Jesus Christ when He beckons, “Come, follow me.”

I understand why God weeps. I also weep for such friends and relatives. They are wonderful men and women, devoted to their family and civic responsibilities. They give generously of their time, energy, and resources. And the world is better for their efforts. But they have chosen not to make covenants with God. They have not received the ordinances that will exalt them with their families and bind them together forever...

They need to understand that while there is a place for them hereafter—with wonderful men and women who also chose not to make covenants with God—that is not the place where families will be reunited and be given the privilege to live and progress forever. That is not the kingdom where they will experience the fulness of joy—of never-ending progression and happiness. Those consummate blessings can come only by living in an exalted celestial realm with God, our Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and our wonderful, worthy, and qualified family members...

In this life, you have never settled for second best in anything. Yet, as you resist fully embracing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are choosing to settle for second best.

The Savior said, ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’ However, as you choose not to make covenants with God, you are settling for a most meager roof over your head throughout all eternity.”

Can you imagine the pain that strikes their hearts when they hear things like this spoken about their eternal family? Can you imagine the heartbreak in believing that you’ll be sealed to only part of your family in the afterlife? In a church where a core teaching is “Families Are Forever,” there is an awful lot of “Us vs Them” mentality taught when it comes to those leaving the church. This is what your parents are being taught about people like you. In the same talk, President Nelson goes on to say:

“I would further entreat my reticent friends by saying:

Pour out your heart to God. Ask Him if these things are true. Make time to study His words. Really study! If you truly love your family and if you desire to be exalted with them throughout eternity, pay the price now—through serious study and fervent prayer—to know these eternal truths and then to abide by them.

If you are not sure you even believe in God, start there. Understand that in the absence of experiences with God, one can doubt the existence of God. So, put yourself in a position to begin having experiences with Him. Humble yourself. Pray to have eyes to see God’s hand in your life and in the world around you. Ask Him to tell you if He is really there—if He knows you. Ask Him how He feels about you. And then listen.”

One such dear friend of mine had limited experiences with God. But he longed to be with his departed wife. So he asked me to help him. I encouraged him to meet with our missionaries in order to understand the doctrine of Christ and learn of gospel covenants, ordinances, and blessings.

That he did. But he felt the course they advised would require him to make too many changes in his life. He said, “Those commandments and covenants are just too difficult for me. Also, I can’t possibly pay tithing, and I don’t have time to serve in the Church.” Then he asked me, “Once I die, please do the necessary temple work for my wife and me so that we can be together again.”

Thankfully, I am not this man’s judge. But I do question the efficacy of proxy temple work for a man who had the opportunity to be baptized in this life—to be ordained to the priesthood and receive temple blessings while here in mortality—but who made the conscious decision to reject that course.

The church uses spiritual intimidation to widen the gap between believing family members and those who have left or have doubts. When members, and especially parents, hear teaching such as this, it causes them to retrench and double down on what they believe to be true. This is what their prophet is teaching them. Parents believe that their children will be lost forever when they leave the church.

This teaching is further reinforced by other speakers in their General Conference talks. In his talk given in the October 2014 Saturday Morning session of General Conference called “Stay in the Boat and Hold On!” Elder M. Russell Ballard makes the analogy of the church being a boat named “The Old Ship Zion.” He likens those who leave the church to those that would jump off a boat in the middle of a stormy sea.

“I have discovered in my ministry that those who have become lost and confused are typically those who have most often forgotten that when the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve speak with a united voice, it is the voice of the Lord for that time. The Lord reminds us, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same”

In other words, they leave the Old Ship Zion—they fall away; they apostatize. Tragically, they often experience short-term and eventually long-term unintended consequences, not only for themselves but also for their families.”

He doesn’t mention what those “unintended consequences of leaving the church are, but he did plant it in the minds of members everywhere that those that leave the church are “lost and confused.” He uses spiritual intimidation again to cement it into their minds that those who apostatize from the church cannot be happy outside the church. Along similar lines, he gave another talk in the October 2016 General Conference named “To Whom Shall We Go?” He gives a story recorded in John 6, where Christ’s disciples left him for a time.

“One of the most heart-wrenching stories in scripture occurred when “many of the Lord’s disciples” found it hard to accept His

teachings and doctrine, and they ‘went back, and walked no more with him.’

As these disciples left, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Will ye also go away?”

Peter responded:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

In that moment, when others focused on what they could not accept, the Apostles chose to focus on what they did believe and know, and as a result, they remained with Christ.

Later, on the day of Pentecost, the Twelve received the gift of the Holy Ghost. They became bold in their witness of Christ and began to understand more fully Jesus’s teachings.

Today is no different. For some, Christ’s invitation to believe and remain continues to be hard—or difficult to accept. Some disciples struggle to understand a specific Church policy or teaching. Others find concerns in our history or in the imperfections of some members and leaders, past and present. Still others find it difficult to live a religion that requires so much. Finally, some have become “weary in well-doing.” For these and other reasons, some Church members vacillate in their faith, wondering if perhaps they should follow those who “went back, and walked no more” with Jesus.

If any one of you is faltering in your faith, I ask you the same question that Peter asked: “To whom shall you go?” If you choose to become inactive or to leave the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where will you go? What will you do? The decision to “walk no more” with Church members and the Lord’s chosen leaders will have a long-term impact that cannot always be seen right now. There may be some doctrine, some policy, some bit of history that puts you at odds with your

faith, and you may feel that the only way to resolve that inner turmoil right now is to ‘walk no more’ with the Saints. If you live as long as I have, you will come to know that things have a way of resolving themselves. An inspired insight or revelation may shed new light on an issue. Remember, the Restoration is not an event, but it continues to unfold.”

The church teaches its members that those who leave the church are lost. They teach that people like you have no direction in life. They teach that true happiness can never be found outside of the church, and your parents don’t want that for you. In the same talk, he continues speaking toward those who have left the church. He poses questions that makes it seem like you have no choice but to return to the church because only the church contains the fulness of the gospel.

“So before you make that spiritually perilous choice to leave, I encourage you to stop and think carefully before giving up whatever it was that brought you to your testimony of the restored Church of Jesus Christ in the first place. Stop and think about what you have felt here and why you felt it. Think about the times when the Holy Ghost has borne witness to you of eternal truth.

Where will you go to find others who share your belief in personal, loving Heavenly Parents, who teach us how to return to Their eternal presence?

Where will you go to be taught about a Savior who is your best friend, who not only suffered for your sins but who also suffered “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” so “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities,” including, I believe, the infirmity of loss of faith?

Where will you go to learn more about Heavenly Father’s plan for our eternal happiness and peace, a plan that is filled with wondrous possibilities, teachings, and guidance for our mortal

and eternal lives? Remember, the plan of salvation gives mortal life meaning, purpose, and direction.

Where will you go to find a detailed and inspired Church organizational structure through which you are taught and supported by men and women who are deeply committed to serving the Lord by serving you and your family?

Where will you go to find living prophets and apostles, who are called by God to give you another resource for counsel, understanding, comfort, and inspiration for the challenges of our day?

Where will you go to find people who live by a prescribed set of values and standards that you share and want to pass along to your children and grandchildren?

And where will you go to experience the joy that comes through the saving ordinances and covenants of the temple?

My heartfelt plea is that we will encourage, accept, understand, and love those who are struggling with their faith. We must never neglect any of our brothers and sisters. We are all at different places on the path, and we need to minister to one another accordingly.

Just as we should open our arms in a spirit of welcoming new converts, so too should we embrace and support those who have questions and are faltering in their faith.”

While these are the types of messages people like me hear the loudest, there have been times where the church has taught to love those who leave. To Elder Ballard’s credit, he did say that those with faith troubles should be loved. People like me often see these talks as nothing more than public relation stunts. I can only speak for myself here, but I see these types of talks as half-hearted and insincere. One such talk was given by Elder Dieter Uchtdorf in the October 2013 session of General Conference called “Come, Join With Us.” Here is the relevant passage:

“The search for truth has led millions of people to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, there are some who leave the Church they once loved.

One might ask, “If the gospel is so wonderful, why would anyone leave?”

Sometimes we assume it is because they have been offended or lazy or sinful. Actually, it is not that simple. In fact, there is not just one reason that applies to the variety of situations.

Some of our dear members struggle for years with the question whether they should separate themselves from the Church.

In this Church that honors personal agency so strongly, that was restored by a young man who asked questions and sought answers, we respect those who honestly search for truth. It may break our hearts when their journey takes them away from the Church we love and the truth we have found, but we honor their right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience, just as we claim that privilege for ourselves.”

It’s really hard for someone like me to listen to a talk like this when the first time I asked a church leader about Joseph Smith’s polygamy, he accused me of reading anti-Mormon literature... or when I hear stories of active members who are excommunicated for starting support groups for disaffected members... or those who are excommunicated for protesting church policies regarding the safety of children. Regardless of how these talks are interpreted, it’s impossible to make the claim that the church has never taught publicly that people should have compassion toward those who leave. Whether the teaching was sincere or not, they do exist. Be aware of these types of talks and other church produced material so that you can more accurately discuss the church’s position in conversations with others.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

“One day I will be able to enjoy my coffee without feeling like it is a statement against my parent's religion.”

Knowing the conversation will be hard, you need to approach this with care. You shouldn't bring your unbelief up in the middle of a shouting match when your mom asks you why you didn't watch General Conference. Before you come out as a non-believer you should have a time and place prepared. You should already know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. This section is intended for use by adult persons only. If you are a minor, I would advise you to wait to have this conversation until you're able to be fully independent.

As I mentioned before, the night I came out as a non-believer to my parents, I wasn't prepared. It wasn't pretty. I had a complete mental breakdown where I cried hysterically in front of my fiancée at her home. After a while, I had become so incapacitated that she had to call my parents to come get me and bring me home. The next day, I wrote about what took place:

“After I regained composure, I was physically and emotionally drained and unable to drive myself home. She asked if she could call my parents to come pick me up and I said yes. She explained the situation the best she could, and I am proud of her that they were the first people she thought to call.

They came to pick me up and I rode home with my mom and my dad drove my car home. My mom said I didn't even have to tell her

what happened unless I'm ready to talk about it. I told her I was okay and that I wasn't going to hurt myself. I told her that I no longer believe the church is true. She immediately started to defend the church. She wanted to argue about how the church brings true happiness and if I don't believe that then I shouldn't get married in the temple.

This is very out of character for her. I was shocked. I told her the same things I told my fiancée and she calmed down a bit. I told her I just wanted her to be able to walk into a room and see me and not think of me as her lost apostate son. I told her I just wanted to be treated normally and nothing was going to change. That I would go to church, and that I would still be a good person. We're okay now and that I think she finally understands.

I got home and told my dad and it wasn't a big shock to him because I had already told him I had major doubts. Something I wasn't expecting was that he said, "Just because you don't believe anymore please don't start drinking or doing anything like that." I told him most of the time when people leave it isn't so they can sin, or are lazy, or are offended. It's because they just don't believe. He seemed to accept that answer and we are okay now."

That was the hardest night of my life up to that point. If I could do it all again, I would do it with the advice I'm giving in this book. I would tell my parents very differently if I had the chance. There were two big problems with how I told my parents. First, it was very unexpected, and I hadn't planned what to say. Second, I delved deep into my issues the same night that I told them of my unbelief. This triggered the backfire effect, which pushed them even deeper in their beliefs in an attempt to defend them. Don't do that. Don't do it like I did. I got lucky with my parents and my wife. Not everyone has such an understanding family.

Do it the right way. Pick a time that you'd like to talk to them. I would suggest not doing this around their birthdays, major holidays, major life events, or family vacations. Timing is important because people have periods of time in their life when their stress level and emotions fluctuate. To use an unrelated example, I told my mother and

my sister that I was engaged to my wife the night after a close family member had passed away. She and my sister had just walked through the door to our home as my fiancée was on her way out to go back to her parents' home. It was unexpected and sudden, and her response was not as great as I would have wanted. She wasn't unhappy but she had so much on her plate between funeral preparations and other tasks that she wasn't emotionally available to reciprocate the excitement. She was very happy for me, and has been nothing but supportive of us. It just wasn't the right time to tell her I was engaged.

After picking the right time, choose a place that they would feel most comfortable in receiving the "bad" news. Don't do it in the middle of a restaurant. Don't do it at church. Don't do it in public. Your parents would probably feel more comfortable learning this news in their own home. If their home is unavailable for any reason, you may want to have the meeting in your home. If possible, have your spouse take your children somewhere for a few hours while you talk to your parents. If you meet in their home and have younger siblings there, you may ask your parents if you could talk to them where you will not be disturbed. Also be courteous of their time. Don't have conversations like this late at night when you're all exhausted.

I would personally not recommend sharing this news over an email, a mailed letter, or a text message. Think of how you would want to learn of bad news. Just as you wouldn't want to be dumped over a text message, no one wants to learn that their child has left the church through similar means. In addition to the benefit of having a two-way conversation, initiating the meeting in person or over the phone will allow you to choose when your parents find out the news. If you send a letter, they might receive it during an uncomfortable time for you, such as in the middle of a business meeting or other high-stress times in your day. You want to be able to know when the conversation is coming and prepare yourself.

That being said, I realize some family situations may be different. If you are estranged from your family, meeting in person might not be the right way for you. If you believe sharing this news with your family may put you in danger, please reconsider having this

conversation at all. Please use your judgement and be safe when deciding to come out as a non-believer to your parents.

If you decide to have this conversation in person, you should go over and have try to have a pleasant night. After you've spent some time with them, tell them you have something you'd like to talk about. Tell them you love them and what you're about to say will never change that. Here is how a sample introduction might go:

“Mom, dad, I have something that I need to speak with you about. It is something that I have thought deeply on in the past weeks and months. What I'm about to say will be shocking and it will probably be very painful to hear. Just know that I love you and nothing will ever change that. This is as hard for me to tell you as it is for you to hear. I know you will need to speak, but please let me finish what I have to say before you respond or jump to judgement.”

At this point your parents may have no clue what you are going to say. Before emotions get too high, allow them a few seconds to acknowledge what you said. Now is the point at which you should either read your pre-written letter or start to deliver your pre-rehearsed message. Continue with something along these lines:

“Mom and dad, my faith has changed. I know this is something you would never want to hear from your child, but I hope you understand how painful this journey has been for me. My entire world has been shaken and I need you to know I need help. I know this is a lot to take in, but I cannot do this alone anymore. I need you to know that I am hurting right now. I am scared, and I just need you to love me through this. Thank you for letting me speak.”

That's it. Don't tell them that you're leaving the church or removing your name from the records. Don't go into the specific issues. Don't refer to the church as a cult. Don't bring up general authority paychecks. Don't bring up sexual abuse in the church. Don't use emotionally charged language. Don't bring up seer stones, and

whatever you do don't bring up Joseph Smith at this point. Allow them a few days to process what you've just told them.

If they push deeper, just reiterate that your faith has changed, and you don't know what this means for you or your family. Let them know that you don't have all the answers. If they refuse to let the topic go and demand that you tell them what the reason is, you may want to say something similar to the following:

“I know you are upset, and I understand why. I realize what this means for our family. I know tensions are high and you are hurt and scared, but right now, even just for tonight, I need you to love me and support me more than finding out the reasons this has happened. Please, in the spirit of this conversation, let me share my reasons another time.”

Rather than sharing what you no longer believe, ask them if you can share what you do believe. You might share that you still believe in families and service. If you are married, tell them that you still love your spouse and you are happily married. If you still believe in the gospel but not the church, tell them that you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you still believe in God and Jesus Christ, let them know so. If you have decided to still attend church meetings, fulfil your callings, pay tithing, or wear garments, don't be afraid to bring it up. You want to erase as much unnecessary fear in their minds as possible. If you tell them you still believe in some parts of the church or the gospel, be sure to tell them that you can't promise that you will always feel the same way. Tell them you are trying to figure out what you believe but at this point you don't have faith in the church. Hopefully this will be enough to satisfy their concerns.

At this point it will trigger the desire for them to “minister” to you or attempt to “save” you from leaving the church. Tell them that while you are undergoing a faith transition, you would like for your privacy to be respected. Ask them not to tell their bishop. If you are in the same ward, or if their bishop knows your current ward, their bishop may contact your local leaders and trigger a form of church discipline. Ask that they not send the missionaries. Whatever you do, do not confess to any type of sin. If you do, your parents will most likely

assume that you have “lost the Spirit” and anything else that you tell them will be blamed on your confessed sin. Always assume if you tell someone you’re leaving the church that everyone else will know. Tell them that you need to make the decision alone. If you feel the need, let them know you would prefer not to be sent scripture references, conference talks, or other church materials.

Do not allow the conversation to escalate to the point of an argument or a shouting match. Do not engage in personal insults, the blame game, or church bashing. You want this meeting to go as smoothly as possible, though don’t expect it to be easy. You will want to leave with a sense of relief, not an added burden. You want your parents to remember this is a day where you reached out to them in love, not a day when your family was destroyed.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

“Drinking coffee was such a small, insignificant thing, and yet if my mother knew... it would make her so saddened. I think if there is a God, he wants us to focus on being free and spreading the good around us.”

Once you deliver the news and the conversation with your parents ends, it would be best to excuse yourself. You don't want to overstay your welcome and you need to give them room to discuss it with each other. As I've said before, give them a few days for emotions to settle and for information to be processed. The initial shock may still be there, but it won't be quite as raw.

By your second conversation on this, your parents have had a few days to think about what you've told them. They've also had time to come up with questions about why your faith has been shaken. This is usually a good thing. The reason I suggest not unloading all of your doubts and concerns with the church until now is because they probably wouldn't be willing or able to accept anything you tell them as truth. At that point the “why” of your news won't be as important as keeping you from falling away.

The first few weeks after your announcement is probably the hardest. Be prepared for fights. Be prepared for love bombing. Be prepared to be called into the bishop's office if you live in your parents'

home ward. The bottom line is that you need to be prepared for confrontation. You'll be extremely lucky if you don't have any type of arguments with your parents over this. Things are good now, but I'll admit to having my share of heated discussions with my parents. Here is what happened the first time I shared the church produced gospel topics essays with my parents:

Mom: I read the essay you mentioned. Where did you get it? It seems like anti-Mormon literature.

Me: I got it from the church's website.

Mom: Well, it doesn't say anything in there about Joseph Smith that you said it did.

Me: Here. I highlighted it.

Dad: I don't even want to read it. You focus so much on the anti-Mormon stuff and the negative that you lose focus on the good.

Me: How is it anti-Mormon if it was published by the church?

Dad: You just focus too much on the negative. I don't want to hear it.

Mom: If it's destroying your testimony then I want to hear it!

At this point in the conversation my dad walked out of the room and I felt defeated. I showed my mom the highlighted copy of the essay, "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo." I told her why I felt this essay was testimony crushing. I told her about Fanny Alger and Helen Mar Kimball. I told her about Doctrine and Covenants 132 and how Joseph broke the instructions from God on polygamy there by marrying other men's wives. The conversation continued:

Mom: It didn't mention anything about him raping them.

Me: He was never married to them. It was never legal. No matter how you try to spin it, that was breaking the law of chastity.

Mom: It doesn't mean he wasn't a prophet. You've made mistakes too.

Me: Yes, but I didn't start a worldwide religion claiming that God made me marry a fourteen-year-old girl.

Mom: He wasn't a perfect man. That doesn't make the church not true.

Me: He wasn't a perfect man. I don't expect him to be. But I do expect that in the 2,000 years the gospel wasn't on the earth that God would choose one non-treasure hunting sexual predator to restore the church.

Mom: Well I know the church is true. The spirit testified to me thousands of times over my life that the church is true. I know it is true. God told me.

Me: He also told that to the Catholics and to the Jehovah's Witnesses and to the Muslims and to the Jews and every other religion.

Mom: Then you just have to believe that the Lord restored the priesthood and that is what separates us from them.

Me: I completely agree. You can't just base truth off of feelings. You have to have other things to support it.

Mom: Well I know it is true.

From there, we continued talking in circles for an hour. At that point in my faith transition, I was much more interested in explaining how I was right rather than explaining the issues. Every conversation was so emotionally charged. I just needed to be validated. I needed someone to tell me that I wasn't crazy. In an attempt to convey my

feelings, I used harsh words and said many things I'm not proud of. I wasn't concerned how they might perceive my words. In any case, it wasn't effective and all it did was damage our relationship and cause my parents to blame themselves.

If you have younger siblings in the home, especially minor children, your parents may try to shield them from your beliefs. They feel as though they've lost one child and they don't want to lose the others. Be cautious of how you "talk church" with them. You don't want a believing sibling to run tell your parents that you're spreading anti-Mormon propaganda, and you also don't want them to think negatively of you. The best way to stay close to them is to let them see you living a happy life. If a minor sibling comes to you with questions about why you left, you can explain it to them in simple, non-specific terms with your parent's permission. You should never attempt to dissuade a child of their faith unless they are your own. Use your judgment if a minor sibling comes to you with doubts or a desire to leave the church. Whatever the case, you will want parents and others to respect the boundaries you set for your children, so it is only fair that you should respect the boundaries they have made regarding their children.

A passage in the Book of Mormon, in Jacob 5, tells the story of the lord of the vineyard. He tends to his trees and tries his best to care for them. However, when one of his trees begins to bear bad fruit he blames himself. He feels he has failed in his duty to tend for his vineyard. Here are the relevant verses:

“46 And now, behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit; and these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self. But, behold, they have become like unto the wild olive tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them.

47 But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have

nourished it, and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?

48 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?

49 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard?

50 But, behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard: Spare it a little longer.

51 And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.”

Your parents aren't going to suggest burning you. If anything, they just want to see you happy. In this story, the lord of the vineyard felt defeated. He felt as though all his work was for nothing. He wondered why all the work he had done on this tree didn't take root or make a difference. He felt like burning it all down and giving up. But he never did. Eventually, his vineyard prospered again due to his work and his diligence.

What he didn't realize is that sometimes, no matter how much effort and work you put into a project, things just don't work out the way you want them to. Your parents are going to blame themselves. They're going to go through every mistake they've ever made as a

parent and wonder if that's the thing that made you leave the church. My parents did it and so will yours. If you did leave the church over something your parents did, I really don't want to give advice for situations I know nothing about. For other times, such as leaving over church history, current church policies, or inconsistencies in doctrine, don't play the blame game. You should tell your parents you leaving the church is not their fault and they couldn't have prevented it. Don't suggest they lied to you. Chances are they didn't know.

It's hard to know how anyone will react when you tell them the news. Your parents might not feel like they can talk to you, so they might choose to look for outer sources of inspiration on what to do. They might turn to other members of the ward, or their leaders, or they might look to official church resources for help. In a church produced blog post, called "When Your Child Chooses a Different Path," writer Robin Zenger Baker wrote of her own experience with her children who left the church:

"When two of my daughters decided to leave the Church, I couldn't help but think of this quote and feel that because I hadn't succeeded in keeping my whole family active in the Church, I had somehow failed as a parent.

In my conversations with other parents whose children have chosen to leave the Church, I discovered that the sentiment of failure among parents is not uncommon. But parents don't need to carry this burden.

I love this quote by Harold B. Lee: "No home is a failure as long as that home does not give up." To me, this means that the time or effort we put into our children is valuable and can lead to success. The goal is to keep on trying and keep on loving our children no matter what. It's also important to realize that success in the home is measured along multiple dimensions. Whether your child believes in the Church is just one aspect of their journey and doesn't have to be the only factor we consider when we measure our success as parents."

Once you tell your parents of your unbelief, your relationship changes. You'll no longer just be their little boy or girl who they love, you'll be their child who they love and who has left the church. For better or worse, you've broken out of the mold they raised you with and become your own person. I can't promise that your parents will react a certain way, but I can tell you that there are a few things you should do after the initial shock wears off if you want to maintain a relationship with them. From this point onward, you want your relationship to grow, not diminish. You do this by repairing burnt bridges and keeping their trust.

Let them know you're still their child. Many times, parents don't know how to talk to their children about the church because they're afraid of offending them. Let your conversations be natural but also be able to lead into church-related discussions if you believe there's a topic your parents want to talk about with you. Sometimes they will need to talk about church things too. If you bring up "anti-church" topics with them, don't be surprised when they share "pro-church" topics with you. If you approach these situations with tact, they can often turn out much better, even if they don't go the way you planned.

For instance, there are several church-produced materials that portray how someone left their faith and then found it again years later. These videos very rarely (if ever) tackle the real issues that someone will have when their faith is challenged. They are often insulting to people who have actual faith issues, even if they aren't intentionally made to do so. These videos frequently portray those who could just be considered less active, and not in the depths of "true" apostasy. In one of these videos, a young man who returned to his faith said, "I dug deeper and deeper in trying to find anything and everything negative I could find about God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and just Christianity more generally..." He continued, "I remember also reading lots of exodus stories--people that had similar questions and ultimately decided to leave the Church. And that was tempting to me." The young man recalled going to his bishop and sharing his doubts with him and the bishop replied, "Well, I hope you're praying." He said that was what made him realize the church actually was true and from then on out he made the choice to believe."

I'm not going to say that this young man made up this experience. What I am going to say is that this type of faith transition reversal doesn't happen very often and videos like this aren't made for people like you and me. They're made to align believing members stronger in their faith. They're made to give "feel goods" to members and give them hope that their own loved one will return to the church. If your parents send you something like this, it's because they think can have this type of experience if you watch it. They think if you can just "feel the Spirit" that you will remember all the good the church has done for your life.

That's a nice thought. It would be nice if that's how it really happens. But most people like me are "past feeling" as the scriptures describe. We're past seeing a feel-good church video and coming back to our faith. For most of us, making the choice to believe in the Book of Mormon again is like trying to believe in the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus again. How should you reply to someone when they send you an article, video, or link related to church issues? I wouldn't recommend sending back an unsolicited link to the CES Letter. Sending others random links is just as effective as them sending you random links. Instead of taking this event as a personal attack, use it as an opportunity to set boundaries. Here are a few examples you may wish to use:

"Mom, I appreciate you thinking of me today, but I don't want to give you false hope. I don't have any plans of returning to the church and I would rather you not send these types of things to me. I love you. Can we please just focus on that rather than the church?"

"Dad, I know I am important to you and that is why you have shared this video with me. I love you too, but please don't send something like this to me again. Please don't take this the wrong way, but if I want to learn about the church, I will seek the information out myself. Again, I love you, and thank you for caring about me."

"Honey, you are so sweet. I am familiar with the article you shared with me. I am glad you were able to get some insights

from reading it, but it just isn't doing anything for me. Maybe later we can discuss that topic in more detail.”

More than anything, let your parents know you still love them. This is awkward and hard for everyone. In your day-to-day interactions with your parents, don't act like nothing has happened. This is a big deal for most families. Every now and then, acknowledge your difference if the time comes. Don't throw the fact that you've left the church in their faces every chance you get. Try not to start arguments, and if confrontation arises, try to de-escalate the situation when possible. There are times for high tension conversations. You need to be heard but it's not usually convenient for believers to have conversations that challenge their world views. In fact, that's not specific to the church—it's human nature.

Section Three

Your Children

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

“How do I tell my children that I am turning away from the most important thing I raised them to believe? This burden is excruciating.”

As I thought about what I should write for this chapter, I couldn't come up with anything that fit the perspective of a child to a Latter-day Saint parent more than something I wrote for my mission blog a while back. In my blog called “Wake Up And Do Something More!” I wrote about my experiences watching and observing my mom when I was a child. I wrote about watching her make sacrifices in the name of the church and the name of God so my sister and I would know the gospel. My dad was also equally important in my spiritual life growing up. Although I have since made my mission blog private, there is no better way for me to express the point of view as a child than by sharing that blog post in part. This post was written from the perspective of a believer, so please excuse the “faithful” wordage:

“When I think about the Stripling Warriors, I don't think of the battle they won against the Lamanites or their bravery or courage. I don't think about how great of a leader they had or the weapons they used. I think about their mothers, because their mothers remind me of my mother.

When I was born, my mother was working at the doctor's office as a nurse. Every day as she went to work, she would drop me off with my Mormon babysitter who would take care of me until my mother picked me up. When my sister was born, my mother wanted to be involved in our lives as closely as she could, so

she quit working at the office and started working as a pacemaker/heart nurse from home. When she wasn't having as much business as she needed to continue her job from home, she had to make the decision to either work full time at the office or find another job. As she prayerfully considered what to do, and she decided to take up the career of being a stay-at-home mother so she could be with my sister and I when we came home from school.

I remember when I was very young, my mother was the Relief Society President. During that time, she must have cooked enough food for other people that she could feed an army. It got to the point that when she cooked our favorite foods or desserts, my family would get annoyed because we knew it was going to someone else. In some instances, we would even get in trouble for eating something she had made because she had made it to give to someone else. My mother, being the angel she is, started cooking double of whatever she was making for other people so we would be able to have some as well.

When I was a child and young teenager, I would often pass by my parents' room at night before I went to bed to tell them good night. Many times, I would see them kneeling at their bedside saying their prayers as I walked by. Other times, as I would be walking out the door to go to school, I would see my mom sitting at the end of the kitchen counter with a bowl of cereal reading her scriptures. I can't think of a single time when my mom said she couldn't go to church on Sundays because she was too tired to go to church or how she had too much to do. Even on vacations, we would always find a Mormon church service to attend, even if we couldn't understand the language it was in.

On Sundays, I knew the paycheck had come because my mom would always pull a check out of her pocketbook and fill out a tithing slip and put it in the envelope with my parents' tithes. My mom always fasted on Fast Sundays and donated a generous fast offering. Because of her and my father's faith and sacrifices, we received the blessings we needed to get along

temporally. Never once did I see or hear them complain about having to pay tithing or fast offering.

When laundry needed to be done, if there was food needed to be made, or when the house needed to be cleaned, my mother usually took this responsibility upon herself, mainly because no one else wanted to do it. When I would look in my closet to put on a shirt, somehow clothes would magically be there. When I would wake up starving late at night and go downstairs to find a quick snack to eat, my mother would wake up and follow me and make me something to eat, even when I would try to tiptoe down the stairs so I would not wake her up. Most of the time when she did this, we would talk about how things are going, even if for a few minutes.

When I got a little older and was attending college, my classes started at noon. My mom had been called as the seminary teacher for my home ward. I lived at home at the time and was commuting back and forth from home each day. As I woke up to get ready to go to class every morning, without fail I would walk into our dining room to tell my mom goodbye, and I would find her studying diligently and preparing her lesson for the following day.

Sometimes as I would be sitting in the recliner of our game room playing video games or watching movies, I would hear my mom listening to church music while working on her computer outside in her hallway office. Many times, I would have a group of friends over to watch a movie or do something at night. If there was a girl there, no matter who she was or how long or well my mom knew her, or if she was a member of the church or not, my mother would always stay up doing something in her office or chores around the house until everyone left to be sure that we were being good.

Although she may not have realized it, these small and simple acts of faith and obedience had a profound impact on me as I saw her example as a righteous woman and Latter-day Saint. Even when I told her how annoying she was with some of the

stuff she said or did, or when I would tell her that I disagreed with a decision she made that I thought was foolish, or when I would yell at her for something that I thought I was right about, she would always take the time to come in later and humbly chasten me with a lesson that would sink deep into my soul, even when she didn't think it did. All of the times when she thought I wasn't listening to her or paying attention to things she said, even when she would do something small and kind for me and wouldn't think I would care or even notice, I did.

Now to the reason I think of the mothers when I hear the story of the Stripling Warriors. In Alma 56:47-48, it reads:

47 Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

48 And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.

I have never in my life doubted that *my* mother knew it, because of her example. She didn't just talk about the gospel, she lived it. I never had to wonder if my mother knew she had a Heavenly Father who loves her and takes care of her, because I saw her down on her knees praying to Him each morning and night. I never once had to question if she knew the Book of Mormon was true, because I saw her reading it each morning. I never had to ask her if she knew the church was true because I saw her attend it every Sunday. I never had to question whether or not my mother loved me, because she showed me. And I never doubted that when I had trials in my life God would deliver me, because like the Stripling Warriors, I had been taught by my mother...

She sent me on a mission because she understands how much it will help me grow, the spiritual and temporal blessings my family will receive, and how it will affect our family and other families forever. I am forever indebted to my mom. I love her,

and I owe her the credit of helping me become the person I am today.”

Although my beliefs in the church have changed, my belief in my mom has not. I stand by every word I wrote all those years ago. She is the perfect example of what a Mormon mom should be, even in the face of my great apostasy. I would almost be scared for my parents to leave the church. Even though I am as far away from the church as anyone who leaves, I could not imagine the impact it would have in their lives. In fact, I wouldn’t even want them to leave. The church has been the biggest part of our lives for as long as I can remember. If you have raised your children in the church as my parents raised me, your children will probably have the same feelings about you leaving the church as I have about mine.

But what does the church teach about the duties of Latter-day Saint parents? The teachings from past presidents and leaders of the church are very clear on the responsibilities of parents. The Family: A Proclamation to the World states the expectation that the church has of parents and then warns:

“We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”

It’s a pretty serious accusation that by not following the church’s way of parenting could bring about the destruction of the world. In his 2014 October General Conference talk, Elder Tad. R. Callister says the following about the role of parents as it pertains to the spiritual welfare of their children:

“The scriptures speak of the role of parents—that it is their duty to teach their children “the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

As parents, we are to be the prime gospel teachers and examples for our children—not the bishop, the Sunday School, the Young Women or Young Men, but the parents. As their prime gospel teachers, we can teach them the power and reality of the Atonement—of their identity and divine destiny—and in so doing give them a rock foundation upon which to build. When all is said and done, the home is the ideal forum for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As parents, we can teach our children to pray for things of eternal consequence—to pray for the strength to be morally clean in a very challenging world, to be obedient, and to have the courage to stand for the right.

No doubt most of our youth have their evening prayers, but perhaps many of them struggle with the habit of personal morning prayer. As parents, as their prime gospel teachers, we can correct this. Which parent in Book of Mormon times would have let their sons march out to the front of battle without a breastplate and shield and sword to protect them against the potentially mortal blows of the enemy? But how many of us let our children march out the front door each morning to the most dangerous of all battlefields, to face Satan and his myriad of temptations, without their spiritual breastplate and shield and sword that come from the protective power of prayer? The Lord said, “Pray always, ... that you may conquer Satan...” As parents, we can help instill within our children the habit and power of morning prayer.”

In the October 2018 General Women’s session of General Conference, Dallin H. Oaks gave a talk called “Parents and Children” in which he addressed mothers, young women, and little children. He said for Latter-day Saint women, “being a mother is their highest priority, their ultimate joy.” He continued with similar remarks and then spoke to the Young Women and children in attendance:

“Now I address the younger group of this audience. My dear young sisters, because of your knowledge of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are unique. Your knowledge will enable

you to endure and overcome the difficulties of growing up. From a young age, you have participated in projects and programs that have developed your talents, such as writing, speaking, and planning. You have learned responsible behavior and how to resist temptations to lie, cheat, steal, or use alcohol or drugs...

Why do you cope best with the difficulties of growing up? Young women, it is because you understand our Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness. This tells you who you are and the purpose of your life. Youth with that understanding are first in problem-solving and first in choosing the right. You know you can have the Lord's help in overcoming all the difficulties of growing up."

With words like that, it's not too hard to imagine why this would be a hard thing for your children to know that one or both of their parents aren't going to go to church anymore. According to the teachings of the church, you are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of your home. Without support from family, children are less likely to progress in the gospel and take part in ordinances such as baptism, temple sealings, and taking the sacrament on a weekly basis. While that seems like the goal of most post-Mormons, it can be especially hard for believing children to let go of. Elder Henry B. Eyring addressed these areas in an April 2014 General Conference address:

"Every priesthood effort and every priesthood ordinance is intended to help Heavenly Father's children be changed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ to become members of perfected family units. It follows that "the great work of every man is to believe the gospel, to keep the commandments, and to create and perfect an eternal family unit," and to help others do the same.

Since that is true, everything we do should have celestial marriage as its focus and purpose. That means we must strive to be sealed to an eternal companion in the temple of God. We must also encourage others to make and keep the covenants that

bind a husband and wife together, with their family, in this life and in the world to come.

Why should this matter so much to each of us—young or old, deacon or high priest, son or father? It is because our priesthood obligation is to put our families and the families of those around us at the center of our concern. Every major decision should be based on the effect it will have on a family to qualify for life with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. There is nothing in our priesthood service as important as this.

Let me tell you what this could mean to a deacon listening tonight as a member of a family unit and as a quorum member.

In his family, there may or may not be regular family prayer or frequent family home evening. If his father, sensing these obligations, calls the family together for prayer or scripture reading, the deacon can rush to take part with a smile. He can encourage his brothers and sisters to participate and praise them when they do. He can ask his father for a blessing when school begins or in another moment of need.

He may not have such a faithful father. But the very desire of his heart for those experiences will bring the powers of heaven to those around him because of his faith. They will seek for the family life that deacon wants with all his heart.

The teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood can see in his home teaching assignment an opportunity to help the Lord change the lives of a family.”

A believing child who sees a parent fall away from the church gains the responsibility of bringing them back to the fold, in addition to maintaining their own spiritual wellbeing. Check in on your children’s feelings on spiritual matters every now and then. Leaving the church does not excuse you from being a part of your children’s church lives. They need to know that you care about all aspects of their lives, not just the ones you approve of.

In October 2018, Elder Jeffrey R Holland delivered the most insulting General Conference talk that I've ever heard him give. In this talk, he tells the story of a man who loses his faith in the church. The man is guilted into coming back to church by his son who tells him it is his fault that their family has been having problems over the years. Elder Holland says:

“Grant Morrell Bowen was a hardworking, devoted husband and father who, like many who made their living on the land, had an economic downturn when the local potato crop was poor. He and his wife, Norma, took other employment, eventually moved to another city, and started their climb back to economic stability. However, in a terribly unfortunate incident, Brother Bowen was deeply hurt when, in a temple recommend interview, the bishop was a little skeptical regarding Morrell’s declaration that he was a full-tithe payer.

I don’t know which of these men had the more accurate facts that day, but I do know Sister Bowen walked out of that interview with her temple recommend renewed, while Brother Bowen walked out with an anger that would take him away from the Church for 15 years.

Regardless of who was right about the tithing, evidently both Morrell and the bishop forgot the Savior’s injunction to “agree with thine adversary quickly” and Paul’s counsel to “let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” The fact is they didn’t agree and the sun did go down on Brother Bowen’s wrath for days, then weeks, then years, proving the point made by one of the wisest of the ancient Romans, who said, “Anger, if not restrained, is frequently more [destructive] than the injury that provokes it.” But the miracle of reconciliation is always available to us, and out of love for his family and the Church he knew to be true, Morrell Bowen came back into full Church activity. Let me tell you briefly how that happened.

Brother Bowen’s son Brad is a good friend of ours and a devoted Area Seventy serving in southern Idaho. Brad was 11 years old at the time of this incident, and for 15 years he

watched his father's religious devotion decline, a witness to the terrible harvest being reaped where anger and misunderstanding had been sown. Something needed to be done. So as the Thanksgiving holiday approached in 1977, Brad, a 26-year-old student at Brigham Young University; his wife, Valerie; and new baby son, Mic, loaded into their student version of an automobile and, bad weather notwithstanding, drove to Billings, Montana. Not even a crash into a snowbank near West Yellowstone could keep this threesome from making their ministering contact with Brother Bowen Sr.

Upon arrival, Brad and his sister Pam asked for a private moment with their father. "You have been a wonderful dad," Brad began with some emotion, "and we have always known how much you loved us. But something is wrong, and it has been for a long time. Because you were hurt once, this whole family has been hurting for years. We are broken, and you are the only one who can fix us. Please, please, after all this time, can you find it in your heart to lay aside that unfortunate incident with that bishop and again lead this family in the gospel as you once did?"

There was dead silence. Then Brother Bowen looked up at these two, his children, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and said very quietly, "Yes. Yes, I will."

Thrilled but stunned by the unexpected answer, Brad Bowen and his family watched their husband and father go to his current bishop in a spirit of reconciliation to set things right in his life. In a perfect response to this courageous but totally unexpected visit, the bishop, who had extended repeated invitations to Brother Bowen to come back, threw his arms around Morrell and just held him—held him in a long, long, long embrace.

In a matter of only a few weeks—doesn't take long—Brother Bowen was fully engaged in Church activity and had made himself worthy to return to the temple. Soon enough he accepted the call to preside over a struggling little branch of 25

and grew it into a thriving congregation of well over 100. All of this took place nearly half a century ago, but the consequence of a son and a daughter's ministering plea to their own father and that father's willingness to forgive and move forward in spite of the imperfections of others has brought blessings that are still coming—and will come forever—to the Bowen family.”

Not only do I disagree with the message of this story, but I believe the story gives children false hope. Elder Holland shared this story and every child who heard it now thinks if they ask their inactive parent to go back to church that it will be that easy. He was inactive for 15 years, yet he was right with God within a few weeks. Most people's issues are much deeper than the one shared by Elder Holland. But children might not understand that very easily. Using children as a means of applying spiritual pressure to their parents is not okay.

My wife still goes to church, and that's fine. But we've had many discussions about what our future children's involvement in the church might be. Of course, I'd rather them not go to church at all. But as we'll both be raising them, we both get a say on their spiritual welfare. My wife wants them to attend church at the very least, and also be able to take part in many of the good things we both experienced growing up. I think Primary would be fun for them to attend. Youth temple trips, mutual activity night, scout camps, taking part in service projects, and having a sense of belonging were the biggest parts of my childhood. I would like for them to experience some of those things, but I would prefer them not to be baptized and blessed.

My biggest fear in having children who go to church isn't what they'll be taught in church. It's how they will be treated because of who I am and what I believe, or rather, don't believe. I don't want the Mormon kids to treat my semi-active kids poorly because they're in a part-member family. I don't want them to sit church meetings and hear someone give a warning about people who leave the church and I certainly don't want them to listen to General Conference and hear Russell Nelson tell stories about how sad they'll be in heaven if their family isn't there. I don't want the children, teachers, or other ward

members to pressure my children into feeling a certain way about their apostate dad.

It's not that I care that something mean might be said about me. I'm way past being offended over personal insults and slander by church members and church leaders. I just don't want my children to experience the inner turmoil of having to deal with picking the church over their own father. I don't want them to worry about my salvation or whether we're going to see each other again in the afterlife. It took me several years to train myself not have those thoughts in my own mind. I don't want my children to go through a lifetime of scarring due to the choice I have made to leave the church. Whatever path my children take in life, I will always love them. Even if they do end up joining the church, I can't be mad at them for joining the church when I expected people not to be rude to me for leaving it.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

“For about a year, my kids wouldn't speak with me regularly. I found out afterwards that in addition to struggling with the divorce and my new relationship, they were also being pressured by their mother not to talk to me.”

As my wife and I don't have any children yet, I don't have any personal success stories or otherwise helpful experience on talking to children about a faith transition. I wanted to give you the best possible information I could, so I reached out to a few people online. Here is one success story that someone graciously allowed me to share:

“My wife has been out since May, me since August/September. We have five kids, [ranging from young children to youth]. When we respectively left, we had talks with our kids about us not wanting to be members anymore. We also told them that we would support them in whatever they decided. We have been attending with our kids, but attendance had been spotty. When we told our kids, the [oldest] was relieved, because she had come to the same conclusion on her own but didn't know how to explain to us. We were mostly worried about how the [middle kids] would react. They both expressed a desire to continue to go to see friends.

We have been wanting to find a way to help them understand why we left and that it would be okay for them to be done too. We have been worried that exposing our deconversion stories would lead to a retrenchment issue.

A couple of weeks ago, I got a text from ward leadership asking for them to be in Young Women's presidencies. I asked the two oldest and the [oldest] said she didn't want to, the [other] said that would be fine. I told the counselor their choices and they asked to meet with [her]. We have put it off for a couple of weeks and put it off again this morning. [She] wanted to stay home and work on homework so we decided today would be the day.

We got them all together Family Home Evening style and told them we wanted to go into specifics on why we left. We told them we didn't want them [to reach] 40 years old and then discover this information and ask why we never told them. We told them that the church had told a particular story and discouraged people from finding out anything beyond the story they've told. I told them that the info we found would be called anti-Mormon by the church, but it turns out it is just verifiable history.

I told them about how Joseph Smith had different accounts of the First Vision. How he found a rock while treasure hunting and used it in a hat to "translate." We told them about his trial in New York. Then we talked about the [church's] narrative and how/why it had been told that way.

We talked about polygamy/polyandry and how shady Joseph Smith was. How he hid things from his wife. How as a 37-year-old he "married" a 14-year-old and how he used [predatory practices to convince her into marriage]. We told them about how the church has subsequently taught Joseph Smith's polygamy completely different than how it actually happened.

We told them about the priesthood ban and how [wrong] it actually was. How the narrative we were fed is so different than the actual history. How upset the things that prior church leaders have said has made us. How the church has treated the lifting of the [priesthood] ban as a beautiful revelation of policies set by imperfect men when in reality it was preached as

unchanging doctrine. We told them that the "most correct book" had racism edited out in our lifetime.

We told them that we don't believe in a god that would call a conman and sexual predator to be his mouthpiece. We told them that we didn't want to leave the church because we wanted to have a cup of coffee in the morning, we left because we believe it is important to be honest. We found that the church was not honest with us and we couldn't support that anymore and that we would not lie and pretend to believe.

I cried. My wife cried. My [older children cried]. My [youngest child] told us that she didn't understand what we were saying but drew a picture of "that rock thingy." We told them we still loved [one another] just the same as before. We told them that our core values haven't changed. We still believe in loving others and treating people with kindness and being honest. We asked if they thought we had changed. The older two said we seem much more fun and less stressed. My wife talked with them about her struggles with anxiety and depression and how much of that she thinks is tied to the church.

We told them that if we didn't do church on Sundays, that it would be a family day. A day to spend time with each other and do whatever we wanted to do. We told them that this has been difficult for us, and that it would be tough for them too. But nowhere near as hard as if they had gotten to 40 and then found out.

The [youngest kid] made sure we weren't going to church "cause it's boring" ... I think it went well. I hope it went well. I hope we can just be done."

You are going to want to tell your younger children differently than your adult children. Your adult children can be handled similarly to telling your spouse or your parents. Regardless of age, there are a few key points that you should bring up with them: You will want to reassure them that they are loved and that nothing will change how you feel about each other. Let them know you still want to a part of their

lives. They will be concerned about what you leaving the church means for your eternal family. You need to reaffirm that the most important thing that binds you together is love.

It can be a tricky situation when dealing with younger children. They are inquisitive by nature and may not always take “I’ll tell you when you’re older” as an answer. You will probably not want to go into the icky details of polygamy or abuse within the church. You want them to have a positive reaction to what you’re telling them, not scar them with the information. However you decide to tell them, make sure it is on a level that they can understand. I would suggest telling your older children the news before you tell your younger children so they will not be caught off guard when you give the short and sweet version to their siblings.

You may wish to use this example when talking to your kids: During your weekly Family Home Evening, tell your children that you really need them to listen because you have something important to say. Start by expressing your love and then have everyone in the room go around and say something they like about a member of their family. When that is done, you can tell them, something along these lines:

“Did you know that your mommy (or daddy) and I have always tried to help you choose the right? For your whole life we brought you to church so that you can learn to be good so that when you’re older you can make good decisions. Well, we have decided that the church we go to doesn’t teach good things anymore, so we aren’t going to go to church any longer.”

At the end of your discussion, ask how they feel about what you’ve told them. They probably won’t lie or hide their emotions. Asking them what they think and how they feel is important in understanding how to proceed. Ask them if they have any fears or concerns about leaving the church. The first concern will probably be about going to heaven, or if you will have an eternal family. You can answer with simple phrases like, “Just because we don’t go to church anymore doesn’t mean we are bad people,” or “We will always be a family no matter what.”

When you initially break the news, you might not want to tell them why your family is leaving the church. If they want to know why, just tell them your family has decided that church isn't for them anymore. Also, as a general rule of thumb, it is senseless to have a theological debate with a child. Children under 10 will not understand the entire doctrinal or spiritual implications of leaving the church. Unless your child is a little church historian, they won't understand the issues like you do. They won't understand why something taught in 1985 that isn't taught now is important enough to leave the church over. They know what they're taught in church and that's the information they will default to using when having church discussions. Arguing or trying to prove them wrong won't help, so keep what you tell them short, sweet, and to the point.

I would suggest not interrupting your child's social routine too drastically. I wouldn't pull them out of Primary, Activity Days, or similar programs right away. Children need consistent routines to make them feel safe. If your situation allows, I would let them do a slow fade from church-related activities while replacing them with other things. For instance, if your family takes part in nightly prayer, maybe replace it with a few minutes where your family members talk about how their day was. If you read scriptures as a family, consider replacing them with uplifting stories that teach good lessons. If both you and your spouse have decided to leave the church, you may want to block out Sunday mornings as family time where you play games or go somewhere together. Replacing church time with family time can reduce stress and anxiety about their faith transition as well as yours.

This may seem like a daunting task, but consider these questions: Is it easy to gather everyone for Family Home Evening, or does it turn into what we jokingly called it in my home growing up, "Family Home Beating?" Do your children dress themselves for church every Sunday or do you have to wrangle everyone together and struggle getting to church? When you say prayers as a family, do your children volunteer to say the prayer, or do they say, "not it" or complain when called on? The things you struggle to do for church will no longer be a problem for your children.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

“We have been wanting to find a way to help them understand why we left and that it would be okay for them to be done too.”

Your children have probably grown to trust adults in positions of power in their time in the church. You may want to have a discussion on the ability to say “no” when things make them uncomfortable. Children in general are sometimes very open about their thoughts and feelings on things, but Mormon children have been trained to be a little too open with personal information. The last thing you would want is for the Primary President to stop by and invite your 10-year-old son to come to church and he agrees to it because he has always been taught to say “yes” to those in leadership. Continuing from the story in the last chapter, this is a great example of children and parents setting boundaries:

“After our talk, we spent lots of time together as a family. I got another text from the bishop's counselor to set up an interview/calling to class presidency for [our second oldest]. I told her about it and gave her some options. She could go in for the interview, or I could postpone it for a while, or I could tell him she didn't want the calling anymore. She told me she didn't want the calling anymore. I asked if that meant she didn't want to go to church anymore and she said she didn't. I tried to mask my excitement but told her that I respected her decisions and that there would not be any pressure if she still wanted to go.

I asked the [second youngest] if she wanted to go still and she said, "not really." Good news for us, Sunday is now family day. Bad news for [the church], that's a family of seven done with them. Since then we have had some good talks with them about setting boundaries with their friends. We told them their friends would try to guilt them in to going to church and that they did not need to feel guilty about their decision.

I texted our bishop and told him I would like to talk. I had told him that I would keep him in the loop with where our family was. I am very lucky as he is a very good man and has treated us with a lot of respect and tact. I told him that my wife and I planned to support our kids in any decision they made, and that they had made the decision to no longer participate so we wouldn't be attending anymore. I asked him to talk to the youth leaders and tell them not to contact the kids. I didn't want them laying guilt trips down on [our kids]. He said he would [tell them]... I am grateful that my wife got us all out. This has been one of the hardest things I've ever had to do."

Others may ask if they can take your children to church so that they can have an understanding of the gospel. That's a question that you and your partner will have to answer between yourselves. Whatever you choose, don't decide it in a shouting match. This is a hard truth, but you have to understand that your spouse has just as much right to teach your kids that the church is true as you do to teach them that the church is false. Tensions can be high when you're not on the same page as your spouse when it comes to your children's spirituality.

They might ask, "How will your children ever learn about Jesus?" or "How will they ever receive proper morals if they don't know the gospel?" If you don't know what you want to teach them about religion quite yet, you can just say so. Tell them you don't have all the answers but that you were raised to value honesty and integrity and you hope to pass that on to your own children. You might want to explain the reasons you don't want them to be raised in the church. If you are concerned about your children being taught about the church by strangers out of your supervision, respond that you would just rather teach them about it on your own. Fear of the unknown is one reason for

parents and others to ask these questions. Erase as much doubt in their minds as you can.

One night my dad asked me a question I had never considered. He asked if I would allow him to give my future children a blessing when they are born. I wasn't prepared to give an answer, but I stick by the one I gave. I told him if it wasn't done in a church meeting or added to the records of the church, I'd be fine with it. Having had time to think more on the answer, I realize this would be a big deal for him. I received a name and a blessing when I was born and from that moment forward, he probably dreamed that he would stand in the circle when I would one day do the same for his grandchildren. Though I no longer believe the priesthood is real, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't let my dad give my child a blessing without church supervision in his own home. He knows how I feel about the church, and I wouldn't have anything to prove to him by denying this request. Little concessions like that go a long way with family.

It can be frightening to think about what part the church will play in your family's future, though it doesn't have to be all bad. Have courage that things will turn out well. In the end, it won't matter what path you or your children take in the church as long as you have each other. I'd like to end this chapter with a remark from a mother who had things turn out unexpectedly well for her. I gain hope from her words:

“I went to lunch with my adult daughter on Friday. She informed me that she and her husband are out [of the church]. They are doing a very slow fade because her husband's family is extremely [devout]. She wasn't that excited to talk about what broke her shelf, but we spent three hours talking about other stuff. You cannot believe how happy I am. There is hope. If my daughter and I can leave the LDS church, almost anyone can.”

Section Four

Your In-Laws

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

“I’m filled with so much emotion, but mostly just regret, fear, and anxiety. There’s no going back now, and I know our lives will never be the same.”

Imagine you’ve spent the last 18 to 25 years raising your daughter in the church so that she will marry a good, honest, believing returned missionary in the temple. You look forward to her and her husband giving you grandchildren that you can sing hymns to and read scripture story books with. She meets a great young man who you instantly grow to adore. You see how happy he makes her, and they decide to get married.

Out of nowhere, your son-in-law announces that he no longer believes in the church. You believe that your daughter’s future is over. She will never be happy again and your grandchildren will be spiritually lost because they won’t learn about the church at home. Even worse, your son-in-law doesn’t just leave the church, but he won’t leave it alone. He’s gone full anti-Mormon, posting things about Joseph Smith and the brethren online.

What part do you play in fixing this situation? What do you say to your son-in-law or your daughter? How will this affect your relationship with your daughter? Is he planning to take her along the same path of destruction and darkness? Will she eventually leave the church with him, taking away your eternal parentage? Should you try to convince her to leave him?

The most important thing your in-laws know about you is that their child loves you and that you're a worthy member of the church. When that changes, they don't have any clue where to go from here. They don't have a lifetime of shared experiences or deep knowledge about you. It's hard enough to let their child marry someone they don't really know. It's even harder when they don't think their child will be happy and their child's spouse leaving the church will be good for their life.

They struggle because they see their child struggling. They don't want to cause a falling out in the family, but they also want to speak their mind about this problem. No in-laws are the same. How they parent is different. The experience with their kids is different than the one you had with you parents. Their experiences with people who have left the church is different. They have experiences with their own marriage that you aren't aware of. Telling your in-laws that you're leaving the church is almost as troublesome as telling your own parents. The situation your spouse finds themselves in is almost identical, except this time it isn't your parents who are feeling the pain, it's theirs. Every concern your parents have about you, your in-laws will have about your spouse.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

“In the past year my husband and I made the decision that we were done with the church. We recently learned that we're not the only ones in the family who are done... This will devastate them.”

My original plan was to live the rest of my life as a private non-believer for my wife. I had decided that if I was able to tell my wife how I felt about the church and if my parents still loved and supported me, I would have no need to tell anyone else. I found this overwhelmingly not to be the case. I was living two lives. In one life, I was an active, faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the other, I was a fully bona fide apostate of the same church. Over time, this began to weigh heavily on my emotional state.

In addition to other issues with the church and its leaders, I began to develop deep suicidal ideation. At the time, I was under church discipline for issues unrelated to apostasy. On two separate occasions in the previous months I had planned to end my life by suicide because I decided I would rather die than meet with my local church leaders again. Whether it be courage or cowardice that saved my life those nights, I am still here, and I am thankful every day for it.

On the third time I had planned to end my life, it was due to the mental anguish of living a double life. I couldn't take it anymore. I remember sitting at my desk at work thinking of how I would kill myself. I will not disclose those thoughts in this book. I decided that I was going to go home that night and end my suffering because my wife was supposed to be gone with her play rehearsal.

To my surprise, my wife was waiting at home for me when I walked in the door. In that moment, everything changed. I had a desire for life again. I don't think I've ever told her that she was the reason I didn't end my life that night, but she was there for me when I needed her the most. As soon as I saw her, I broke into tears. I told her of my thoughts during the day and my plan to take my life by suicide. I told her the reasons behind my plans, and we talked through it together. We decided the best course of action at this point was to tell her dad that I no longer believed in the church. I felt more comfortable telling him than I did her mom because he had always been understanding and soft-spoken about my church discipline.

My advice on revealing your unbelief or faith transition to your in-laws is similar to the advice I gave in the chapter on how to tell your parents. Reference that chapter on the topics of times and places. I would also recommend having this meeting in person if possible. If they live far away, you can have the conversation over the phone. You may want to write a letter like I did. Having a pre-written statement will allow you to say what you need to say and not get side-tracked. If you decide to go this route, I would suggest reading it in full before deviating or taking questions. I believe the letter I wrote to my in-laws will help you with your own meeting. Here is my letter in its entirety:

“[Names redacted], I have something that is going to be hard to hear but even harder to say. For the sake of adequately sharing what I have to say without misunderstanding or unfair assumptions, please allow me to finish reading this letter before asking any questions or sharing comments.

For the past year or so I have had an internal struggle that has affected many areas of my life for the negative. It has affected my relationship with my family, with my friends, and also with my sweet wife. It is something that racks my mind with torment every day. Sometimes it is all I can think about. It has led me to nearly attempting suicide on multiple occasions. I have also come to physically hurting myself in other ways just to feel something other than emotional or mental pain.

For my mental health, I have decided to come forth and be public about this issue that has caused me so much pain. I know there will be negative responses from loved ones and others, but I have decided that I would rather be open and honest and receive hate than for my mental health to keep spiraling downward.

The issue at hand is that my views on the church have changed. I mean that to say that I can no longer believe the doctrine taught by the church, support current church policies, or agree with or defend controversial events in church history. To be respectful of your beliefs and to prevent an argument, and to not take away from the spirit of this conversation, I will not go into what those issues are tonight.

One of the things I would like to ask is that you respect my right to believe or not to believe as I do and that [your daughter] not be an in-between in any backlash or negativity that may come as a part of my beliefs. I would like to ask that I not be treated as a terrible person because I no longer believe. Please know that this is hard for both of us. Please know that unless I felt that my life didn't depend on being honest about this that I wouldn't come forth about it. I trust you enough to tell you and confide in you and I hope that we may be able to continue a relationship as normal.

I understand that [she] is your daughter and that you want the best for her. I love her and want that for her as well. Nothing will change that, and we will continue our marriage and our relationship as normal. We love each other for who we are and what we have in common. We love each other for us and not for the church.

[She] has supported me through this difficult time in my life and I have supported her in her beliefs as well. I have not and will not attempt to change her beliefs. I am proud of who she is and what choices she makes. I will continue to be the supportive and loving husband that she deserves, both temporally and spiritually. She and I will continue to keep the commandments,

go to church, and do the things that we have been taught to do our entire lives.

The only thing that has changed is that I no longer believe. Many people will claim that when someone loses belief it is because they want to sin, or have been offended, or are just lazy. Please rest assured that none of those things apply to me. This was a very hard decision that was made after many months of studying, fasting, and prayer.

I hope you know that I love and respect you and I will never do anything to hurt your faith or challenge your beliefs. You are safe with me. Your children are safe with me. I promise you that I will not try to change you or your family's view. I am glad that both of you have found happiness, security, and peace of mind in the church. Unfortunately, that is not the case for me.

I think it is wise that we should set a few boundaries in relation to this new information. I for one will be respectful of your family and your home. I will never bring up my beliefs in any way with you or your children. I will never bring anything into your home that is not worthy of the Christlike atmosphere that you have set here. When I am in your home things will continue as normal, including reading scriptures and having prayers at the end of the night.

All I ask in return is that I am treated with the same respect that I show you. I do not want there to be any hard feelings or contention between us. I also do not want to be preached to or talked down to as though I am any less of a good person as anyone else. I love this family and I want our friendships and relationships to continue. I feel that as long as we respect these boundaries that we can retain our relationships and be a truly happy family.

I know that this has been hard to hear and that you may not have expected this from me. I am sorry for any worry or negativity this may place on you for me or [your daughter] but I feel that I have to do what is best for myself and my mental health. I am

grateful for you and the love and support you have given to me since we first became friends. I hope that we can continue that relationship for many years to come. If you would ever like to talk to me or find out what caused my unbelief, I would be willing to talk privately with you on those issues.

Thank you.”

The conversation with her dad went well. He told me he loved me and while he respected my agency, some things would change. I reassured him that I loved his daughter and that I would continue to take care of her. He really seemed to understand that this was causing me great pain and that something needed to change in my life. We left the conversation on good terms and he departed from our home. Later in the week, I learned that he had already shared what I said with his wife, so I never had to have that conversation with the rest of the family.

You know your family better than anyone. Your spouse knows their parents far better than you do. Their advice and experience can be invaluable. Ask for it. But always remember that you’re not the only one affected by this news. Your spouse and children’s relationships may change, and you should be willing to help when needed. Try to focus on maintaining positive relationships and interactions with your in-laws but at the same time, set boundaries and practice self-care.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

“I just told my parents and siblings I’m out. I just hate the feelings that I’m disappointing them and letting them down. I’m the first out of my immediate family.”

From this point onward, you need to regain the trust that you’ve lost. Even though you have committed no sin in leaving the church, believers think you have. They see this as not only a betrayal of your faith, but also a betrayal of your spouse and your family. Not only do you have to tell them that you’re leaving the church, but you also have to convince them that you are a good person and that you will protect and love their child. Be prepared to deal with the fallout. It’s a tricky situation. You have to share why you left the church with someone who doesn’t know your entire life story but someone who deserves intimate details about why you left. They don’t know what to say to you, so they do what they know best: being a parent and trying to protect their child.

One way to improve relationships is to be supportive of and interested in their church lives. Stay informed about their callings and other church assignments. It will mean a lot to them to know that even though you have left the church, that you are still willing to acknowledge that part of their lives. You don’t have to bring up Joseph Smith’s wives every time someone mentions how their Sunday mornings went at church.

Don’t put up walls and suggest that they never mention the church again. I know it’s hard to see people you love “trapped” in something that has caused you so much pain. To use Elder Ballard’s

boat metaphor, you know the ship is sinking but you can't do anything about it. Sometimes it's even hard to throw a life raft.

I understand how triggering even talking about the church is for some people. If this applies to you, learn to set boundaries. I had to learn this the hard way. You can't expect your family to remove pictures of the temple from their homes when you come over. You can't expect them to hide their statues of Joseph Smith or Jesus Christ just because it makes you uncomfortable. You must learn to exist in the same universe as the church because that's the reality for most people who leave it. The church will always be around. Especially if you grew up in the church, chances are that someone in your life will bring up the church. It's just a way of life for exMormons.

I am lucky to have in-laws who, despite our differences, support my marriage to their daughter. As with my parents, we've had a few words here and there, but for the most part we have respected the boundaries I set in my letter. Admittedly, it's a little anxiety provoking when I go over to their home and church related topics make up half of the dinner conversation. But that's the world I live in, and that's okay.

When I go to my in-laws' home, I play by their rules. I talk about the topics they bring up. It's not too much to ask that I participate in their lives and discuss things that are important to them. We love one another. When I married my wife, I joined their family and they joined mine. I appreciate the fact that they haven't tried talking to me into returning to the church. I can't say leaving the church has helped our relationship any, but we're at a good place with it and we feel comfortable with one another.

Your believing in-laws are likely to have reactions like those of your own parents, except this time that same fear and worry will involve both of you. Even if you tell them that you're the only one who has issues with the church, they will be worried for their child as well. I would suggest having your spouse's permission before telling her parents about your faith transition. This event has the possibility of changing their relationship with their parents forever. They will undoubtedly be the ones who get the most flak from this reveal. Be

there for your partner. As soon as they tell their parents, it becomes their faith journey as well.

You don't want to burn the bridge between your family and your in-laws. Realistically, things may not be great for the first little while. However, as you work to repair relations with them, change is possible. Here is a success story that I saw posted online. The title of the post is "I made my TBM Mother-In-Law cry. It felt good." At first, I thought this post was going to be about a guy who finally said "enough is enough" and had a shouting match with his mother-in-law. It turned out just to be a very clever clickbait title and the message was one of the most uplifting posts I've seen in a while:

"[My] recently widowed Mother-In-Law was staying with us from out of state. I took her car to the car wash, filled it, vacuumed it, blacked the tires, and washed the windows. [It] looked pretty good when I was done. She broke down. Through her tears she said that was the nicest thing anybody has done since her husband died. And that's just the kind of thing he would have done for her.

For the first time in the 15 years since I broke up with the church, I got a nice hug from that woman. It didn't feel forced or conditional. It was just a nice, shared moment. I'm trying not to get too excited by it. There are still issues, of course. But maybe, just maybe, I have some value as a human being even if I don't go to church."

Regardless of how you and your in-laws feel about it, you are going to be a part of each other's lives for a very long time. If your in-laws give you a hard time, just press on. You don't want your spouse to feel as though they have to choose between you and their parents. If you have a close relationship with your in-laws, you may not have to worry as much about not being welcome in their home or the backlash that comes with this part of a faith transition. In all things, just try to be respectful. Once they see that their child is safe and happy, concerns will fade, arguments will die down, and relationships will grow.

Section Five

Local Leaders

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

Your bishop is supposed to be the person that you can come to with anything, even if no one else in the world will listen. You are encouraged to bring your issues to him, both spiritual and temporal. He is supposed to work with you on these issues and give you the tools you need in order to overcome the problems that you are burdened by. He is sometimes called “the father of the ward” and the members treat him with love and respect. In 2017, Elder Henry B. Eyring gave a talk called, “The Lord Leads His Church.” Here is a snippet of the characteristics of a bishop according to Elder Eyring:

“Let’s talk about what such faith means for a bishop. A bishop is sometimes called to serve people who know him well. Ward members know something of his human weaknesses and his spiritual strengths, and they know that others in the ward could have been called—others who seem better educated, more seasoned, more pleasant, or even better looking.

These members have to know the call to serve as a bishop came from the Lord, by revelation. Without their faith, the bishop, who was called of God, will find it harder to get the revelation he needs to help them. He will not succeed without the faith of the members to sustain him.”

In the church’s General Handbook, it lists the responsibilities and duties of both bishops and stake presidents. Here is what the handbook says about bishops:

“Wards are the basic congregations of the Church. In wards, Church members worship together, partake of the sacrament, learn the gospel, and serve and strengthen each other.

The bishop holds the priesthood keys to direct the work of the Church within the ward. He and his counselors form a bishopric, which works under the direction of the stake presidency. They care for ward members with love and concern, helping them become true followers of Jesus Christ...

Ward members look to their bishop as the primary spiritual leader in the ward. He sets the spiritual tone for the ward by doing the Lord’s work “with holiness of heart” ... He teaches and uplifts members after the example of the Savior.

A bishop is a faithful disciple and witness of Jesus Christ. He is true to his covenants. He is loyal to his wife and considerate of her. He sets an example of righteousness for his children, the ward, and the community. His counselors are men of the same character.”

However, for a person like me, the bishop and the stake president are the last person on earth I would want to deal with about my issues in the church. Even when I was a believing member with questions, words like “apostasy” and “anti-Mormon material” were thrown around, suggesting that the problems were with me rather than the actual issues at hand. Had I not removed my name from the church’s records, I am sure I would have been charged with apostasy sooner or later.

In previous years, a repentance process that required leadership involvement was referred to as “church discipline” and was resolved in “disciplinary councils.” In the newest iteration of the church handbook of instruction, called the General Handbook, the name of this process has been changed to “membership councils” and do not refer to discipline. Similarly, “excommunication” is now referred to as “membership withdrawal” and disfellowshipment is referred to as “formal membership restrictions.” In the General Handbook, it says the following concerning membership councils:

“When a person is baptized, he or she becomes part of the “household of God” ... The baptismal covenant includes a promise to strive to live according to Christ’s teachings and commandments. When a person falls short, he or she exercises faith in Jesus Christ and repents, relying on His mercy to strengthen and forgive.

If a member commits a serious sin, the bishop or stake president helps him or her repent. As part of this process, he may need to restrict some Church membership privileges for a time. In some situations, he may need to withdraw a person’s membership for a time.

Restricting or withdrawing a person’s membership is not intended to punish. Rather, these actions are sometimes necessary to help a person repent and experience a change of heart. They also give a person time to prepare spiritually to renew and keep his or her covenants again.

The bishop or stake president oversees membership restrictions or withdrawal... These actions are accompanied by conditions of repentance. As a person sincerely repents, he or she may have the privileges of Church membership restored.”

Church discipline, or membership council, is used to achieve several purposes. Unless handled with love and tact, the accused often ends up battered and scarred, and leaves the church all together. Church discipline is used on both believing and non-believing members for any number of reasons. I once knew a stake president in my mission who was so excited to excommunicate a less active person we were working with. He said that excommunication is a blessing to the sinner because it releases them from the covenants they made at baptism and in the temple. He said excommunication would draw this person closer to Christ. Even then, I couldn’t fathom how removing blessings from someone would cause them to come to Christ.

Not all leadership in the church are the evil, self-righteous old men that people make them out to be. I have had many great experiences with local leadership both on my mission as well as in my

home life. I served my mission in Utah where I was assigned in several different stakes and was responsible for up to four wards at any given time. Ward council meetings were held every Sunday in my mission, and we were required to be at every single one. It was in these councils that I learned from the top down how the ward operates. I served with over two dozen bishops. Covering multiple wards per area, I went to hundreds of ward council meetings in a two-year period.

There are bishops who sincerely care about the ward and the people they serve. Then there were those who were more apathetic. There were men who dispersed fast offering funds to those in need more freely than others. There were bishops who wanted to create meaningful missionary opportunities to help people come back to church and there were some who wanted to “trick” people into coming back to church. You know your bishop better than I do, so you should use your judgment on how to proceed. Do you want to do the slow-fade, or would you rather go loud and out? Do you want to bother going to the bishop for help with your issues or would you rather have no contact? There are no wrong ways, but some ways are better than others.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

Before I start this chapter, I would like to put a disclaimer to any believers who are reading my book. You will want to skip over this chapter. I get very specific when referring to my issues with the church in my meetings with my former bishop. I mentioned in the introduction that the book would be mostly non-aggressive. However, these were the actual discussions I had with my local leader at the time, and I want to deliver them accurately and honestly. I also give examples of written text that a person could use when requesting name removal and suggestion on how to respond when leaders request meetings. Unfortunately, strong and direct refusal is typically needed when requesting no contact from the church and its leaders. If you decide to read this chapter, you do so at your own risk. Though you may find it somewhat distasteful, this the reality of things.

My former bishop was my first local leader to know of my unbelief. My wife and I had just gotten married in the temple, so until that point, I had kept my apostasy a secret from the public so my temple recommend wouldn't get revoked. We had gone to church a few times but for the most part I just stayed silent in meetings or politely declined when asked to participate. Exactly one month into our marriage, we were asked if the bishopric could come over before church and get to know us better. I knew what this meant even though my wife did not: We were going to get callings.

We accepted their self-invitation into our home and when the day came, they came into our home and chatted for a few moments. They asked if they could offer a prayer and the bishop asked a blessing

on our home life, our jobs, and our marriage. The first words after the prayer came from one of the counselors: “Can we issue a calling?” My wife asked, “What kind of calling?” and upon realization of how awkward that transition was, the bishop changed the conversation and asked about the glass display cases in our home. My wife told them that I would be putting my collections of movie memorabilia in one, and she would be putting her shot glass collection on one of the shelves in the other. I was hyper-focused on making it out of this visit with my mind in-tact, so I blew right over the small talk and said, “I’m just going to be honest with you brethren. As far as a calling goes, she’s ready to accept one, but that’s just not something I want in my life right now.”

Everyone in the room was kind of shocked, because as you probably know, you just don’t say “no” to a calling, especially one presented by the entire bishopric. The bishop said, “alright” and then the air was dead for a moment until I laughed and said, “You know, just since you brought it up.” Everyone chuckled and then the counselor who brought up the calling before said, “Well, it is voluntary. That’s one of the great things about the church.” Jokes were made and then my wife said, “Well thank you for coming.” The whole thing took about four minutes from start to finish, and that turned out to be the shortest meeting I would have with a church leader in the next few years.

I went to church that day wondering if I was going to get called into an office. My fears were confirmed when a clerk pulled me aside after the meeting and said the bishop would like to meet with me. Still trying not to blow my cover as a believer, I accepted and sat in the lobby waiting to speak to him. A thousand thoughts were going through my head about why he called the meeting, but the time finally came when he called me from the foyer and into his office. We talked about some things I won’t share in this book, but eventually I told him I realize he probably wanted to know why I turned down a calling. I made up some excuse I don’t remember now, and then he asked me how I was doing in the church. I told him things were going “good.”

He didn’t seem too convinced by my answer and said, “Logan, I didn’t ask to meet with you just so that you can tell me the answers you think I want to hear. I want to talk because I care about you. If you don’t want to meet, then that’s okay. I just don’t want to waste your

time or my time if you don't want to be here." Although it wasn't my plan, I told him it was a struggle for me to attend church because I wasn't too happy with the current stake president. The bishop said he understood how it can be sometimes to have disagreements with church leaders. I told him it went a little deeper than just having disagreements. I told him even though I still believed in God and Jesus Christ, it makes it hard to want to go to church knowing every meeting I go to is ultimately presided over by that man.

He paused for a moment and then asked me if I believed in the church. That was the moment I had been preparing for. And even as I gave my answer, I was still unsure what I was even going to say. I managed to get out the sentence: "I do not." I think he may have expected that answer and he told me there were things he had questions on himself but that he knew the church was true. We talked for a little longer but didn't go into the details of why I didn't believe in the church. We had been talking for a while and our meeting was cut short by the ward clerk knocking on the door to tell him he had other appointments. Reluctantly, the bishop said he had to meet with the others waiting for him but that he would like to continue the conversation another time.

I laid low after that. I wasn't ready for the inevitable fallout of going public with my beliefs at that point. For another month I was able to avoid meeting with the bishop but one Sunday he saw me and asked me to meet with him again. I agreed and we exchanged pleasantries in his office. Then he did something unexpected. He asked if he could give me a mock temple recommend interview to see where I was and I agreed to it. This is how this conversation went:

"Logan, do you have faith in and a testimony of God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost?"

"I do."

"Tell me about that."

"Well, it took a really long time, but we finally had an answered prayer. I don't have total faith in God, but it's a start."

“When was that?”

“Last week.”

“So you’re praying with your wife?”

“Yes, we are praying. We have family prayer every night.”

“Good. That’s good. Do you have a testimony of the atonement of Christ and of his role as Savior and Redeemer?”

“Yes, I do. I believe maybe not as the church teaches, but I believe that everything was done on the cross and everything was taken care of then. I don’t believe we have to go through a repentance process and that if we stop the action and confess to God that we are forgiven. Sorry for going into details, I know the church doesn’t agree.”

“No, it’s good to go into detail and that’s not a problem at all. Because what you said is that you do have a testimony of the atonement of Christ and his role of savior and redeemer. I think that is what the church teaches, Logan. There’s no way around it. We are saved by grace. That’s what I believe, so it sounds like we’re pretty much on the same page.”

We talked about my recent experiences with the repentance process under other leadership and the issues that arose between us. He told me not to let those types of situations hold me back, and that he knows how hard it can be when you have issues with your direct priesthood leader. He said people need to learn to separate church leaders from the church, and then the gospel from the church. He said the church has an administrative role and then it has a priesthood role to provide ordinances and facilitate the making of covenants.

He said, “I’ve told you before, if someone hasn’t had a problem with a priesthood leader, it’s only a matter of time.” His words brought some relief to me and it seemed like for the first time in the past few years that there was a church leader who was on my side. He really gained my trust, which was near impossible for the church to do at the

time. I felt heard. I felt validated. After a brief conversation about grace and works, he continued:

“Do you have a testimony of the restoration of the gospel in these the latter days?”

“I do not.”

The questions up to that point were pretty straightforward and simple. Most Christians could fundamentally agree that faith and God is important, but the real interview began when I said those words. That's when he began to dig deeper.

“Okay, tell me about that.”

“I believe that any and all priesthood authority in the church has from the lowest member all the way to the prophet was lost when Joseph Smith fell as a prophet, when he started practicing polygamy. When he started marrying other men's wives, men who were still living. When Emma Smith was his 28th wife that he was sealed to. When he manipulated young girls into marrying him by saying his life would be taken by an angel with a flaming sword if he didn't marry them. When he falsely translated documents, whether it be the catalyst theory or whether he made it all up.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I'm talking about the Book of Abraham and the translation of the Book of Mormon. I'm talking about the peep stone that he found while digging a well. I think it's funny that throughout all time, the Urim and Thummim had been used and then protected by God, prepared and put into that little box just for Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon with. Then they lose the 116 pages of manuscript and Moroni gets pissed so he takes away the Urim and Thummim and now he has to translate the entire Book of Mormon with the seer stone in a hat. Now when you see any depiction of Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon you see him sliding his finger across golden

plates. But we don't see this. We don't see the seer stone. Long story short, the reason I don't support Joseph Smith, or the restoration is because I believe he fell as a prophet. But please don't get me wrong, I'm trying to be as respectful as possible to your beliefs while also answering your question as accurately as possible."

He asked me to examine the other side of that. He asked me what the case was for the restoration. I told him that the case was the "right time, right place" for the movement to start, as I learned in Sunday School. I told him as far as I was concerned, the right time and the right place was 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ set his original church up and that there was more evidence against the church being true than there was for it. We went over everything from the succession crisis, to the "spiritual eye" testimonies of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, to the theories of why Joseph Smith created the church. It didn't really get anywhere, and we ended up agreeing to disagree. The interview continued:

"Do you sustain the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator and as the only person on the earth who possesses and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys? Do you sustain members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators? Do you sustain the other General Authorities and local authorities of the Church?"

I jokingly told him that I sustained them "as such," and I referred to the quote by Joseph F. Smith where he claimed he never received revelations. I told him I absolutely do not sustain those men and that I actively opposed them. I told him I didn't believe they had any priesthood authority to lead or guide the church. I said I don't believe that we need prophets as "go-betweens" to God and that the whole point of the restoration was to bring back personal revelation and our connection to God.

Yes, of course I lived the law of chastity. No, there wasn't anything in my conduct relating to members of my family that is not in harmony with the teachings of the Church. I told him that I do support,

affiliate with, and agree with groups or individuals whose teachings or practices are contrary to or oppose those accepted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I told him I was one of those individuals. I told him there were several thousand of us on exMormon Reddit. I told him I do not strive to keep the covenants I have made, as those covenants were made under false pretenses. I told him I do not strive to attend sacrament and other meetings, nor do I strive to keep my life in harmony with the laws and commandments of the gospel.

I told him I was honest in my dealings with my fellow men, but that I was not a full-tithe payer. I told him I do keep the Word of Wisdom, though I didn't believe it was inspired. I told him I do not wear the garment both night and day as instructed in the endowment. I told him there are no sins or misdeeds in my life that should have been resolved with priesthood authorities because I reject that I need priesthood authority to resolve my sins with God. Finally, I told him I do consider myself worthy to enter the Lord's house and participate in temple ordinances, though the church would disagree.

I really don't think he was expecting all of that but it's what he got. That's the way I came out as a non-believer to my bishop. Nothing came of this interview. I told him I expected him to want to take my temple recommend but he replied that he wanted me to keep it. He said there would be no better place to go if I had doubts in the church and that he would like me to continue to go with my wife. Later, when I came out publicly as an apostate, we did have a falling out. He doesn't know this, but he was indirectly responsible for my resignation. There were a hundred reasons why I could have resigned, but there was one conversation we had that made me go through with it. Here is a quote from a post I made about this meeting:

“After contacting [the stake president] through a letter to let him know I opposed Elder Oaks in General Conference, he sent [the bishop] to deal with it. He called me into his office, but I was tired of meeting with these men on their own terms. I told him I would meet but I would like to do it at my home. He accepted and asked if he could bring one of his counselors. To my knowledge, the bishop did not know that this counselor was a

long-time personal friend of my family. I agreed to have both of them come over and meet in my home.

The final straw was when the bishop came into my house and denied things about church history in front of his counselor that he had already admitted to being true when we were in private. One example I brought up was how one general authority had said that rape victims may be prompted to recognize what they did to cause the assault and then to repent for it. He told me I was crazy and that the church would never teach things like that. I showed him a quote by Elder Richard G. Scott from when he gave that talk in General Conference.

He then backtracked and told me that even if he did say that, it wasn't the main point of his talk. I told him it doesn't matter what the point of his talk was, but that he said it and it was wrong. He said that he disagreed, and I got so mad I wanted to kick them out. I tried to be polite and told them I needed them to leave so I could do homework. Rather than respecting my request, he immediately changed the subject and asked, "So, tell me about your online activities against the church." I was flabbergasted. I told him to leave my house and never return. That is when I knew it was time for me to resign.

The saddest day of my life to that point was the day when I finally removed my name from church records. I struggled with this for weeks after meeting with the bishop, but I knew it was the best thing for my life. It was sad because it felt like someone I loved had just died. I cried and cried the entire day, letting go of the church and what it had done to me. Since then I have done everything can to cut ties and recover. A lawyer at QuitMormon sent a no-contact order along with my resignation letter. I refused to meet with leadership when asked. When local leaders contacted me through my cell phone, I told them to stop calling me and to take me off their lists. I refused all contact with the church, and I am better off for it."

I realize not everyone feels the need to tell their local leaders that they're out of the church. If you don't have a personal relationship

with your bishop outside of a church setting, I might not tell him at all. As I see it there are two good options in dealing with local leaders. The first option is the slow fade. Just stop going to church regularly. Stop accepting callings or assignments. Stop signing up to feed the missionaries when the sign-up sheet goes around. Stop going to Sunday School after sacrament meeting. Politely decline to say prayers in public meetings and most importantly, stop meeting with leadership. With luck, your ward members and local leaders won't realize you're gone. At the very least, you'll have distanced yourself from your leaders to the point at which you no longer accept their authority over you. I didn't do a slow fade. I went full-blown scorched earth bridge burning. I kind of wish I didn't go that way now, but I was too stubborn to listen to my parents when they gave me that advice.

Take my advice: Don't go full scorched earth with leadership!

The other feasible option is to ask your bishop to be released from your callings. If he presses you for information, just tell him you are not able to fulfil those responsibilities at the moment. If he refuses to release you, tell him you were not requesting a release, but that you were informing him that you would no longer be performing the calling. After that, draft a letter to your bishop informing him that your faith has changed and that you will no longer be attending church. You should tell him the boundaries you wish to set with ward members and other church leaders.

At the time that I left the church, the term was referred to as "name removal" in the old church handbook. In the General Handbook, name removal is now called "resignation" of church membership, which exMormons have been using for years. For the purposes of this book, the terms "church discipline" and "membership council" will be used interchangeably. If you are not concerned with facing charges of apostasy or if you are having your name removed from church, this is the time to tell your bishop of your reasons for leaving the church. Here is what the General Handbook says about resignation of church membership:

"If a member asks to resign his or her membership in the Church, the bishop reaches out to see if he or she is willing to

discuss the concerns and try to resolve them. The bishop and member may also counsel with the stake president...

If the member still wants to resign Church membership, he or she gives the bishop a written, signed request. The bishop submits the request to the stake president through the Leader and Clerk Resources system. The stake president then reviews and submits the request through that system. Leaders should act on requests promptly.

A person can also resign membership by sending a signed, notarized request to Church headquarters...

A request to resign membership should be acted on even if priesthood leaders have information about a serious sin. Any information about unresolved sins is noted when the request is submitted through the Leader and Clerk Resources system. This allows priesthood leaders to resolve such matters in the future if the person applies for readmission into the Church (see 32.16.2).

A priesthood leader should not recommend resigning Church membership in order to avoid holding a membership council.”

Resignation is not an easy process. I would recommend using the service [QuitMormon](#) if you are serious about terminating your membership in the church. If you choose to resign locally, there are several hoops you must jump through for your request to be honored without hassle. If you are writing to resign your membership, I recommend including this language in your letter:

“I fully and completely understand the consequences and results of the resignation of my church membership. I understand that resignation revokes all ordinances and removes all membership privileges. I have no plans to rejoin the church, but I understand that readmission by baptism and confirmation can only occur after a thorough interview and membership council per instruction contained in the General Handbook. I also understand that I would only be eligible to receive a

restoration of blessings by First Presidency approval after at least one full year from readmission. I demand that my resignation from the Church be processed immediately or legal action may be taken. I have committed no sin and therefore you have no evidence of unresolved transgressions to be noted in the Leader and Clerk Resource system. Any allegations to the contrary are false and will be considered slander.

I do not wish to be contacted about this matter any further than receiving a confirmation through mail that my membership resignation has been processed. I will not meet with local leaders to discuss my resignation or any other topic related to my former church membership. My resignation is not to be announced, whether in public or in private, to any group or individual. This includes, but is not limited to family or relatives, local missionaries, and members of the ward council. I refuse any ministering attempts by church members and I demand that no further contact be made. This is not a request; I am informing you that your records need to be updated.”

Unless you want to give church leaders an opportunity to attempt a reconversion, don't meet with them. They only have as much authority over you as you give them. From here on out, you choose how you want your relationships with church leaders to be. You don't have to meet with them about anything. You don't have to accept being pulled to the side for something. You don't have to attend tithing settlement. You don't have to go to church. All of that is your decision now.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

In order to safeguard the name of the church and to “save your soul,” your local leaders may call you in and accuse you of apostasy. The action taken in these membership councils is often decided beforehand, despite what the church’s official claims are. According to the General Handbook, church discipline or a membership council is no longer mandatory for apostasy. As the handbook describes it, apostasy has several different definitions. The one that most commonly refers to those who leave the church is: “Repeatedly acting in clear and deliberate public opposition to the Church, its doctrine, its policies, or its leaders.”

In the General Handbook published in February 2020, a new definition of apostasy was given: “Showing a pattern of intentionally working to weaken the faith and activity of Church members.” Here is what the handbook says regarding disciplinary action for apostasy:

“Issues of apostasy often have an impact beyond the boundaries of a ward or stake. They need to be addressed promptly to protect others.

The bishop counsels with the stake president if he feels that a member’s action may constitute apostasy. The bishop or stake president may place informal membership restrictions on the member. The stake president promptly counsels with the Area Presidency. However, only the stake president decides whether a membership council or other action is necessary.”

Note that just being inactive in the church doesn't mean you are in apostasy. According to the church, a person must act out and be vocal regarding their opinions of the church. There is precedent in past church disciplinary councils where fully believing and active members of the church have been excommunicated for expressing concerns and ideas about the church and its policies. Going public in your apostasy also doesn't guarantee that your leaders will feel the need to call a disciplinary council.

When I posted on Facebook about my unbelief in the church, I was fully expecting to be pulled into an office the next time I set foot in a church building. My prediction was correct and the very next Sunday I was asked to meet with the bishop. He started and told me I probably knew why I was there, and I told him I did. He told me when I made my post on Facebook that he received four different reports about what I had said. I asked him who made those reports, but he refused to tell me. He said, "I can't tell you who made those reports, but I will say that two of them came from within the stake, and two came from elsewhere."

He told me, "I guess you know what I have to do now." I told him I presumed he was going to take away my temple recommend. He replied that I was correct, and I said, "Well, I'm not going to give it to you. I assume that you know how to cancel a recommend." It took him a minute, but he did open his computer and log onto the church's website to invalidate my recommend. He told me he wanted to make it clear that it wasn't because of my beliefs that he had done it, but because I had been vocal in expressing my disbelief in the church and its leaders. This was the last time I met with him as a friend.

Telling your local leaders of your faith transition can trigger all types of situations. You can bet during the next ward council, bishoprics meeting, or stake president interview, your bishop will inform others of your news. It's safe to assume when you tell someone of your faith transition, that everyone will know it. This is especially true when it comes to church leadership.

If the ward council is told, there's a chance that you or your family are going to be put on the ward's project list. You may get love

bombed by the Young Women's group or the Relief Society Presidency. Expect a text from your Elders Quorum President or cookies from your "ministers" which are the new title of home teachers. The missionaries might just find themselves "in the area" and come to your house to "get to know you better." These attempts at "friendshipping" could last anywhere from one Sunday to years. Even if you remove your name from the records of the church, these visits or phone calls can still happen.

It's easy to get frustrated with these people who know little to nothing of your situation yet judge you behind closed doors in their council meetings. But you have to understand that these people don't understand why you have made the decisions you have. I would encourage you to be kind to these people who show up on your doorstep unless the same people come back after you've asked them not to. If you get repeat visitors after you've asked them not to come anymore, you should contact the bishop and tell him you no longer wish contact. If that doesn't work, consider taking legal action or filing a police report. In most cases, even a threat of legal action will be more than enough to stop the church from sending people to your home.

But sometimes, local leaders won't respect your right to live independently of the church. Be prepared for backlash, especially if your name is still on the records. To repeat Elder Ballard's Old Ship Zion metaphor, once you transition out of the church, "where will you go?" Here's the good news: You can go anywhere you want to go now. You can go to love. To happiness. To freedom of self and sanity. You no longer have to answer the summons of a church leader. You don't have to apologize for leaving the church as though it is a sin. You no longer have to subject yourself to the authority of those who really had none over you in the first place.

Wherever you go, I would encourage you to make peace with your experiences in your own way. Whether it be a stake president that treated you poorly or a family member who misjudged you, holding on to anger will do nothing but poison you. That doesn't mean you have to forgive them, and it doesn't mean that you have to let them walk all over you and hurt you more. A video that helped me overcome my anger and bitterness toward the local leaders that hurt me features

Nadia Bolz-Weber. In this video she explains that to her, forgiveness is a way for her to cut hurt out of her life.

“I really believe that when someone else does us harm, we're connected to that mistreatment like a chain because forgiveness is nothing less than an act of fidelity to an evil combating campaign. So, it's not an act of niceness, it's not being a doormat, it really to me is more [awesome] than that. Maybe retaliation or holding on to anger about the harm done to me doesn't actually combat evil, maybe it feeds it. Because in the end if we're not careful we can actually absorb the worst of our enemy and on some level even start to become them. So, what if forgiveness rather than being like a pansy way of saying, 'it's okay' there's actually a way of wielding bolt cutters and snapping the chain that links us like it is saying what you did was so not okay that I refuse to be connected to it anymore.”

I would never suggest that you forgive someone who hurt you as that's not my place. I know some of you have been deeply wounded and I would never pretend to know what you've gone through or the impact that has on your life. The reason I shared this was because her words helped me, and I hope that they might help you as well. Your path is your own. You get to choose what to do, what to say, who to forgive, and anything else your heart desires.

Section Six

Ward Members

Chapter One

Understanding Their Point of View

Someone once told me that every member of the church can fit into four categories: You have the Nephi group, who are actively faithful. Next, there are Sams, the passively faithful. Then you have the Lamans, the actively unfaithful, and the Lemuels, who are passively unfaithful. To simplify this analogy, the Nephi group represents members of the church who believe and act on those beliefs while the Sams follow the Nephis. Those in the Laman group are the apostates who speak out against the church and its leaders. The Lemuel group, while maybe not full of apostates, is comprised of those who follow the ways of the world.

Most people are familiar with the Nephi group and the Laman group, but don't much consider the Sam or the Lemuel group. I think it's interesting that most people lump Laman and Lemuel together while not doing the same for Nephi and Sam. There was nothing much special about Sam or Lemuel in the Book of Mormon. They both just went along for the ride. They voiced their opinions here and there but for the most part, they just followed their brothers. When the Lamanites broke off from the rest of Lehi's family, Sam and Lemuel took the back seat and were pretty much forgotten for the rest of the story.

The thing is, you often get Laman and Lemuel grouped into the same club. You never hear "Sam and Nephi" spoken of in same level of reverence. They're both good guys but ask any member of the church if they think Sam is as awesome as Nephi. Their answer will be "of course not." So why is it that Laman and Lemuel are both lumped together as though there're the same person? Sam and Lemuel are the

same character for the most part. The only difference between the two of them is what brother they follow.

It's because the Book of Mormon reinforces the "Us vs Them" mentality over and over. Anyone who leaves the church is conscripted to the same club. It doesn't matter if they're an arch-apostate or if they leave the church silently. It's the idea of "if you're not with us then you're against us. Someone once asked me why I called myself an apostate rather than a former member. This person couldn't see past my apostasy. They couldn't understand that I have other dreams, hobbies, or desires. Here is my response:

"I call myself an apostate rather than a former member because that is the label I've chosen. This word is so often used by the leadership of the church to degrade and dehumanize people like me that I have chosen to wear it as a badge of honor rather than letting it be used as a slur. "Apostate" is an emotionally charged word. When church leaders and members say it, an image immediately pops in your head of what you think they're like. When you think of apostates in the Book of Mormon you think of Laman and Lemuel and imagine us to believe, think, and act as they did. When you speak of apostates in the Bible you think of Judas, who betrayed Christ, the church, and sold his salvation for a few pieces of silver. You believe what you hear in Sunday School about apostates being lazy, offended, or wanting to sin. You think of wretched, hateful, bitter, and vulgar drunks. And some apostates may fit those categories, but the vast majority do not. The vast majority are normal people."

When you tell members of the church that you no longer believe, prepare for walls to start coming up. They might not see you as a vile sinner, but they will begin to treat you differently. It's almost unexplainable how it happens. I believe it's human nature to reject opinions that challenge your worldview, but in the church I think it runs much deeper than that.

Most of us have been in Sunday School when the instructor writes "apostasy" on the board and asks, "Why do people leave the church?" The usual answers are given: "They can't live the standards,

or they were offended, or they are lazy.” However, the answer they rarely share is: “They don’t believe the church is true.” In fact, I gave that answer in one of the Sunday School lessons I went to when I was mentally out but still attending for family. The stares I got cut through the silence that blanketed the room and I knew the class wasn’t ready for that answer. Why?

It’s because in the mind of a believer, there is no valid reason for someone to leave the church. Many of them have probably never asked themselves what it would take for them to leave the church. Any disagreements with local or worldwide leadership can be written off as the mistakes of men, while any disagreements on doctrine can be labeled as the mysteries of God. Members of the church love to quote Wilford Woodruff when he declared:

“The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty.”

That quote leaves no room for error. This implies the prophet is always right, even when he is wrong. This explains why Gordon B. Hinckley can say the word “Mormon” should mean “More Good” while Russell M. Nelson can declare that using the word “Mormon” offends God. That’s the same reason David A. Bednar can explain that people can choose to be offended, but also why Thomas S. Monson can authorize the multi-million dollar “I’m a Mormon” campaign on God’s behalf. Who is at fault here? Who was wrong? According to the church, none of them. You are the one who is wrong if you can’t accept the church’s teaching. Ezra Taft Benson once spoke of apostates of the church. He said:

“The wolves amongst our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made this statement... Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and

from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble...

Christ taught that we should be in the world but not of it. Yet there are some in our midst who are not so much concerned about taking the gospel into the world as they are about bringing worldliness into the gospel. They want us to be in the world and of it. They want us to be popular with the worldly even though a prophet has said that this is impossible, for all hell would then want to join us.

Through their own reasoning and a few misapplied scriptures, they try to sell us the precepts and philosophies of men. They do not feel the Church is progressive enough.”

In a worldwide devotional for young adults held at BYU Hawaii, Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve apostles, and his wife, Sister Ruth L. Renlund, gave a controversial talk titled, “Doubt Not, but Be Believing.” This talk addressed topics such as faith, doubt, and those who leave the church. Sadly, the talk missed the mark and the messages they gave about people like you and me were uninformed, misleading, and flat out wrong, to put it bluntly. Below is the transcript of a relevant section of the talk. Once again, the boat metaphor is used, but this time it’s admitted that the boat and its captain appear to be less than reliable:

Elder Renlund: Imagine having capsized in a boat while sailing in the ocean. You’re wearing a life preserver and have been swimming for hours toward what you believe is the nearest shore, but you can’t be sure. You’ve become extremely dehydrated, so that every time you start swimming, you become light-headed and fatigued. By your best estimates the shore is 30 kilometers, or 18 miles, away. You fear for your life because you can’t swim that far. In the distance you hear a small engine. The sound seems to be coming toward you; your hope of rescue soars. As you look, you see a small fishing boat approaching.

Sister Renlund: “Oh, thank heavens,” you think, “the captain sees me!” The boat stops and a kindly, weather-beaten

fisherman helps you on board. Gratefully you crawl to a seat in the boat, breathing a sigh of relief. The fisherman gives you a canteen of water and some soda crackers. You consume them greedily. The water and soda crackers provide enough nourishment for you to recover. You are so relieved and so happy. You are on your way home.

As you begin to revive and start feeling better, you start paying attention to some things you hadn't really noticed before. The water from the canteen is a bit stale and not what you would have preferred, like Evian or Perrier. The crackers tasted good, but what you really wanted was some delicatessen meat followed by a chocolate croissant. You also notice that the kindly fisherman wears worn boots and blue jeans. The sweatband on his hat is stained, and he seems to be hard of hearing.

Elder Renlund: You note that the boat is well-used and that there are dents in the right side of the bow. Some of the paint is chipped and peeling. You see that when the fisherman relaxes his grip on the rudder, the boat pulls to the right. You begin to worry that this boat and this captain cannot provide the rescue you need. You ask the fisherman about the dents and the rudder. He says he hasn't worried much about those things because he has steered the boat to and from the fishing grounds, over the same route, day in and day out, for decades. The boat has always gotten him safely and reliably where he wanted to go.

You are stunned! How could he not worry about the dents and the steering? And why could the nourishment have not been more to your liking? The more you focus on the boat and the fisherman, the more concerned you become. You question your decision to get on board in the first place. Your anxiety begins to grow. Finally, you demand that the fisherman stop the boat and let you back into the water. Even though you are still more than 20 kilometers, or 12 miles, away from shore, you can't stand the idea of being in the boat. With sadness, the fisherman stops the boat and helps you back into the ocean. You are on your own again.

Sister Renlund: Consider this story as a parable in which the boat represents the Church and the fisherman represents those who serve in the Church. The sole purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to help Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in Their work to bring to pass the eternal life of God's children. It provides the covenant path, the way to return to our Heavenly Father. Those who serve in the Church, though not perfect, are essential to help and encourage us along the covenant path.

What do the boat and the fisherman teach us about the Church? Do dents and peeling paint on the Church change its ability to provide the authorized saving and exalting ordinances to help us become like our Father in Heaven? If the fisherman must hold on to the rudder with both hands to keep the boat on course, does that negate his and the boat's ability to get us safely and reliably where we want to go? You do not have to be an ordained seer, like my husband, to know that slipping back into the water instead of staying in the boat is risky. Yet when we lose sight of the big picture, the small dents and peeling paint can loom large in our minds.

Every member needs his or her own witness of the truthfulness of the restored Church. Without a true conversion, including a mighty change of heart, you may begin to focus on the metaphorical soda crackers and chipped paint.

In this example, they paint believing members of the church with questions or opinions as unappreciative brats who just want to find fault with everything they see. In reality, people in the early stages of questioning try to hold onto what they believe with all their heart and look for a reason to believe what they're doubting isn't a big deal. The Renlunds jokingly mention that people with doubts are angry that they don't get Evian or Perrier when in reality, a vast majority would be thrilled to even have crumbs of an answer.

As though the message they gave with the boat analogy wasn't hurtful enough, they told the story about a man named Stephen who left the church because his doubts. In the story, they compare the very tragic

and difficult process of going through a faith transition to playing a game of whack-a-mole:

Elder Renlund: On one occasion while attending a stake conference, a stake president asked me to visit with a man whom I will call Stephen. Stephen had been a faithful member of the Church. He had served a mission and had married in the temple. He had served faithfully for many years but began to have doubts about the Church. As I visited with Stephen, he said that he had concerns with the fact that Joseph Smith related four versions of the First Vision. He thought that this might mean that Joseph Smith made up his experience.

I put Stephen in contact with a man who had researched these four versions decades earlier. Stephen visited with the researcher. The next time I spoke with Stephen I said, “So, how do you feel about the First Vision?”

He said, “Well, I feel okay about that because my questions have been answered. That no longer bothers me. But now I’m really concerned about the polygamy that was practiced in Nauvoo and after the Manifesto in 1890. That is really troubling me.”

I asked Stephen to visit with someone who had researched these topics in reliable primary sources. After that discussion, I contacted Stephen and asked how he was doing.

He said, “Well, that doesn’t bother me anymore. I understand what happened, and my concerns have been resolved. But now I really am concerned that the priesthood was withheld for a time from those of African descent.”

Sister Renlund: Sadly, Stephen had chosen to be a perpetual doubter. For him, doubting pleased him more than knowing and he was digging up in doubt what he had planted in faith. As time went on, as one concern was resolved, another one was found. No matter how much anyone tried to respond and answer these questions, he found another topic on which he was anxious. He

focused on the dents in the boat instead of on the capability of the boat to lead him to the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. What Stephen was doing is a form of “Church history whack-a-mole.” You know, the children’s game where a mole pops up from a board and as soon as you hit it, another mole pops up in another place.

While further intellectual information may temporarily resolve an intellectual concern, further information is not the complete solution because, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Faith in Jesus Christ and a witness borne of the Spirit are also needed.

Many who have had questions, who have had doubt enter their minds, and have had difficulty finding their spiritual footing have nonetheless stayed faithful and have remained on the covenant path. Often, as they have prayed, they have received the answer Elder Neil L. Andersen received decades ago when he wondered whether he was adequately prepared to enter the mission field. As he prayed, the feeling came: “You don’t know everything, but you know enough!” At times—in fact often—the Lord’s answer will be, “You know enough to stay on the covenant path and keep My commandments...”

Elder Renlund: Doubt is not and will never be the precursor of faith any more than light depends on darkness for its creation. Peter was not told, as he was slipping into the water after having tried to walk on it, “Oh Peter, if only you had more doubt.” No, he was told, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

In the Lectures on Faith, the differences between faith and doubt are explained: “Where doubt and uncertainty are ... faith is not, nor can it be. For doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time; ... persons whose minds are under doubts and fears cannot have unshaken confidence; and where unshaken confidence is not, there faith is weak; and where faith is weak the persons will not be able to contend against all the

opposition, tribulations, and afflictions which they will have to encounter in order to be heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus; and they will grow weary in their minds, and the adversary will have power over them and destroy them.”

This is what happened to Stephen. He let doubt and uncertainty occupy his mind. As time went on, he did not have the strength to confront the challenges that one faces as a member of the Church. He grew weary in his mind, and his faith disappeared...

Elder Renlund: We love a statement made by Elder John A. Widtsoe, an Apostle earlier in this dispensation. I will paraphrase what he said. Doubt, unless changed into inquiry from reliable, trustworthy sources, has no value or worth. The stagnant doubter, one content with himself, unwilling to make the appropriate effort, to pay the price of divine discovery, inevitably reaches unbelief and darkness. His doubts grow like poisonous mushrooms in the dim shadows of his mental and spiritual chambers. At last, blind like the mole in his burrow, he usually substitutes ridicule for reason, indolence for labor, and becomes a lazy scholar. Doubt is not wrong unless it becomes an end in and of itself. That doubt which feeds and grows upon itself, and breeds more doubt, is evil.

Elder Widtsoe’s words are still true. Stagnant doubt does not lead to knowing the reality of the Savior, Jesus Christ and His Atonement; it does not lead to really knowing that we have a kind, loving Heavenly Father who instituted the great plan of salvation. We can come to know the truthfulness of this latter-day work, but it requires that we choose faith, not doubt, and that we go to the reliable, trustworthy sources for our answers.

Sister Renlund: Alma spoke about this principle as well. He said, “And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know

nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction.” Would you seek financial advice from someone who is broke and in debt?

Elder Renlund: Would you ask for medical advice from a charlatan snake oil salesman?

Sister Renlund: Who would you take advice from on how to improve your forehand in tennis—a weekend hack or Roger Federer?

Elder Renlund: So why would you entrust your eternal welfare to those who are spiritually bankrupt because they have ripped up in doubt what they once planted in faith or who, as Jeremiah said, “have forsaken [Christ] the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?” These individuals have walked away from that fountain of living waters and want you to trust in something that doesn’t hold water.

I can’t explain how insulting it is to hear a top leader of a church I used to love compare people like me to snake oil salesmen or claim that I am spiritually broken. This is not a talk that builds faith. It is one that tears down and destroys. Their objective was not to help believers struggling with questions, it was to discredit people like me by painting them as unreliable and untrustworthy.

I’m sure that Elder and Sister Renlund never stopped to think that maybe the reason Stephen eventually left the church was because he felt that the answers weren’t satisfactory, or maybe that he felt the people he confided in mocked him when he went to them for answers. After listening to this talk, it is apparent that neither of the Renlunds have any real understanding of those who have questions. And that’s no different than the vast majority of those in the church who have never had a personal experience with someone they love leaving the church. Often, if a member of the church hasn’t had such an experience, they won’t know any better than the answers they learn in Sunday school.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

When I left the church, I had a lot to say and I wanted people to hear it. Mostly because I wanted validation from others that I wasn't crazy for not believing in the church anymore. I also felt the need to go public with my unbelief to see if anyone else I knew felt the same way. My process in going public to the world was a slow one. At the time, I was trying to keep my apostasy on the down-low because I didn't want my wife or my parents to become targets of the church's project list nor did I want to bring any sort of disciplinary action on them for supporting me. I just didn't want any of the drama that comes along with leaving the church.

That drama is really hard to avoid. It's hard to be "in the church but not of the church." When you go through a faith transition, you begin to notice the little cracks in the boat. To use both Elder Ballard and the Renlund's analogy, this doesn't automatically mean you jump ship or leave the church. Things build up over time. Just as people gain testimonies over time, they can also lose them just as slowly. Testimonies aren't the only thing that are lost in the process. Since leaving the church, my social circle has gotten incredibly small.

The one thing I miss about my time in the church is the community. There have been many times when I wish I had done things differently with others. When I read gospel topics essays, I assumed everyone would be just as shocked at their content as I was. I quickly learned that I was wrong.

After posting some things online and after and talking to friends and family, I was met with a lot of pushback. In their eyes, I was the one responsible for my doubts, not the new information. Subsequently, I was at the receiving end of many long and hurtful messages and conversations. I was tired of the accusations and insinuations that I had less of a moral high ground simply because I wasn't happy with what I was reading. I decided to make a post on Facebook to clear things up:

Me: Can I just say that I'm not the bad guy for discovering or even sharing controversial things about the church and its leaders? Wrong is wrong no matter if Joseph Smith does it or Logan Hill does it. Don't shoot the messenger, especially when I'm not out trying to deconvert anyone. People get more upset over the fact that I call Joseph Smith out on stuff he's done than the fact that he actually did them. I know it's a difficult discussion but if you want to talk more, please PM me. I don't want to have a blow out in my comments. At this point I'm about done with negative people in my life.

Friend: I haven't read any of that stuff however, we will be upset because we love and revere the Prophet Joseph. Please be very careful what you post, not everything said about that amazing man and prophet is true. I am sure you know that, don't be surprised when people react negatively.

Me: Sure, not everything is true. But the stuff that I dislike him for is posted on [the church's website]. For instance, instructions were supposedly given in Section 132 on how to practice polygamy. No wives but virgins. No women who belong to another man. But he did the exact opposite and married other men's wives and mother daughter pairs.

I'm sorry and I don't care who dislikes what I say about him but wrong is wrong. But people will defend to their dying breath that he was in the right and then blame me for disagreeing with him.

I'm not trying to push you or anyone else away but I'm just tired of getting labeled as an apostate when people like the early leaders of the church did way worse things than I've ever done.

I hadn't come out as a non-believer at the time that I posted those things on Facebook. I was trying to drop hints that something was about to change in my life even if I didn't know it was. That all changed after hearing Elder Dallin H. Oaks's talk, "The Proclamation and the Plan" in the October 2017 session of General Conference. In this talk I heard the hate being taught over the pulpit and it sank into my heart deeper than it ever had.

I realized the same type of comments that had been directed at me for doubting were now being spoken by an apostle. Although the core of his talk was directed toward those who fought against the church and its teachings, it was clear to me that I would no longer be welcome in the church. I saw people on Facebook praise this talk for being "inspired" and "sticking it to the world." I couldn't listen to words like this and also stay silent:

"Inevitably, the actions of those who try to follow God's plan of salvation can cause misunderstanding or even conflict with family members or friends who do not believe its principles. Such conflict is always so. Every generation that has sought to follow God's plan has had challenges. Anciently, the prophet Isaiah gave strength to the Israelites, whom he called "ye that know righteousness, ... in whose heart is my law." To them he said, "Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings." But whatever the cause of conflict with those who do not understand or believe God's plan, those who do understand are always commanded to choose the Lord's way instead of the world's way."

At that moment, it was painfully obvious to me that Elder Oaks was referring to people like me. I knew then that I would never have a place in the church or a real place among its people. I couldn't stay silent anymore and I needed the world to hear what I had to say. That night I told my family that I was going to make a Facebook post where I declared my stance as a non-believer. I told them I could no longer

live a double life. I got pleas from my wife and my mother not to do so but I was determined to speak my truth. My intent wasn't to go on Facebook and bash the church that all my friends and family loved. I just wanted to stand up for what I believed was right. I couldn't live my double life anymore and I wanted to be honest with the world on how I felt. The next morning, I shared this in a Facebook post:

"It is essential that we reject anything that does not conform to our standards, refusing in the process to surrender that which we desire the most..."

—Dallin H Oaks

I declare my standards as love, honesty, and integrity. On top of happiness, these are the things that I desire most. Though I do not always live up to those, I do try to change when I realize I am wrong.

Today I am rejecting the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from my life. After hearing Elder Oaks's talk yesterday, I knew this is what I have to do. For anyone to listen to these men speak at General Conference they must realize that they have none of those standards. They preach with their mouths but not with their actions. There is no integrity in how they run the church.

The church does not follow its own doctrine. It doesn't follow the examples set forth in its own books of scripture. It teaches conflicting things as truth and then expects you to believe both of them. The church is not honest. The church cannot teach love but also spread hate and be true.

I can no longer support the actions and doctrines of the church. That does not mean that I can't support my friends and my family and my wife in our relationships.

[My wife] and I are happily married to each other and very much in love. She has known about my feelings for the church since I started doubting and we have reached an understanding

about the topic. Although we do not agree about the church, we agree that we will always love each other.

She supports me in my decision to leave the church and I support her in her decision to stay. Let there be no confusion about the future of our marriage: we love each other very much and it will always stay that way.

In fact, the reason I stand so strongly in support of same sex marriage is because of how much I love my wife, and if two people can love each other as much as I love [her], then they deserve to be together no matter what.

Today has been a tipping point in a very long journey in my life. I have decided that this is what is best for me. I honestly feel that this is the right path in my life. If the day comes that I regret this decision, then I will change my beliefs and my actions and come back into the church.

To many of you this will not come as a surprise. However, I want any of you who did not know about my beliefs in my life to know about them now. The gap between the world and the church is growing and I am siding with the one that has the standards that I support.

Please know that this isn't a personal attack on anyone. If my posts make you uncomfortable or offend you, you have the ability to unfriend or unfollow me.

I know I may lose some friends over this post but at the end of the day it is up to you to decide whether or not we're still friends. My feelings for the church don't affect my personal feelings for any of my friends or family in the church. My love for my friends runs deeper than the church. I know this post may cause controversy, but I have decided that this was the best route for me to go.

The reason for this post is that I cannot in good conscience continue to purport that I am something that I am not. At this

moment, I have no plans to remove my name from church records.

I don't wish to destroy the faith of those around me. I don't want to de-convert you or your family. I am still the same Logan, the same friend, and the same family member. I am still a good person. I still want to help people. I still believe in God and Jesus Christ, but I cannot believe the teachings of the Mormon church any longer.

I would not like to discuss the issues I have with the church publicly but if you have questions please message me privately. Please respect my right to believe as I do. I don't hold a moral low ground because I no longer believe. I only want to be open and honest about who I am.”

In my post, I followed a pattern similar to the letters I had written before. I made my point, addressed that I no longer believed, attempted to calm their fears before they ever came up, and then reinforced my love for my friends and family. I made it clear that I didn't want to lose friends over this, but I left the ball in their court, so to speak. I let them know that they were the ones choosing the next move. I don't know the exact number of friends I lost that day, but I know that was a result of their action, not mine. Unlike the other posts I made where I fought with people online or accused them of being brainwashed, I consider this post to be a successful and well written one.

Chapter Three

Where to Go from Here

If you're trying to go through this faith transition without losing friends and come out as unscathed as possible, you're going to want to hold on to your relationships. Let them know you still care. Sometimes it just isn't that simple. Once you go public with your unbelief, don't be surprised if people come out of the woodworks to give you their opinion of your choices. I hadn't had a conversation with my mission president in four years, then one night he sent me this message:

“Logan, I love you and respect your decision to leave the Church, but it saddens me, for I know without any question it is true. The experiences I have had too sacred to discuss have touched my very soul and the opportunities afforded me of spending so much time with the Brethren you have maligned have thoroughly convinced me of their Divine calls and service. I'm happy you have decided not to have your name removed from the records...when the world crowds in and saps your happiness someday, the warmth of the gospel and of Church members will be welcoming. I'm sure your mother is heartbroken, but I also know she loves you. I pray your future will be less rocky than many I know who have made similar choices. You have many talents and abilities the Lord can use—you are His choice son!”

I've learned a valuable lesson: Don't send a text or an email when you're angry. Don't go on Facebook and vent your troubles to the world. If that's your plan, take 20 minutes to cool off and if you still need to say something then find a way to say it with tact. I cared so

little for this man at this point, I almost sent him back a very wordy and rude message to let him know what I thought of him. But I also knew if I did this, it would solidify his negative opinion of me. Instead, I took the alternate approach, and this was my reply:

“I know your intentions are good and I’m rather surprised you even messaged me. I wasn’t expecting the first communication we’ve had in years to be about me leaving the church. I appreciate your concern and your hope, and I have no doubt they are sincere.

I am glad your experiences in the church have been positive and helped you feel it is true, but my experiences in the church have convinced me of the church’s untruthfulness. My doubts began on my mission and when I got home, I knew the church couldn’t be what it claimed to be.

I haven’t truly believed for years now but only recently had the courage to speak up about it. I am 100% sure of my decision. I would love to remove my name from the records when the time is right. I’m sure I’ll be summoned for a disciplinary council for speaking out against the church but that would only solidify my position.

I didn’t malign those men. I believe they maligned themselves by the terrible and hurtful things they preach. I just don’t see Jesus Christ teaching those things. In good conscience I can’t support those men and also support Jesus Christ. In my opinion, the Jesus of the Mormon Church isn’t the Jesus of the Bible.

My [family] has actually been very supportive of my decision to leave. Rather than just tell me that I’m wrong they have listened to the reasons I left. They realize my reasons for leaving are legitimate and will defend those reasons even if they don’t agree with them.

I’ve heard people say all manner of terrible and untrue things about me since I’ve left the church... People lie and do

everything else they can to attack my character but that doesn't do anything to fix the gaping hole in the church's truth claims.

I will never regret serving my mission. The church has done many great things in my life. But I simply cannot support the Mormon Church any longer.”

He replied that he could debate with me until he was 70 years old, but that he could see my mind was made up. I told him there wasn't any need for a debate, but that that he shouldn't lecture me on leaving the church without first asking my reasons for it. If you believe it, he had the nerve to ask me if I was trying to make him feel guilty. I told him I found it funny that he asked that, considering that he was the one who contacted me and brought up my mother being “heartbroken.” I told him I thought we left the conversation in a good place and that I'd rather not continue. I also told him I didn't contact him in years because of the negative relationship we had on my mission.

He asked me to explain why he thought we had a rocky relationship. It was at this point that I unloaded everything I had wanted to tell him over the past few years that had ever wanted to say. I called him out for slandering my name in the mission and brought up exact quotes that he used years ago. I told him that his actions caused me to develop insomnia, anxiety and depression while on my mission. I told him how foolish I thought his rebukes were over the arbitrary rules he would set for me such as how often my family sent me mail. I said, “I forgave you and I forgave myself for what happened, whether it was purposeful or not. I believe that you did what you thought was best with the information you had. I don't fault you for doing what you believed was right.”

I told him I knew he was probably wondering why I didn't go to him with any of this before. I listed several reasons, and then told him the biggest reason was that I thought he wouldn't care. I told him I thought he would simply write it off as just another problem that I caused for him. I told him I didn't expect for him to fix anything and that I would rather have not had to have that conversation with me. He ended by saying, “I'm sad to hear it all. I'm very sorry for any hurt I caused you!”

I believe my old president when he says he is sorry for the pain he caused me on my mission. I believe he realized that he didn't have all the information and perhaps he had judged me too harshly. I don't think it had ever occurred to him that my mission wasn't what he thought it was. The next day, I got another call from him while I was at work and I wasn't able to answer my phone. I didn't respond or call him back all day and decided it was probably better to drop the conversation rather than rehash everything that we had already discussed the previous night. He sent me another message saying something along the lines that he was sorry for the pain he caused me, and he didn't realize that things were that bad for me. He asked me to forgive him as he was just a man trying to do his best. I told him I forgave him and that I knew he was just doing what he thought was right.

There comes a time in your faith transition that you will have to ask yourself, "Is this person worth it? Is this topic worth discussing? Is this a battle worth fighting?" If not, it's probably best to let things rest. My mission president did give me one good piece of advice when I was under him. He said that it's okay to let someone be wrong without letting them know they're wrong. In this case and many others, I have tried to incorporate this piece of wisdom into how I deal with difficult people. Sometimes you should just let others be wrong but that doesn't mean that you're not right.

There are ways to talk about things and there are ways not to talk about things. After you go public with your unbelief, someone may approach you and say something along these lines: "You're blind to the truth and have been deceived by Satan. You've turned your back on everything you once loved and are on the path to destruction. You're like Korihor—an anti-Christ! Deep down you know it's true. One day you'll return to the church, so why fight it?" In fact, Elder Holland once said the following to a congregation of young adults:

"Don't you dare bail. I am so furious with people who leave this church. I don't know whether 'furious' is a good apostolic word. But I am. What on earth kind of conviction is that? What kind of patty-cake, taffy-pull experience is that? As if none of this ever mattered, as if nothing in our contemporary life

mattered, as if this is all just supposed to be just exactly the way I want it and answer every one of my questions and pursue this and occupy that and defy this – and then maybe I’ll be a Latter-Day Saint. Well, there’s too much Irish in me for that.”

Most of us who have left the church have heard something like this since leaving. I can say with almost certainty that those accusations aren’t going to change your mind and you’re not going to go back to church because of them. In fact, they might cement you in your beliefs even further. But guess what? If you approach members of the church with the same nonsensical language and insults, their minds won’t be changed either. You can bet they’ll be in church on Sunday morning. I’m sure there have been a few who’ve responded to these types of comments from both sides. But if you really want to make a difference, be careful how you say things to others. Be tactful in presenting information. The best way to get a point across isn’t to yell personal insults to the other person. Especially when talking about religion, ad hominem attacks are rarely efficient. They detract from your argument and aren’t relevant to whether or not the church is true. Below are a few examples to steer clear of.

Rather than saying:

“You’re a homophobe and a racist for belonging to a church who has homophobic and racist teachings!”

“You’re a sheeple who follows all church teachings no matter what!”

“You’re in a cult and are brainwashed!”

You might want to say:

“The church has homophobic and racist teachings, and this bothers me because...”

“Believers in the church tend to defend the its teachings no matter what. If people were to take a step back and really look

at some of the issues, they would see there are a few problems in the church, regardless of whether or not it is true.”

“In my opinion, the church has many similarities to other high-pressure groups. I know the church is often referred to as a cult, and intentionally or not, there are several cult-like tendencies that the church shares. If you’d like to understand why some critics make this claim, here is an article on cult characteristics...”

This takes the pressure off the individual and puts it back onto the church or the topic being discussed. If they feel the need to defend both themselves and the church, not only will they write this off as a personal attack, but they’ll double down in their beliefs, retrench into their position, and categorize any future discussions on the topic as nothing more than anti-Mormon.

I lost most of my friends when I left the church. Whether it be through my own actions, or simply their intolerance of apostasy, the reason doesn’t matter. There came a time after my anger died down that I wanted to rekindle some of the friendships I once held dear. I decided to post something on Facebook to clear the air with where I stood in the church. The reception was fairly positive and a few of the people that I had lost connection to messaged me in support. A handful of people also told me that my posts had helped them through their own faith transitions. I believe this post was necessary to begin to break down some of the walls I had constructed in my angry phase:

“To those of you who have been affected by my faith journey since leaving the church:

I want you all to know I am in a really good place with the church right now. Although I never intend to return to membership in the church, I do wish to return to the people. I wish to return to my friends who left me and also who I pushed away.

I am ready to say "agree to disagree" on issues while at the same time I am willing to discuss topics in the church. When it comes

down to talking about church related topics, I just wish I could say, "Here's this news article" without someone thinking I have an agenda. I am ready to have conversations where people see me as Logan Hill, normal person, rather than Logan Hill, apostate.

When I announced I was leaving the church I immediately became an outsider to many of you. Anything and everything that I posted, commented on, or shared was met with caution, distaste, or a personal insult. Lifelong friends called me "blinded" and "deceived" among other untruths. Many people I looked up to and grew up knowing questioned my integrity for leaving, sharing truth, and asking questions.

Let me derail for a moment. Let me give you some insight into my life where it has been hard to get over this anger. By those same lifelong friends, I have been accused of everything from being an alcoholic to abusing my wife. To those of you who took part in attempting to chip away at my dignity: How dare you judge me for following my heart and doing what I believed to be right? How dare you spread vicious, insulting, and slanderous lies about me because I chose to believe differently than you? How dare you assume why I left the church and proceed to spread false gossip without ever asking me why I really left? You know who you are. Shame on you.

[To those] in local ward or stake leadership who have lied to and about me, harassed me, or otherwise questioned my character: Shame on you. I am not a perfect man and God knows there are many unflattering, but true things that could be said about me. Having to lie your way around the truth to protect the church is more pathetic and shows more dishonesty on your part than anything I've said about the church. I have reached out numerous times to some of you and have been met with silence or insults. If [anyone] would like to meet with me and explain how me leaving the church makes me any less of a person than they are, I am all ears.

With that being said, I realize much of the disconnect between friends and family I once had good relationships with has been of my own doing. I acknowledge some of the things I have said on Facebook or other platforms has been unflattering toward the church. I realize much of the information I have posted, though it be true, is unwanted, unappreciated, and could be taken personally. If this is the case, I apologize. It may not make things better but know that this is not and has not been my intention. Me leaving the church or sharing things about the church has never been personal to any of you. With the exception of a handful of the members of the local leadership, I don't hold anything against any of you. I left the church because I believed it wasn't true. End of story.

Where am I with the church right now? For the last few months, I have been much less focused on tearing the church down and more focused on moving on with my life. My healing finally began in May of last year when I willingly removed my name from the records of the church. This allowed me to experience the church through the eyes of a non-member. I was able to take a step back and view the church with new eyes.

When I resigned, that was my literal and symbolic termination of the church's authority over me. I was able to control how I experienced the church rather than under the control of local leaders. Not being pulled into an office every time I set foot in a church building. Not having men acting as church security pull me aside and harassing me just for entering a building. Not being asked about what sins I have or have not committed that week. Not having my personal worthiness or relationship with the Lord analyzed or being told it's not up to par or could be better.

In doing so, I have affirmed for myself that the church still is not true. However, what bothers me far less than hundred-year-old church history is how the current church is being run. How top leaders of the church talk about and respond to social, political, or other issues. How the leaders speak about those with doubt or about asking questions. That is what matters the

most to me now. I can forgive polygamy and other forms of deceit and cover up from Joseph Smith's time. I can forgive horrible and heinous racist comments by Brigham Young and other church leaders. I can forgive the flat out incorrect and fabricated translation of scripture such as the Book of Abraham.

What I cannot forgive is current church policy that hurts many of its members, whether they are still in the church or not. What I cannot forgive is further hateful remarks about members of the LGBTQ community. I cannot forgive the current leaders of the church for making a mockery of the church I grew up in, loved, and gave twenty-five years of my life to. I cannot forgive the leaders dragging that church through the mud and then blaming people for not staying.

That's where I am with the church. If you would like to talk or ask questions, please feel free to do so. I'm done debating or trying to convince others that I'm right about doctrines of the church. If you want to know my story and why I left, I'm more than willing to discuss those with you.

With love,
Logan Hill”

You may want to make a similar post, minus the “shame on you” wordage. However, notice that I tried to reinforce my love form my friends and family. I also just told the truth where I was at with the church. I realize it may not be an option for all to be as blatantly truthful as I was in my posts. But after a few years of this kind of dialogue, I felt I had to stand up for myself and my family. At this point, we had all endured “a few stripes” in our efforts to move past this thing. We all wanted to heal. We all wanted to get our lives back together. It just seemed like every time we got to that point, a local leader would pull one of us into an office or insult us in one way or another. We had previously told leadership how we felt about our situation, but they weren't respecting the boundaries that we had requested.

In any relationship you are going to have to set boundaries. This is even true of those you like. Know that you will eventually come

across a member of the church who is rude to you for leaving, or voices a rude opinion about your lifestyle choices, or about how much you've changed. If there's anything I would have you learn from this chapter it is this: Just because someone is rude to you, it does not give you a license to be rude back. This is a hard truth to accept, but just because Mormon missionaries come to your door, or the Elders Quorum President texts you and wants to come over, or a member of your ward posts a picture of the First Presidency on Facebook, that doesn't mean you should go on Twitter or Reddit and harass church members. But what about the good encounters? Are there any? Can you have good relationships with members of the church even though they have different beliefs? Of course you can. Despite all the backlash from local leaders, experiences with most of the people in my home ward weren't as dramatic.

Take for example, a post I made about General Conference. Every six months, the church holds a broadcast where speakers share messages on various church related topics, and musical performances are given by what is now known as "The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square." Growing up, I loved listening to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. It's the only music I knew existed when I was fourteen and the church was my whole life.

I remember sitting in the balcony of a conference session as a recently returned missionary where the choir and congregation sang "Come, O Thou King of Kings." I felt what I identified then as the Holy Ghost so strongly that I believed at any moment the ceiling of the conference center would crumble open and Jesus Christ would make his second coming. I sang along with pride as I numbered myself with one of the twenty thousand:

"Come, make an end to sin,
And cleanse the earth by fire,
And righteousness bring in,
That Saints may tune the lyre
With songs of joy, a happier strain,
To welcome in thy peaceful reign."

I felt special that out of the billions of people on Earth, I was one of God's chosen people who has the truth. Not only that, but I was able to sit in the conference center and hear the prophet of God speak. I was proud that I would be one of those kept safe on Zion's hill when the destruction of the wicked was taking place. It was one of the more spiritually powerful moments of my life. Hymns like this one are powerful to those who already believe they're true. The message of the hymn is reinforced when they feel "the Spirit" confirm their own beliefs back to them.

These hymns can inspire and uplift those in time of need. However, some of them don't sound the same when you're on the other side of that line. Some of the hymns suggest that you either can't be happy outside of the church, or everyone else is the enemy. Some hymns celebrate the destruction of those like me who have left the church. Here is the post I made regarding an issue that bothered me during General Conference:

"If you have a loved one who has doubts about the church or who has left the church, and they will be watching General Conference in your home, please consider not singing "Let Us All Press On" or "Hope of Israel" or "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" if they are in the lineup this weekend.

These hymns are deeply hurtful and damaging to those who have left the church. I understand what the meaning of those songs are, that all "truth" will eventually conquer "darkness" and that the Lord is helping you along in a world of sin. However, your loved one will not see it like that if they have left the church.

The extremely militant theme in these hymns is seen by apostates and doubters as their loved ones calling for the downfall of people like them. This hymn divides and isolates when this should be a time for families to come together.

Your loved one will already be hurting today. General Conference weekend is very tough on those who have recently left the church or who are struggling with doubts.

Even if you think it is foolish of me to post this, there is no harm in being kind and skipping one or more hymns. If you do still insist on singing these hymns, please acknowledge to them that you love them and care about them. A little kindness could go a long way.”

After this post, I received several comments asking me why I was watching Conference if I no longer believed. Someone also suggested that the only “enemy” in the hymns is Satan. I gave a response to both of these questions and the comment section didn’t erupt into flames like many of my much earlier, bitter, accusatory, and argumentative posts did. I did it in such a way that I was able to remain firm in my position as well as have a respectful conversation. This is one of the outcomes I am hoping that my book can help you achieve. If you can learn to have conversations to build relationships rather than to destroy, the perception people have about you can change, even if it is one by one.

Section Seven

Everyone Else

Chapter One

What the World Knows

Imagine you wake up one day and the color red no longer existed. No cherries, no ladybugs, no stop signs. All red is replaced by gray. You wake up the next morning and orange is gone as well. The sunset is no longer beautiful. Your orange juice looks like bad milk. Imagine waking up the next day and the day after next until the pattern continues and there's no more color, just monotone shades of gray. After a while, your other senses fade. You can't feel the prick of a rose, you can't taste your food, and you can't hear songbirds sing. Eventually, everything just disappears, and you're left with nothing but your own thoughts.

Imagine you are in the middle of a park taking a moonlight stroll. During your walk, the earth shakes, and the ground starts to cave beneath your feet. The streetlights, park benches, and trees fall away into the hole in the ground, threatening to take you along with them. Then the moon and the stars fall from the sky, leaving you in complete darkness. You just keep running and running but the ground falls behind you as quickly as you're running. After running for so long, your legs finally give out and the ground beneath your feet catches up, casting you into a deep, dark hole.

Imagine you believe you're the literal child of a supreme deity and that you have powers of heaven in your home. After years of faithful service to your religion, something happens that causes you to question a central teaching of your church. You're not looking for trouble, but trouble finds you in your attempt to eradicate the questions that plague your mind. Your questions turn to doubt, and your doubt

leads to loss of belief. You want to believe but find yourself incapable of doing so. You no longer believe that you wield the powers of God, and you question whether your god even exists at all. You discover your own truth at the dismay of your religious leaders and are cast out. Everything you thought you knew to be true has suddenly shifted. Things that used to bring you joy and comfort now bring you great pain.

You didn't ever want this for your life, but here it is regardless. The package isn't wrapped in pretty paper and tied in a large bow. A faith transition is the mess you come home to when the mail lady delivers a package where your dog was able to get to it, and now you have to pick up both the box and its contents from all over your front yard. Such is life when going through a faith transition. Picking up the pieces of your life and starting again isn't easy and there's no standard path that everyone can take.

If you've never experienced such a journey, you are incapable of fully comprehending what it's like. That's not to say that you're ignorant or uneducated. If you're a believing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is no other option for you than the church being true. Most likely, you can't think of any valid reason that someone should leave the church. You've heard in Sunday School what the reasons are for people leaving the church: they're offended, lazy, or want to sin. You never hear, "People leave because they don't believe the church isn't true." Well, people don't give up eternal salvation to drink Starbucks or get an extra hour of sleep on Sunday mornings.

As for being offended, that's as valid of a reason to leave the church as any other. Note that I'm not referring to the cautionary tale of Thomas Marsh. I'm not referring to milk strippings. I'm talking about deep and hurtful cuts. I'm talking about giving your entire life to a religion and then being forced out because you were vocal about issues that disease the church. You've served in church callings for over forty years, at both the ward and local levels. You've been a seminary teacher as well as a primary teacher. You've served as a member of a Young Men's or Young Women's presidency. You've been in a bishopric or Relief Society President. You've been a mother or father who has sent a child on a mission. You paid ten thousand dollars for

that mission on top of thousands, or perhaps, hundreds of thousands of dollars in other monetary donations. Your life has been the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and because you cared enough about your own church to speak out against the issues in church you have become a pariah. An outcast, or maybe even an exile. That's the offended I'm talking about. There's no choosing to be offended about this. Suggesting that you can choose to be offended in a situation like that is like suggesting that you can be slapped in the face and choose not to feel pain.

You get it, but those unfamiliar with Mormonism don't. They won't understand why it's such a hard thing for someone like you to leave the church. They don't understand why Joseph Smith's actions two hundred years ago have such a big impact on your life now. Most people outside the church only know what they see on the TV or from talking with their Mormon friends. They don't have any concept of what it's like to be a young man in a caravan on the way to the nearest temple and worried that the Holy Ghost will tell the temple workers that he committed a sin the night before. They don't know what it's like to sit down with your whole family in front of a bishop at the year's end and discuss whether or not you paid your dues in tithing. They don't know what it's like to be denied a temple recommend because they can't sustain the local stake president. They don't understand the concept of needing a temple recommend in the first place, much less disciplinary action over something like disagreeing with church leaders.

Chapter Two

Coming Out as a Non-Believer

If you've been following this book in order, you've already learned how to come out as a non-believer to the most important people in your life: your spouse, your parents, your children, your siblings, and your in-laws. But what about everyone else? What about your close never-Mormon family and friends? What about people you went to high school who know you used to be a member? What about people at work or in the community? You might not interact with these people on a daily basis, but they are still important people in your life.

I like to refer to the process of unbelief as a faith transition for this reason: Change takes time. It's not an event, it's not something that can just be mentioned once and then swept under the rug, never to be mentioned again. Some also refer to it as a faith journey, and it's an accurate term. Once you tell someone close to you that you've left the church, it's like they pack up their bags and embark on the road to change with you. Their views may change along with yours or they may stay the same. They may double down in their beliefs or they might gain more compassion for individuals marginalized by the church like yourself.

Learn to limit what you share with people. As members of the church, people tend to be very open book with the issues in their life. They feel like they need to share every personal or intimate detail of their lives with others. I believe this trait carries over into post-Mormonism a bit. If you are comfortable enough with discussing church topics in conversation with someone, don't overload them. Even when people are genuinely interested in hearing why you left or what

issues you have with the church, they don't want to hear everything. You know the burden you feel when thinking of church-related things? Do you stay awake at night and lose sleep over it? Did you ever spend every waking second of the day thinking about it? The burden you feel can start to wear on the people you share things with as well. They won't want to be around you and it's not just because they don't like hearing critical remarks about the church. In general, people don't like being around negative people. As selfish as it may seem, people do get tired of hearing you complain all the time.

Other than Facebook or other social media, you are going to want to tell people in person as well. For important people in your life such as your grandparents or grandchildren, you can follow the suggestions in telling your parents and children, respectively. For siblings, uncles or aunts, cousins, or other extended family, you can use the chapter on how to tell your parents or in-laws.

For never-Mormons, you will want to take a different approach all together. First, you'll need to decide if it is worth telling them at all. When you talk to people outside of the church about "the Mormons," a few thoughts might come to mind: The boys on bicycles in the white shirts and ties. The black name tags and book bags. They knock on your door, asking to come inside and share the "good news" with you and your family. They'll think of the friendly people who go around delivering cookies or other goodies, or who randomly rake leaves for a "service project." Either that, or they'll think that the Mormons have multiple wives.

No one needs to know in your first conversation on religion that the founder of your former religion married children and that children today are asked if they masturbate in interviews with their local religious leaders. Not everyone needs to know that Brigham Young said some racist things in his day and that your school's namesake had fifty-five wives. Sometimes it's simple enough just to tell them that you left the church because it wasn't right for you. For others you have close friendships with, you may want to share with them that you are no longer a believer or a member of "the Mormon church." Share with people what you're comfortable with, but don't give them too much all in one sitting.

Section Eight: Happily Ever After

Communicating with Yourself

The process of coming to terms with leaving the church is no simple task. It can be a daily battle of willpower to simply not think about the church. You can, and probably will, lose friends along the way. Hopefully, that is the worst that will happen. In the end, if you lose everything and everyone you care about, remember to love yourself. Love who you are. Don't let your former membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints define your entire life. You're worth more than the sum of your negatives.

It's okay to acknowledge your past without holding on to it. You can find value in your Mormon upbringing without believing the church is true. You can look back on your life and appreciate the good times you had without them always being overshadowed by the bad. You can also move past the church all together. You will come to learn that the world is so much bigger than the little corner you are a part of. You will see that there are much more important issues in the world than the ones the church presents. The church may be the monolith that stands in the way of your happiness now, but once you move past it the possibilities are endless.

I hope you will take the words that I've written and use them in your day to day interactions with those in your life. I wish you the best in your life and I hope you come out of this faith transition happier and more successful than you ever have been. I wish you to be surrounded by people you love and things that bring you joy. It is my hope that you can begin to accept what life has brought you and do what it takes to reframe your life into whatever you'd like it to be. Your life is what you make it. Make it great!

Quotations

Section One – Spouse

Chapter 1: “Told my wife I no longer want to wear garments, now we’re talking divorce. This is just the straw breaking the camel's back. Honestly, without the influence of the church we never would have married.”

– Reddit user, /u/backstrokes

Chapter 2: “I just told my wife I drank coffee yesterday. I was terrified.”

– Reddit user, /u/nobleport27358

Chapter 3: “I really opened up my search for truth this May and knew when I was researching, I was out. It's been hard on my marriage but luckily my wife is more focused on our relationship and we've been able to work through so much.”

– Reddit user, /u/lukewarm208

An extra special thank-you to my wife. I am so proud of where we are now considering all we have been through. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you. Thank you for your support through it all.

Section Two – Parents

Chapter 1: “When they found out that I’m not paying tithing, my mom said, “You better think about what you’re doing.” Well, mom, I do think about it. I think about it a lot. In fact, it seems like it is all I can think about. I wish I could think about something else.”

– Reddit user, /u/BlueMoroni

Chapter 2: “One day I will be able to enjoy my coffee without feeling like it is a statement against my parent's religion.”

–Twitter, Sam Bryner

Chapter 3: “Drinking coffee was such a small, insignificant thing, and yet if my mother knew... it would make her so saddened. I think if there is a God, he wants us to focus on being free and spreading the good around us.”

– Reddit user, /u/nobleport27358

Section Three – Children

Chapter 1: “How do I tell my children that I am turning away from the most important thing I raised them to believe? This burden is excruciating.”

– Anonymous

Chapter 2: “For about a year, my kids wouldn't speak with me regularly. I found out afterwards that in addition to struggling with the divorce and my new relationship, they were also being pressured by their mother not to talk to me.”

– Reddit user, /u/newhunter18

Chapter 3: A special thanks to Reddit user, /u/slymike914, for his contribution to this book and his willingness to share his success story with all of us and also for allowing me to use this in my book. This section could not have been what it is without your special words.

Another special thanks to Reddit user, /u/Readbooks6 for her support. She is such a great grandma figure for the exMormon community. Her support of this book and my other projects means so much to me and has earned her a place in my heart. It's only right that she has a place in my book as well.

Section Four – In-Laws

Chapter 1: “I'm filled with so much emotion, but mostly just regret, fear, and anxiety. There's no going back now, and I know our lives will never be the same.”

– Reddit user, /u/HideYourNakedness

Chapter 2: “In the past year my husband and I made the decision that we were done with the church. We recently learned that we're not the only ones in the family who are done... This will devastate them.”

– Reddit user, /u/kdasha

Chapter 3: “I just told my parents and siblings I'm out. I just hate the feelings that I'm disappointing them and letting them down. I'm the first out of my immediate family.”

– Reddit user, /u/lukewarm208

A special thanks to Reddit user /u/blovy for letting me share their success story regarding their mother-in-law. Sometimes it might take a while, but relationships can be repaired. Best wishes for your family in the future.

Leaders, Ward Members, and Everyone Else

For these chapters, I have made the decision not to include chapter heading quotes as these interactions often aren't as up close and personal as those in your family circle. Each quote in this book was carefully chosen and used as a way for people to “liken the chapter unto themselves.” It's hard to find quotes like this for those you really don't care too much about.

Final Thanks – The ExMormon Community

Thank you to the exMormon community. Because of your words, your posts, your stories, I was inspired to write this book. I hope you find it useful. Stay strong, have confidence in yourself, and believe that your life can end “happily ever after.”