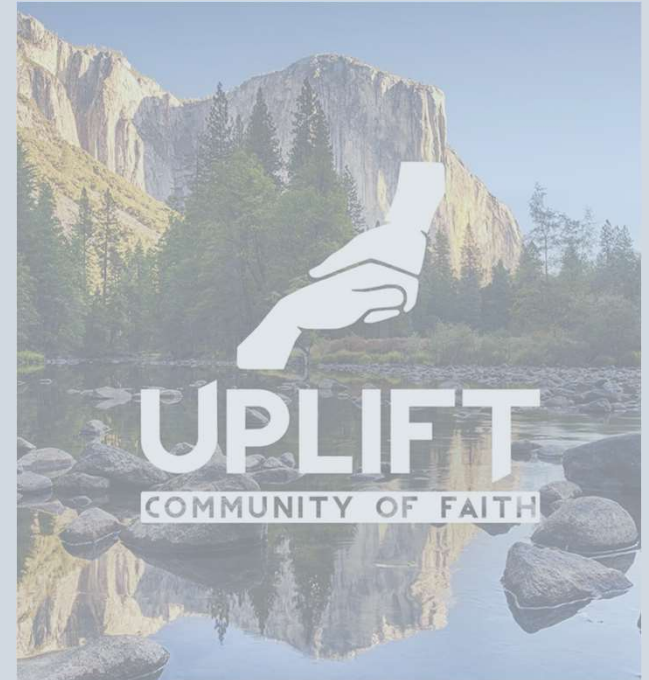


Faith Crisis 101



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UpliftCOF>

What is a faith crisis?

- A severe challenge to one's faith, sometimes referred to as the "dark night of the soul"
- Different from a trial
- Different from a "devotion crisis" or "enthusiasm deficit"
- May be the result of a long sequence of events, or may be one major event
- Not necessarily caused by sin or misbehavior

Unhelpful things you can expect to hear in your faith crisis

From people who have not been there

"Stop sinning"

"I know ____ is true"

"Read your scriptures more"

"Doubt is sin"

"Don't disappoint your loved ones"

"Stop reading anti-Mormon stuff"

"Pray more"

"This is just a phase"

"I'm happy; why can't you be?"



From people who have been there

"The way out of a faith crisis is to abandon faith"

"Yep- you've been lied to your whole life"

"You need to listen to voices that are objective"

"Your whole worldview is based on wishful thinking"

"People in every religion have the same spiritual experiences"

"You're another victim of a big, corrupt system"



A faith crisis: How did this happen to me?

The Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil: since there is so much evil and suffering in the world, what does the existence of this evil and suffering say about 1) the existence of God, or 2) the character of God?

“Does God “temper the wind to the shorn lamb”? Does He never ask more of us than we can endure? My experience, alas, has been otherwise. I have seen people crack under the strain of unbearable tragedy. I have seen marriages break up after the death of a child, because parents blamed each other for not taking proper care or for carrying the defective gene, or simply because the memories they shared were unendurably painful. I have seen some people made noble and sensitive through suffering, but I have seen many more people grow cynical and bitter. I have seen people become jealous of those around them, unable to take part in the routines of normal living. I have seen cancers and automobile accidents take the life of one member of a family, and functionally end the lives of five others, who could never again be the normal, cheerful people they were before disaster struck. If God is testing us, He must know by now that many of us fail the test. If He is only giving us the burdens we can bear, I have seen Him miscalculate far too often.”

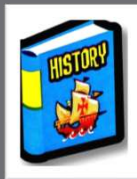
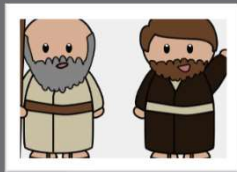
— Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

A faith crisis: How did this happen to me?

Cognitive Dissonance

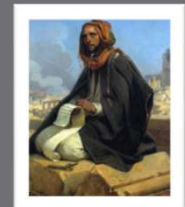
Cognitive Dissonance is the perception of a gap between the way things are and the way we think they should be

My cherished simple mental models of scripture, prophets, revelation, history



Cognitive Dissonance

My growing awareness of the complex and sometimes upsetting realities of scripture, prophets, revelation, history



A faith crisis: How did this happen to me?

Personal Betrayal

Feelings of personal betrayal are common when revered, trusted Church members or leaders are seen to behave in a deceptive or harmful way.

Sustained Disappointment

Long periods of disappointing experiences with one's church experience can lead to disillusionment and to questioning of one's previous convictions.

Fruitless Searching for Answers

A lack of satisfying answers to questions can turn into a situation where doubt seems like the only viable response.

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

Things you may have been taught in the past that provide fertile ground for a faith crisis in the present:

10. We live the gospel so that we can receive good things after we die.

The truth: this is an approach to the gospel that stifles personal spiritual growth and development in the present.

9. If you're not happy, then you are probably doing something wrong in your gospel living.

The truth: spiritual growth is often painful and deeply challenging.

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

8. Prophets have always believed the same things and behaved the same ways.

The truth: Prophets are influenced by their cultures, upbringings, and environments, just like everyone else.

7. Everything in the scriptures and in our church manuals is “doctrine,” so you are required to believe it.

The truth: the scriptures are people’s best attempts to describe and explain God’s interactions with humanity. Our church manuals are the church’s best efforts to explain and interpret scripture, church history, and modern revelation. There are very few of our teachings that rise to the level of “Doctrine.”

(See D. Todd Christofferson, The Doctrine of Christ, April 2012)

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

6. Spiritual gifts such as prophecy, revelation, healing, etc. are for righteous men with prominent church callings to exercise, and for women to observe and admire.

The truth: spiritual gifts are for everyone to understand and exercise. The idea that spiritual gifts are for “other people” results in missed opportunities to gain personal testimony.

5. Ordinances are eternal, meaning they don't ever change.

The truth: Ordinances can change as our capacity and understanding evolve.

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is the only faith community where people experience the power of God.

The truth: Good people everywhere experience the power of God, including the gifts of the Spirit. Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "He lives today, mercifully granting unto all nations as much light as they can bear and messengers of their own to teach them." (Oct. 1981 General Conference)

3. Scripture only has one genre: it is a series of declarations of fact.

The truth: Scripture has numerous genres, including historical narratives, poetry, satire, allegory, polemic, etc.

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

2. The scriptures are words spoken by God to people, so they are a perfect record of historical events. If you are confused by the scriptures because they contradict your observations of science, then maybe you are just lacking in faith.

The truth: the scriptures are not perfect historical records, and they don't claim to be. They often reflect limitations in people's recordkeeping, and reflect ancient perspectives and worldviews.

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

1. Any time you have an emotional feeling, that's a spiritual experience.

*The truth: emotions and the Spirit are not the same thing.
Elder Richard G. Scott in October 2009:*

“The inspiring influence of the Holy Spirit can be overcome or masked by strong emotions, such as anger, hate, passion, fear, or pride. When such influences are present, it is like trying to savor the delicate flavor of a grape while eating a jalapeño pepper. Both flavors are present, but one completely overpowers the other. In like manner, strong emotions overcome the delicate promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

Fertile ground for a faith crisis

Bonus item: American political conservatism is also the gospel, so if you have any liberal views, you are probably in need of repentance.

The truth: partisan political zeal is often a counterfeit to authentic spirituality. The church maintains partisan neutrality for very good reasons.

Things you
might be
hearing...

10. Apologists can't be trusted. Scholarship isn't valid if it considers the possibility of miracles or supernatural claims.

The truth: All scholarship of history and scripture (and even much scientific scholarship) is affected by people's worldviews and assumptions. An assumption that miracles are not possible will color a scholar's evaluation of evidence every bit as much as faith-oriented assumptions

9. Discussions of epistemology are a tangent to distract people from what really matters: "the facts."

The truth: Epistemology is something that each of us defines for ourselves, and it determines all of the possible outcomes of our questioning and study.

Things you
might be
hearing...

8. Feelings of happiness or sadness or contentment or pain are reliable indicators of whether something is true or false.

The truth: True things are often deeply painful and upsetting. Having a healthy mind, body and spirit often requires tremendous emotional and physical cost.

7. When an insight or spiritual breakthrough emerges from things in a person's environment, that is not revelation. Revelation is always new and original.

The truth: Revelation can and does often emerge from observations of things in our environment.

Things you
might be
hearing...

6. People of faith are not able to evaluate questions objectively, but secular scholars can. Strict adherence to scholarly standards enables scholars to operate free of their own biases and worldviews.

The truth: There is no such thing as "objective" scholarship in matters of history and faith.

5. Spiritual experiences are "subjective," and therefore less real than other things.

The truth: Spiritual experiences are often attested by multiple witnesses, and often have verifiable physical evidence.

Things you
might be
hearing...

4. The majority of what we call "spiritual experiences" can be categorized as emotional in nature.

The truth: Spiritual experiences have numerous categories, including healings, premonitions, perception of things outside of one's senses, impossibly improbable events, and so forth. All of these things happen among people of faith.

3. "Deconstruction" leads to "the truth."

The truth: True beliefs can be deconstructed, leading to belief in falsehoods.

Things you
might be
hearing...

2. If the church can't answer an accusation to the accuser's satisfaction, then the accusation is valid.

The truth: Accusations are easy to make, and for every true narrative of history, it is possible to generate a virtually infinite combination of counter-narratives, especially when critics feel no obligation to adhere to the historical record.

1. The only way out of a faith crisis is to abandon faith and replace it with atheism, agnosticism, or just a love of one's participation in a community.

The truth: It is possible to reconstruct one's faith using more mature assumptions, resulting in a faith with revelation and gifts of the Spirit.

The truth about your faith crisis

- For many people, it's a normal part of their spiritual development
- You may end up rebuilding faith, or never again having faith, but there is probably no regaining the exact faith you had before because you will be a different person at the end of this process
- It places you in the company of some really great people who have been where you are now
- It is possible to grow a deep, mature faith in the ashes and ruins of your previous simpler faith
- People who give you advice are speaking from their own perceptions and experiences (or lack thereof)
- Building a more authentic faith takes an immense amount of desire, devotion and effort
- GOD IS NOT MAD AT YOU FOR HAVING A FAITH CRISIS

Is a positive
outcome
possible?

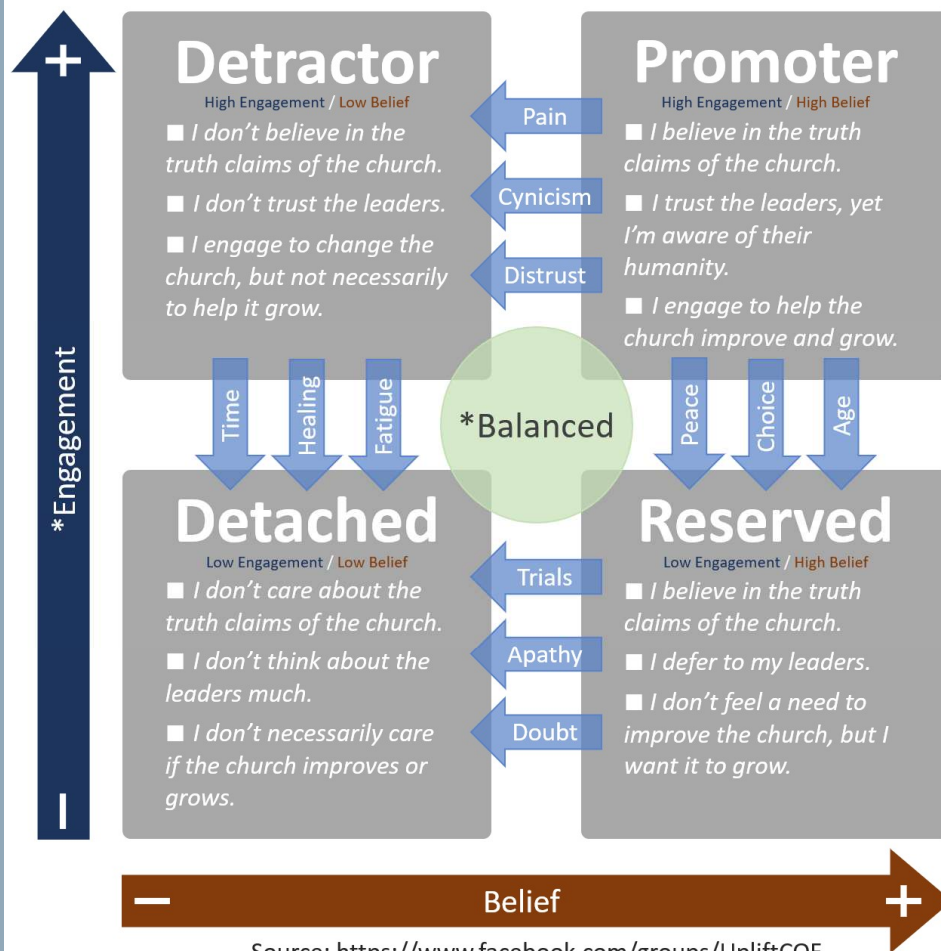
Yes.

- Many people who work through a faith crisis emerge happier than they were before
- It is possible to emerge from a faith crisis and fully believe in the truth claims of the church
- It is possible to emerge from a faith crisis and fully enjoy the gifts of the Spirit (D&C 46)

Is a positive outcome possible?

This graphic illustrates various stages of engagement and belief. Individuals may experience various stages over the course of a lifetime, and stages may be repeated multiple times.

There are many reasons and motives for people to move between stages. The light blue arrows represent typical movement reasons based on the authors' observation.



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/UpliftCOF>

***Engagement** is defined as extra-institutional, elective activities. These activities are atypical attitudes and behaviors, not mandated by the church, which may include, and are not limited to:

- Private and public advocacy
- Criticism of church leaders, doctrines, policies, or culture
- Critical scholarship pursuits
- Apologetic efforts, both for and against the church
- Interfaith involvement

***Balanced** is defined as an average person who interacts with the church. Balanced doesn't represent an "ideal", but a common state where a combination of feelings are experienced. Here are a few examples:

- Reserved: An active member who struggles to sustain a local leader
- Promoter: A doubting member who stays engaged in church activities
- Detractor: A former member who remains open to apologetic answers
- Detached: A less active member who wants to return to full activity

What do I do?

You have choices to make

- What are my priorities?
- What voices to listen to?
- Am I willing to value what I have already received?
- Am I willing to make changes?
- Am I willing to work?
- Am I willing to keep an open mind?
- Am I willing to forgive and assume the best about everyone?
- Am I willing to tune out voices of cynicism?

What do I do?

Be self-aware

- People are different mentally and emotionally
- Some people crave binary yes/no or true/false answers; other people have higher tolerance for abstract thinking
- Anger and resentment affect how we perceive things
- Our definitions for gospel concepts are often not the best possible definitions

What do I do?

Be patient

- In our past church experiences, we often had quick answers that lacked depth
- Better answers often require excavating old ways of thinking to make room for new and better ways of thinking, and this takes time
- Emerging from a faith crisis often involves lots of interaction with other people to gain their perspectives
- Returning to our devotional habits often takes time

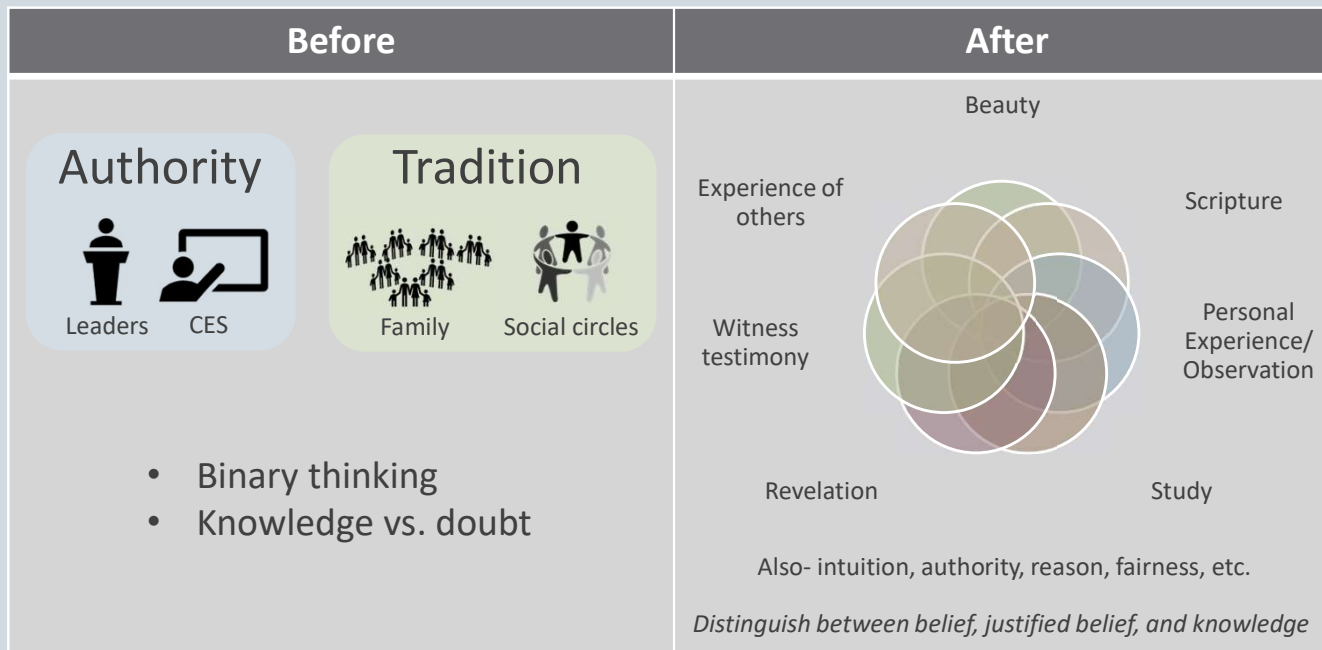
What do I do?

Study

- Apologetic resources are designed to defend the truth claims of the church
 - That does not make them automatically less reliable (or more reliable)
- Scholarly resources vary in quality and perspective
 - High quality scholarly resources will show an awareness of opposing views and engage them with generosity
 - All scholars bring their own biases and worldviews to their work

What do I do?

Define your epistemology (how you determine what is true)



- Internalist – everything has to be understandable and verifiable by me
- Externalist – I am able to place some trust in sources external to me (witnesses, systems, etc.)

What do I do?

Define what it means that the “church is true”

Some possible questions to ask:

- 1) Does Jesus Christ possess the divinity and power and messianic role that scripture and modern witnesses claim for Him? *(This is by far the most important question, and it should be answered before any of the others)*
- 2) Does God utilize prophets and prophetesses to communicate His will and intentions for humanity?
- 3) Was Joseph Smith a prophet? Did God ever communicate specific things to him about God's intentions for humanity? Did God ever really give Joseph direction in the establishment of the church?
- 4) Was God involved in the production of the Book of Mormon? Did the witnesses actually see an angel and plates, and was there divine inspiration in its production?
- 5) Does God approve of and operate with the current system of prophet/presidents of the church? Is Russell M. Nelson receiving divine direction in his calling? Does God approve of the deliberative decision making processes used by the Q15 and auxiliary presidencies and councils, and honor their best efforts to convey His will?

What do I do?

Define what it means that the “church is true”

- 6) Our missionary work involves bringing people out of their current belief systems into the restored church. Is God involved in that work?
- 7) Our temple work involves bringing people to the restored church as their final spiritual institutional destination, regardless of what their belief systems were in mortality. Is God involved in that work?
- 8) Are the gifts of the spirit evident in the church? Prophecy? Tongues? Healings? Visions? Other miraculous manifestations of God's power?
- 9) Do the experiments (see Alma 32) we undertake in our service and devotional activities demonstrate the desired results? When we live the gospel as taught by the current leadership of the church, do we become better people? Closer to God? Do we receive revelation? When we are living the basic principles of the restored gospel, are we a beacon on a hill to the rest of humanity?

Avoid Cynicism

Cynicism is when we assume the worst about other people and their motives.

Rachel Held Evans:

"But what I'm learning this time around, as I process my frustration and disappointment and as I catch those first ribbons of dawn's light on the horizon, is that I can't begin to heal until I've acknowledged my pain, and I can't acknowledge my pain until I've kicked my dependence on cynicism.

Cynicism is a powerful anesthetic we use to numb ourselves to pain, but which also, by nature, numbs us to truth and joy. Grief is healthy. Even anger can be healthy. But numbing ourselves with cynicism in an effort to avoid feeling those things is not.

When I write off all evangelicals as hateful and ignorant, I am numbing myself with cynicism. When I roll my eyes and fold my arms and say, "Well, I know God can't be present over there, " I am numbing myself with cynicism.

And I am missing out. I am missing out on a God who surprises us by showing up where we don't think God belongs. Cynicism may help us create simpler story lines with good guys and bad guys, but it doesn't make us any better at telling the truth, which is that most of us are a frightening mix of good and evil, sinner and saint."

What do I do?

Take responsibility for your faith

- **In the past, you might have assumed things like:**
 - Consulting the right authorities will get you the right answers
 - Being in the right ward will give you a good church experience
- **Taking responsibility for our faith means defining your epistemology**
- **Taking responsibility for your church experience means doing what is possible for you to do**
 - Being clear with leaders about where you are with your faith
 - Attending meetings that allow you to enjoy the fellowship of others
 - Being the (appropriate) change you wish to see

What do I do?

Do you want faith? Get ready to leap for it.

A leap of faith means doing things that might be outside of your comfort zone

- Taking a calling that maintains healthy engagement with other people
- Contributing to ward music
- Contributing to activities
- Getting out into nature
- Frequent fasting
- Asking for a priesthood blessing
- Teaching a lesson on a topic where you feel your understanding is shaky

How can a community like Uplift help you?

Things we can do for you

- Love you
- Support you
- Mourn with you
- Discuss your honest questions
- Share our own experiences and perspectives
- Help you to learn spiritual and intellectual self-reliance
- Celebrate your insights and spiritual breakthroughs
- Fully respect your decision to either remain affiliated with the church or to not remain affiliated

Things we cannot do for you

- Make decisions for you
- Create a new belief system for you
- Answer every criticism of the church to your satisfaction
- Resolve issues that are rooted in mental illness
- Validate or indulge self-destructive feelings, beliefs, and behaviors
- Substitute for a real relationship with God
- Substitute for revelation
- Substitute for church participation
- Study, Fast, Pray, Serve, Meditate

Soil and plants as metaphor for belief

Hosea 10:12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; *break up your fallow ground*: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

- *Fallow ground* is ground that is not plowed; it is hard, and resistant to planting of new seeds. One of the most basic actions that enables a return to faith is the decision to keep an open mind and be willing to revise our assumptions and our definitions for gospel concepts. Better assumptions and definitions are like seeds that are resistant to drought and storms.

Soil and plants as metaphor for belief (Cont.)

Mark 4:3-8 The parable of the Sower. Four situations:

- *Seed stolen by birds:* interpreted as Satan immediately stealing the seed
- *Rocky Soil:* the soil does not allow for deep roots, so the plants are not able to survive heat
- *Seed among thorns:* the plant is deprived of space and nutrients by other things that are growing in the same space and take a higher priority
- *Seed in good ground:* the seeds grow into plants that bear fruit

Soil and plants as metaphor for belief (*Cont.*)

Alma 32:26-43 Experiment upon the word, like planting a seed. Instead of staying in a simple binary true/false framework, Alma encourages people to try the seed and observe over time:

- If it results in personal development (v.28)
- If it is good (13x)
- If it is enlightening and mind-expanding (v.34)

What are things that we do to soil?







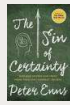




- Plow it (open it up to new growth)
- Fertilize it (give it nutrients)
- Water it (to give it moisture and make it flexible)
- Balance it (ensure that it is a healthy ecosystem)
- Neglect it (abandon it to the elements)
- Poison it (introduce toxins that kill growth)
- Overwhelm it (Allow so much growth that the desired plants cannot get space and nutrients)

Soil and plants as metaphor for belief (*Cont.*)









Belief cannot be forced or faked. All we can do is create a healthy soil environment where belief can sprout.

- Improve our assumptions
- Develop a mature epistemology
- Maintain devotional practices in a spirit of hope
- Keep an open mind
- Listen to witnesses

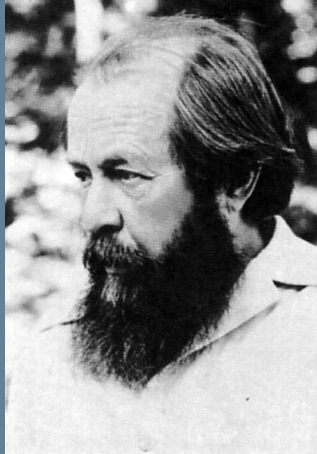
Resources for Reading

	Terryl and Fiona Givens, <i>The Crucible of Doubt</i>
	Bruce and Marie Hafen, <i>Faith is Not Blind</i>
	Sheri Dew, <i>Worth the Wrestle</i>
	Adam Miller, <i>Letters to a Young Mormon</i>
	Peter Enns, <i>The Sin of Certainty</i>
	Julie M. Smith, <i>Search Ponder and Pray</i>
	Wendy Ulrich, <i>Let God Love You</i>
	Edward Kimball, <i>Lengthen Your Stride</i>
	Patrick Mason, <i>Planted</i>

Resources for Viewing

	Rosemary Wixom, <i>Returning to Faith</i> (Apr 2015)
	Chieko Okazaki, <i>A Living Network</i> (Oct 1995)
	Russell M. Nelson, <i>Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives</i> (Apr 2018)
	Wendy Ulrich, <i>Seeing Our Blindness: Our Personal History and Our Understanding God</i> (YouTube FAIR 2007) <i>Faith, Cognitive Dissonance, and the Psychology of Religious Experience</i> (YouTube FAIR 2005)
	Bruce and Marie Hafen, <i>Faith Is Not Blind</i> (BYUI Devotional)
	Ben Spackman, <i>Truth, Scripture, and Interpretation: Some Precursors to Reading Genesis</i>
	Terryl Givens & Thomas McConkie, <i>The Spiritual Journey</i>
	Patrick Mason, <i>Embracing Mormonism in a Secular Age</i>

Solzhenitsyn's poem



"When was it that I completely scattered the good seeds, one and all?
For after all I spent my boyhood in the bright singing of Thy temples.

Bookish subtleties sparkled brightly, piercing my arrogant brain,
The secrets of the world were ... in my grasp, Life's destiny ... as pliable
as wax.

Blood seethed—and every swirl gleamed iridescently before me,
Without a rumble the building of my faith quietly crumbled within my
heart.

But passing here between being and nothingness, stumbling and
clutching at the edge,
I look behind me with a grateful tremor upon the life that I have lived.

Not with good judgment nor with desire are its twists and turns
illuminated.
But with the even glow of the Higher Meaning which became apparent
to me only later on.

And now with measuring cup returned to me, scooping up the living
water,

**God of the Universe! I believe again!
Though I renounced You, You were with me!"**