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## Brigham Young Unfiltered: His Life, Conversion, and Faith in His Own Words

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**Abstract:** This article offers an insightful exploration of Brigham Young's life through his personal statements and prayers, transcribed from original shorthand records.



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Photograph of Brigham Young, 1865, from Susa Young Gates family memorabilia, 1865–circa 1928. Courtesy Church History Library.

# Brigham Young Unfiltered

## His Life, Conversion, and Faith in His Own Words

*LaJean Purcell Carruth*

On October 6, 1867, the Saints met in the new Salt Lake Tabernacle for the first time. Brigham Young rose, made some remarks about the still unfinished state of the organ, and then dedicated the tabernacle to the Lord. This dedicatory prayer was completely unknown until I found the original shorthand record of it several years ago and transcribed it; prior to that time, the earliest known dedication of the tabernacle was 1875. He prayed, “O God our Heavenly Father who dwells in the heavens, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ we come before thee at this time to worship thee. On this occasion we ask for the aid of thy Holy Spirit to teach us how to pray, what we should ask for, [and] how to ask that we may receive.”<sup>1</sup> This and other prayers by Brigham Young tell us a lot about the man: in prayer, the “Lion of the Lord” was a humble, pleading servant.

I am a professional transcriber of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century documents written in both Pitman and Taylor shorthand at the Church History Library, Salt Lake City. I have spent much of my career—twenty-five years—transcribing the words of Brigham Young.

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1. For the entire dedicatory prayer, see “Brigham Young, October 6, 1867, Dedication of Salt Lake Tabernacle” 2, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, typescript in Church History Department Pitman Shorthand Transcriptions, 2013–2024, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9d78a5af-a73d-43cc-a641-015b46e70560/0/0>. Punctuation and capitalization for this and all other quotes in this paper have been silently added for readability. Struck words have also been removed. Bracketed words have been inserted where appropriate. The transcripts of the complete sermons can be accessed by the links to the Church History Library catalog.

Many of the sermons spoken by Brigham Young and others were reported in Pitman shorthand but never transcribed until I transcribed them, many over 150 years after they were spoken. These previously untranscribed sermons by Brigham Young include many statements that he made about himself, his life, his conversion, and his faith. All quotes in this paper are from my transcriptions of Brigham Young's sermons from the original shorthand records, from previously untranscribed sermons, or in a very few cases, from sermons that were transcribed incorrectly.<sup>2</sup> This article is about what Brigham Young said about Brigham Young—in his own words.

## Early Years

Brigham Young grew up in a very strict, very poor home. “After I was 23 years old [I had] 11 days of education. [I was] brought up in the woods. My father wanted to be wealthy, and [was] plowing the new countries to make himself wealthy. My father never bought me but one hat from the world and it cost him a dollar. I do not think my father ever furnished me more than two or three pair of shoes in his life. I do not consider I am the worst and lowest.”<sup>3</sup>

At that time, children, or the labor of children, belonged to their parents until they were twenty-one years old; Brigham Young's father told him when he was sixteen that he could have his time, that is, he could leave and support himself, which he did from that age on, learning many

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2. For more information on how the *Journal of Discourses* differs from the original shorthand records, see Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and LaJean Purcell Carruth, “The Prophets Have Spoken, but What Did They Say? Examining the Differences between George D. Watt's Original Shorthand Notes and the Sermons Published in the *Journal of Discourses*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2016): 24–118; and “Preached vs. Published,” three blogs published by the Church History Department: LaJean Purcell Carruth, “Preached vs. Published: Shorthand Record Discrepancies (Part 1 of 3),” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, August 4, 2020, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/preached-versus-published-part-1-of-3>; LaJean Purcell Carruth, “Preached vs. Published: Shorthand Record Discrepancies (Part 2 of 3),” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, August 11, 2020, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/preached-versus-published-part-2-of-3>; and LaJean Purcell Carruth, “Preached vs. Published: Shorthand Record Discrepancies (Part 3 of 3),” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, August 18, 2020, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/preached-vs-published-part-3-of-3>. See also note 11 herein.

3. “Brigham Young, 19 February 1865, Centerville,” 7, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e0bb6c85-d950-40b7-a542-0157dc9c190d/0/0>.

things in the process. “I went to school 11 days, [the] most school I ever had, but from [the] time I was 16 years old I clothed and fed myself. . . . I have been in [the] school of economy since [I was] 16.”<sup>4</sup> He worked hard and took pride in the very high quality of his work.

## Conversion

Brigham Young searched many years from his youth up to find a “Bible church, a church whose teachings and practices agreed with the Bible” but was unable to find one. He was finally convinced that there was not a Bible church or a Bible Christian on the earth.

I lived long enough to learn that the whole sectarian world was ignorant, was in darkness <if> they were not in unbelief but supposed they were. They were in ignorance. They didn’t know God and Jesus Christ. They had not the words of eternal life. They didn’t possess the holy priesthood, they hadn’t the keys of the priesthood, [and] they had not power to say to this man, that man, this woman, that woman, do as I tell you and I will promise you eternal life. But [they would say] come to the anxious seat [and] give all to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

He learned about the gold plates from a newspaper article shortly after Moroni’s first visit to Joseph Smith. “4 years before [Joseph Smith obtained the plates], I picked up a newspaper and there [read that] . . . there is a young man living in town of Manchester, Ontario County, that has found plates in the earth. He says it is a history of aborigines of our country, giving details of [the] forefathers of the Indians now living here, and who knows but what our Indians will have a Bible as well as the Jews? And that was all that was said.”<sup>6</sup>

Brigham had been disappointed so many times in his search for a Bible church that he was very skeptical at first, but he was interested enough to follow the travels and activities of Joseph Smith through the years.

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4. “Brigham Young, 3 October 1852,” [6], transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1767f6d1-2627-4ec2-b2ce-2155e1676b16/0/0>.

5. “Brigham Young, 4 April 1868, Afternoon,” 7, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9e8514fd-14a8-4250-81d0-8dd651b49f9c/0/0>.

6. “Brigham Young, 24 February 1868; School of the Prophets,” 9, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d82805b1-dc0c-4ce8-ae9c-47a974093e94/0/0>.



Although I was not a member of the church until [it was] 2 years old, yet I knew very well about Joseph Smith before he organized the church. Brother [Heber C.] Kimball and I only lived 14 miles [from] where the plates [were] taken from the ground. We could hear of the doing of this, about travels to Pennsylvania, over to New York State to place called<sup>7</sup> and back to Palmyra and so forth, and we had the history of the young man all the time. And in [18]30, immediately after the organization of the church, the brethren commenced to preach. I recollect my father and myself early took it into our hearts [that] we [would] go to hear Elder [Oliver] Cowdery preach. I turned to look for my horse to get up a little wagon Sunday morning, [but] I found my horse [was] lame [and] that we could not go, some circumstances transpired that we didn't go. If only [we had] seen Oliver Cowdery [or] Joseph Smith, as soon as the church [was] organized, and known or seen any person [who had] explained to us and given us the reason to hope then, though I expect we should have embraced the faith as we did, when we did.<sup>8</sup>

I can feel the longing in his words, "If only . . ."

He heard others talk about their efforts to get the gold plates from the hill before Joseph Smith obtained them.

I knew one astrologer. I heard him say when Joseph was looking for the Book of Mormon, they was in the hill, and a number of men knew there was a treasure there. Old Father [in longhand: Beman], [a] Baptist minister and several others sent down to town of [illegible] close where I lived. He went up there 3 times to see if they could not get that treasure. This was before Father Beaman was acquainted with Joseph, but [he] knew Joseph had said there was a treasure there and expected to get it. They sent for this astrologer, he was [the] smartest one ever. I saw Job Sanderson walk and put them together, more wisdom in his little finger than all the astrologers here. I saw that man. He went up the last time there, the last he goes on first of September, a few days before Joseph got the plates. [He] came into David Smith's store. I was there [when] he came in. He was the greatest swearer I ever heard, a man of great learning. [He had] been educated in America and sent to France and Italy and had received his education, a man could become a priest and turned out to be a devil. He commenced swearing about this loot and damned him and said, "I believe he will get the treasure I cannot get. They flee

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7. The transcription here states, "Blank space is in shorthand; Watt did not record the place name."

8. "Brigham Young, 9 October 1865 (two sermons)," 5–6, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7ed2c0e8-1e2c-45ab-86e4-57750058ba61/0/0>.

away from me. This is the third time I [have] been there, and I cannot go to the spot and I cannot get it.”<sup>9</sup>

In a sermon admonishing departing missionaries to be patient with those they would teach and give them time to study things out, Brigham Young said that although he had a copy of the Book of Mormon in his hands shortly after its publication in March 1830, he studied it and the doctrine and revelations for two years before he joined the Church.

When the Book of Mormon was first printed I had it [in my] hands two [or] three weeks after. Did I believe, though the man [who] brought [it] told me the same things? Says he, “This is the gospel of salvation, revelation [the] Lord has brought forth for [the] redemption of Israel, [the] gospel according to Jesus Christ and [his] apostles. You must be baptized for [the] remission of sins [or] you [will] be damned.” Hold on! says I. The mantle of traditions was over me to that degree and my pre-possessed feelings I had woven. I had beheld all the days of life that the traditions of people all religion they had; I had got a mantle over myself. Says I, Wait a little while. What is the doctrine of [the] book and of [the] revelations the Lord has given? Let me apply my heart to them. And after [I have] done this, [it is] my right to know for myself as much as any man upon the earth. Do not be in hurry now. It took me two years before I made up my mind to receive that book. I knew it was true as well as I believe [the] sight of my eyes, [the] touch of [my] finger, and all my senses [or] I never would have embraced it to this day. It would have all been without form [or] comeliness to me now. [I said,] Wait a little while; I have not time to prove all things from the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

He was introduced to the gospel by men who were not learned, but who brought the power of God.

I praised Christ but disbelieved the religions of the day and [thought] that their practice [was] all folly and nonsense, [which] I believe pretty much to day. When I heard the gospel, men came to our neighborhood, they could not quote half dozen passage[s] of scriptures. They could not talk longer than every brother here today, some 3 minutes some 11, 13 and 9, but if they got up and talked 3 minutes they did pretty well. But

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9. “Brigham Young, 3 February 1868, School of the Prophets,” [2], transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c60399d6-18d3-42fa-aeba-a9dcbae4a3a8/0/0>.

10. “Brigham Young, 8 August 1852,” 20–21, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9874d297-4315-416d-a499-7d5899f342b2/0/0>.

they brought the power of God with them, and the Holy Ghost spoke through them, and spoke to my heart.<sup>11</sup>

He used his experience with the Book of Mormon to encourage the Saints to ask God to know if things were true.

I have no doubt but what the spirit will bear witness to every such person that desires the truth and wishes to receive it. Upon this ground and upon this very principle I embraced Mormonism. When the Book of Mormon came to me, when the revelations came to me, when witnesses came and declared that Joseph Smith [was a] prophet, seer, and revelator, [and] bore their testimony, the revelations neither the Book of Mormon was testimony to me until I got the revelations for myself [that] it was true and of God. [I] never admitted the fact in my own feelings or judgment that any of this was true pertaining to the gospel of salvation as brought forth through the Prophet Joseph Smith until the Lord revealed that to me by his Holy Spirit.

I admitted the facts as far as it went, but man's testimony did me no good, for [a] man to say he was prophet himself or to have witness to declare it that heaven [was] open, [the] Lord had spoken to him was no witness to me to benefit me or prepare me to enjoy the blessings until I could . . . receive testimony for myself. Upon this grand principle men [and] women [are] capable of judging the things of God and those that are not of him.<sup>12</sup>

Like many new converts, Brigham Young had very high expectations for other members of the Church, and, like many new converts and longtime members, he was deeply disappointed in the behavior of other Church members.

When I received the spirit of this religion that we have embraced, that so far enveloped me in love, purity, good thought, and good feelings, I could not but believe that every man and woman that came into this kingdom was as pure as an angel. Here in I was mortally deceived. . . . [When] I received the gospel, I put up my book[s], I laid them aside, I did not expect to charge another particle of labor [f]or anything I should do. I calculated to live with the church and had not the least idea that book

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11. "Brigham Young, 2 September 1866," 2, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/cb5fc7f5-ebd0-4c03-8005-bb191e643788/0/0>.

12. "Brigham Young, 7 October 1853," [2–3], transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b840245a-d8ef-4aba-8664-f3b8bee8da94/0/0>.



account[s] [were] needed in this church. I calculated that every man would do every thing necessary to do for themselves and something more, and hand it to send the gospel, gather up the poor saints, learn them how to get their living, and how to do for themselves, and no one should say aught they had, they possessed. I found myself mistaken.<sup>13</sup>

## On Joseph Smith

Brigham Young was baptized in April 1832. That fall, he went to Kirtland, Ohio, to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith for the first time. On his way, he visited with a minister, who was greatly opposed to Joseph Smith.

I recollect when I was going to see [the] brethren for the first time, one of my Methodist friends, I don't know whether Methodist or not but he was a preacher. I recollect calling on him; he began to tell what old Joe Smith [had] done, [that Joseph] himself [had] done this, that, and [the] other thing. What [power did he do it] by? By the power of the devil! [He said that Joseph Smith was] one of wickedest men [to] ever live. Says I, "Hold on a little! Let me talk. Joseph Smith I have never seen, to my knowledge, though I have always lived close by him. And the revelations that the Lord has revealed through him is the same as he revealed through his ancient prophets and apostles, and by his Son Jesus Christ. I have taken the rule laid down there, and in the late revelations, to know whether they are true or not. [I thought], if they are true, the Lord will tell [me], he will answer [me], he will reveal [it to me]. Go to the Father in [the] name of Jesus Christ, and all these things shall be made known. Now," says I, "I don't know anything about Joseph. But the doctrine [that has] been revealed through him, I do know to be the plan of salvation according to the New and Old Testament[s], and the signs God has given me. He may act like the devil, for aught I care—I didn't call him to be a prophet, deliver the plates of [the] Book of Mormon, [or] send Moroni to administer to him. And I had nothing to do with him, and don't care to the latest day he lived what he do. It is not my business to call in question an act of his life. He was in the hands of him that called him, and the doctrine, and the author could do as he pleased with his servant."<sup>14</sup>

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13. "Brigham Young, 26 March 1865," 4, 11, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2c83dae6-dd2f-4e87-afd5-2c13c0f4e4fa/0/0>.

14. "Brigham Young, 7 April 1859," 16, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/093e861b-f5af-4d04-aa21-c4bdcd2bc4c6/0/0>.

The Lord “could do as he pleased with his servant.” It was the Lord’s job to call his servants, and only the Lord could judge those whom he called.

Brigham Young described his first meeting with Joseph Smith:

After I was baptized and built quite a number of branches, I had to see the prophet in the fall. I wanted the hand of prophet in my hand, his eye to look in mine. I wanted to look in his eye, and I wanted to read that man’s heart, and I wanted to know for myself and not for another. I saw him and heard him speak; he was chopping in the woods. [He] stopped and shook hands with us. All right. He put down his ax. I said, “I can chop this,” so we chopped and loaded a little while, and then [he] said, “Come, let’s go to the house.” I knew then for myself and not for another. I wanted to see this man that dictated and led and guided and the Mormons where they lived together and then for the world. I defy it to produce any community like this that is governed and controlled by words and words alone.<sup>15</sup>

Brigham gained a firm testimony of Joseph Smith, and he never wavered, ever. He earnestly sought to learn all he could from him.

I know how I received the knowledge that I have got. I have seen the time when I first saw Joseph, I had but just one prayer and that was all the time I could hear Joseph and hear his doctrine. . . . I would watch him; I was with him several years before I ever opened my mouth. I was with him when [he] received revelation and so was Brother Kimball and others. . . . An angel never watched him closer than I did, and that is what has given me the knowledge I have to day.<sup>16</sup>

Brigham Young traveled on many missions, including preaching in Canada, before he was baptized.<sup>17</sup> He described how he obtained food and lodging while traveling and preaching the gospel.

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15. “Brigham Young, 20 November 1864,” 11, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bf80c07f-14af-4c9c-a792-870dfe360018/0/0>.

16. “Brigham Young, 8 October 1866,” 6, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6f60b02a-236e-4135-92b1-bc22e54ab3d1/0/0>.

17. “Brigham Young, 9 April 1853,” transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/61a07e7e-336e-4a65-8901-5243fc4488ec/0/0>; “Brigham Young, 6 April 1860, afternoon,” transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/4dcb a2a2-f8f6-4bf7-afa5-adf3f80dade8/0/0>.

[George A. Smith] commenced his preaching [when he was] 17 years old, traveling [with] blood in his shoes. [He] traveled [and] asked if [he] might stay over night. “No sir; go to [the] next house.” “Will you keep Mormon elders here?” “No!” Next house, “Will you feed a Mormon elder?” “No! Mormon? What is Mormon?” But I recollect [hearing] yes yes! “You are a follower of Joe Smith? Away with you, we don’t want you here!” Elders have been turned out of doors scores and hundreds of times. I [can’t] say that is the case myself, and though I have traveled without purse or scrip about as much as any other man in the church, but I rather lean upon the office and doings of the Apostle Paul. He said it was no harm to take them by guile. If I was hungry and stopped in a house, I asked them for something to eat. I don’t know I ever told them I was a Mormon elder until I got what I wanted. I thought I was justified in this. If I [was hungry and] went into a house, I [would] make known my wants, and by time I got through eating they were willing to talk about Mormon[ism] [or] anything else. If I wanted to stay over night, I made known my want. I don’t recollect of one circumstance but what I was made welcome and could call again and was welcome to every table lodging and friendship.<sup>18</sup>

Brother Brigham must have been an engaging, very pleasant guest.

## Missouri Persecutions

The Saints were driven from their homes in Jackson County, Missouri, in the fall of 1833. In 1834, a group of Latter-day Saints called Zion’s Camp traveled from Kirtland and other places to Missouri with Joseph Smith. They tried to help the Saints who had been driven away and restore them to their lands. When they returned home without fighting and without restoring the Missouri Saints to their lands, many considered the venture a failure. Brigham Young later related a conversation he had with one such person.

I recollect in the year [18]34 [that] 205 [of us] was going up to Jackson County. We did not go [into Jackson County]. We did not reinstate the brethren. We returned and the Lord gave Joseph a revelation concerning this matter. I understood it. I recollect when I returned home the question was asked me by some of the elders: “Brother Brigham, what have you gained by your going up to Missouri?” “Knowledge.” “What is the advantage of Joseph calling a company together to lead them to

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18. “Brigham Young, 20 August 1865,” 4, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6514365e-8bbd-4eda-afce-e81e4fea4c52/0/0>.

Missouri? They have accomplished nothing!” Says I to the individual that was talking with me, “For the knowledge I have gained, this is the [use?] in leading the companies, gathering saints, dealing with myself, overcoming myself, governing and controlling the spirits of others. For this knowledge I have gained, I would not give it for this town, and then I will add the county of Geauga, and I will add the state of Ohio, too, and every person there is in it to be our slaves, and every particle of property in it to be my own individual property. You did not go, did you?” “No.” “No, and there is something we have gained [that] you will never learn.”<sup>19</sup>

During Zion’s Camp, Brigham Young gained the experience of watching Joseph Smith and learning from him how to lead a group of people. This became invaluable four years later when Joseph Smith was imprisoned in Liberty Jail, and Brigham Young and the Twelve had to direct the Saint’s removal from Missouri to Illinois, and then again, years after that when he had to direct the migration to the Salt Lake Valley.

Brigham Young described how his father, John Young (baptized into the Church on April 5, 1832), felt when the Saints were expelled from the state of Missouri in 1838: “My father was a Revolutionary [War] soldier. ‘Now,’ says he, ‘I want to live no longer. I have fought for the liberty of my country. <If there is> there is no liberty left, no freedom left for the inhabitants of the country I have fought for, I want to live no longer.’”<sup>20</sup> John Young died in Quincy, Illinois, in October 1839.

Joseph Smith received a revelation on July 8, 1838, in Far West, Missouri, directing the Twelve to leave on their mission to England the next spring: “Let them take leave of my saints in the city of Far West, on the twenty-sixth day of April next, on the building-spot of my house, saith the Lord” (D&C 118:5). While the thought of a mission to England must have sounded daunting in and of itself, none of the Saints would have predicted the mobbing and violence they would experience that fall, their expulsion from the state of Missouri, or that Joseph Smith and other Church leaders would be arrested and held in Liberty Jail. It was life-threatening for a Latter-day Saint to return to Far West, Missouri, in 1839, and many said they should not go to Far West as commanded, but as Brigham Young later related, he was determined to follow the Lord’s directions and keep his commandments at all costs.

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19. “Brigham Young, 24 September 1864, Parowan,” 4, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f7424d8a-3245-47ee-a90a-2f25e1d33fe7/0/0>.

20. “Brigham Young, 20 May 1866,” 6–7, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9f722472-c4e0-43ff-8b39-f5f87df24f4c/0/0>.

It is pretty hard in the eyes of many for us to go to Far West [at the] time we left. There was nine of us there after ordaining George A [Smith] and another.<sup>21</sup> Some of our brethren said we should not live to go there. I said we should and come back, and one thing [was] certain, if we did not live to go, we should die trying, we should fulfill all the Lord had spoken. They had said far and near that there was one revelation [that] could not be fulfilled. The revelation was given on 8th of July and was published in [the] *Elder's Journal* and went forth among the people, and they cried that that revelation never could be fulfilled, but it was, and we went our way rejoicing.<sup>22</sup>

They arrived in Far West shortly after midnight on the appointed day, sang, prayed, ordained George A. Smith and Wilford Woodruff as Apostles, symbolically started their mission (though they were not able to leave for months), and went on their way rejoicing. They fulfilled the commandment of the Lord. Seeking and obeying the will of the Lord, no matter the cost, was central to Brigham Young's life.

## On Himself

Brigham Young's comments on himself help us see him as he saw himself. He said he didn't care what others thought of him: "I am that independent [that] I never lose a moment's sleep reflect[ing] whether people love me or not. [It] never takes away my appetite. I never hate anybody so as [to] take away my appetite, or love anybody so as [to] do it, but I delight in doing good, keeping the commandments of [the] Lord, and building up this kingdom, and it is my chief and only joy."<sup>23</sup>

## Brigham Young on Himself as a Prophet and His Ministry

After Joseph Smith's death, Brigham Young and the Twelve took their proper place as the leadership of the Church. Brigham later said, "When I heard of the death of Joseph [my question was], What will become of the people? What will the saints do? The prophet has gone! It was my whole desire to preserve the sheep, the flock of God. This was my desire and my whole desire and it is so today: what can we do to preserve the flock of God."<sup>24</sup>

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21. George A. Smith and Wilford Woodruff, the "another" in the quotation, were ordained Apostles at the Far West temple site on April 26, 1839.

22. "Brigham Young, 20 May 1866," 7.

23. "Brigham Young, 8 April 1865 (two sermons)," 22, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/eee49d5a-8a2e-46f1-9551-722e1ab35a08/0/0>.

24. "Brigham Young, 31 August 1875," transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from David W. Evans's shorthand papers in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee

But there were others who also laid claim to the leadership of the Church. When Joseph and Hyrum Smith were killed, most of the Twelve were away on missions. Sidney Rigdon arrived in Nauvoo, Illinois, on August 3, 1844, before most of the Twelve, and immediately pressed his claim to the leadership of the Church. Brigham Young and four other members of the Twelve arrived the evening of August 6. Sidney Rigdon had called a meeting of the Saints for August 8, 1844, now 180 years ago, at which he spoke about the future of the Church.<sup>25</sup> Brigham Young later recalled his response to Sidney Rigdon's words.

I do think I am a good hand to keep dogs out of the flock. When Sidney Rigdon was saying he [should become the] church guardian, I called at Brother Woodruff's, Dr. Richards, but he was gone and I went there alone, and pretty soon Kimball came and Brother Woodruff, this and that and the other, and filled up the stand, and Sidney took his place on the wagon. I thought, My good fellow, if I do not hunt you until you are out of this flock of sheep, I am mistaken! That is the way I feel to this day. I am angry when anybody does anything to destroy the truth.<sup>26</sup>

Brigham Young knew he was called of God: "The Lord in his providence called me where I am; [it is] not my own doing, and it is and through the providence of God, and I know how to build up the kingdom."<sup>27</sup> He applied the same standard, that the Lord calls his prophets, to himself that he did to Joseph Smith.

I am [filled?] naturally as much tempted as any other man. As to the complaint many make, want of education, there is not a man in this

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Library, Brigham Young University, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7ec33299-8227-443a-95e4-6d863f21da62/0/0>.

25. For information about succession after the death of Joseph Smith, see D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 2 (1976): 187–233; Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (1981): 301–41; Lynne W. Jorgensen, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: A Collective Spiritual Witness," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 4 (1996–97): 125–204. For Sidney Rigdon's August 8, 1844 speech, see LaJean Purcell Carruth and Robin Scott Jensen, "Sidney Rigdon's Plea to the Saints: Transcription of Thomas Bullcock's Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 121–39.

26. "Brigham Young, 23 September 1865, Beaver," 7, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ba471b58-9522-41d0-91f5-7bbf2270313a/0/0>.

27. "Brigham Young, 8 September 1867, Logan," 10, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b1b31972-deac-4a5d-b7d3-cd4f580fa44d/0/0>.



stand that can tell hardly story with regard to [woods?], back woods, hard fare. The most schooling I ever had after [I was] 22 years old [was] 11 days. I know how to cut down hemlock trees and beech, maple, bass-wood. I know how to clear off farms. I knew it in my youth, learned it as [a] trade, hard fare. What I aim to say [is], God calls me to [this] duty. [It is] none of my business whether [I am] capable or not; if he doesn't give me anything to say to people, I sit down and hold [my] tongue.<sup>28</sup>

Many Church members questioned then and later why Brigham Young did not write revelations like Joseph Smith did. Brigham Young brought this up on occasion: “Many whine [that] Brother Brigham does not have revelation. Why bless your souls, hearts or gizzards! I could not exist one day without living in the light of revelation. [People ask me], ‘Why do not you write your revelations?’ Because it would damn the people, and when a revelation is given, if [they do] not abide it, [it would] cut people from the church. I speak the words of the Lord to the people without writing a revelation and saying thus saith the Lord; it is to spare the weak and the feeble and the ignorant.”<sup>29</sup>

He said that if he wrote a revelation and it was accepted by the people, those who did not obey would be under condemnation. Therefore, he did not write his revelations. Section 136 is the only revelation given through Brigham Young that is in the Doctrine and Covenants. Though he did not write revelations as Joseph Smith did, Brigham Young said that revelation was essential to him to live and lead: “I do not know how a saint can get along without the revelations of the Spirit of the Lord day by day. I do not. I cannot accomplish any business transactions and know how to conduct myself before my family, before my neighbors, and do my work, to be prepared to accomplish the work here upon the earth that is assigned me to do manfully, nobly, and acceptably to God. I do not know <see> how a person can get [a]long without the revelations of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>30</sup>

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28. “Brigham Young, 25 September 1853,” 3, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d98222ad-b616-42f9-a5ee-d44ee99f8d76/0/0>.

29. “Brigham Young, 7 September 1864, Fillmore,” 7, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/edf36b22-aa39-4e10-b744-66bb310ffd4b/0/0>.

30. “Brigham Young, 25 August 1865,” 1, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d8a96e24-c157-4c5f-93ac-f76e785a91e8/0/0>.

Brigham Young sought to learn and then follow the mind and will of the Lord. He told the Salt Lake City School of the Prophets in May 1868 the following:

I have an experience in these things, and it is this: in the first place to learn the mind and the will of God, then bring my will and mind and love and affection directly to that line, to do the things the Lord wants done and requires of me. That is what I wish to do. I wish to do nothing else but the will of God. . . . I know just as well how to direct this people how to sustain themselves, to become wealthy and wise, as I know the road home. God has given this to me and filled me with every thing. [I] know [the] place and time, and it is plain to me how to dictate the people. There is no goodness in me more than others, only I am here. I am here, and I only desire to do the best I can, and lead this people to victory and glory, the Lord being my helper, and he does help me all the time.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

When we have Brigham Young's own words, what he really said according to the shorthand record, we hear a very different man from the one that is so often criticized. Brigham bashing has become a sport for some people—criticizing him for his words or parts of his teachings, often without correct information or considering the times in which he lived. Yes, he said things that I and many others wish he had not said. But I have said many things that I wish I had not said, and I suppose every person has. We need to reexamine what we believe and say about Brigham Young, with a more broad understanding and based on correct sources. He was a complex person and lived in complex times. He thought deeply and shared his thoughts. He led the Church through many perilous times. He organized the first migration to Salt Lake City and tried every means, including handcarts, to bring the Saints to Utah, even though he knew many, if not the majority, would not stay faithful.<sup>32</sup> He was a brilliant organizer. He sought the Lord and his gospel long before he found The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When he found the truth, he studied it intensely, then believed and never

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31. "Brigham Young, 7 May 1868, School of the Prophets," 7, 12, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman shorthand manuscript in Papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/58bccd9c-071c-4145-a3da-5e7bc67f561c/0/0>.

32. "Brigham Young, 24 August 1867, Evening; Provo," 3, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from Pitman Shorthand manuscript in papers of George D. Watt, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/72dc6187-91c8-4ab4-8b8f-7c17287f1a96/0/0>.

wavered. He learned for himself of the divinity of Joseph Smith's call, as he said: "I knew then for myself and not for another."<sup>33</sup>

He lived according to what he knew. When hard times and difficult teachings came, he studied and prayed and pondered until he could understand, and he always remained faithful to Joseph Smith, to his teachings and revelations, to the gospel, to the Church, and to the Lord.

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33. "Brigham Young, 20 November 1864," 11.