

Jesus Christ Is the Truth—Primary and Secondary Questions, Experience, and Reason

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“Stand Forever” Episode 28

How can you know the truth? How do you close the gap between your beliefs and the truth? How do you avoid deception?

Hello, I’m Larry Corbridge and this is Episode 28 of the *Stand Forever Series*. The last episode ended with this statement: “Stupidity and deception contribute greatly to sin and suffering. Knowledge and belief are essential. When you act badly, you may think you are bad, when in truth you are usually mistaken. You’re just wrong. The challenge is not as much closing the gap between your actions and your beliefs, rather the challenge is closing the gap between your beliefs and the truth. That’s the challenge.”

That leads us to these two questions: (1) How do you close the gap between your beliefs and the truth? (2) How do you avoid deception? Some of what I have to say here I have said before in a BYU Devotional.

Primary Questions and Secondary Questions

Begin by answering the primary questions. There are primary truths and secondary truths. 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 truths and questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate. There are very few primary questions. Here are four of them:

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

You might add a few others to the list. One might suggest, for example, the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, but that question is embedded in the question about Joseph Smith. One goes with the other. Why are you here, where did you come from, and where are you going, are also timeless, important questions.

The secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, plural marriage, 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.

In a world of uncertainty, you can be certain about the answers to the primary questions, not as a matter of faith but knowledge grounded in experience, study, reason, and revelation. And if you are settled, you can chart your course without wavering like a “wave of the sea driven with the wind”¹ or “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine and the sleight of men.”²

Faith is not going forward hoping and thinking there is probably a God and Christ may be the Savior, Joseph Smith may be a prophet, and the Church may be true. You are entitled to know those things that you may then exercise faith by charting your course to the destination of the great gifts of God’s Son, His Spirit, and His life. Faith is based on knowledge, especially knowledge of the primary truths.

“And the Lord said unto him [the brother of Jared]: Believest thou the words which I shall speak? And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie.”³ The Lord didn’t ask the brother of Jared if he believed the words He had spoken, rather the words He would speak. Essentially, He was asking, “Do you believe in me?” which is the primary question. If you believe the Lord, you can believe (have faith in) whatever He may say.

Nephi is known for his faith, but his faith was grounded in knowledge. In response to the command to secure the plates of Brass, Nephi famously said: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, *for I know* that the Lord giveth no commandment unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”⁴

Nephi had faith he would be able to secure the plates of brass against all odds, but he didn’t have faith regarding the existence of God or that God could prepare the way before him or that the command to recover the plates came from God. He knew those things, and because he knew them, he had faith to “go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded,” whatever the outcome.

¹ James 1:6

² Ephesians 4:14

³ Ether 3:11-12

⁴ 1 Nephi 3:7, emphasis added

You may know the big things, the primary things that you may have faith lesser things are also possible. A man had a crisis of belief coupled with infidelity in marriage for many years. It is unclear which was the cause and the effect. It could be that his disbelief in the Church caused all the wheels to come off, leading to infidelity. It may otherwise be that he made choices that withdrew himself from the Spirit of God which then gave rise to doubts about primary truths. Either way there is a correlation. Sin and disbelief are frequently companions.

Heavenly Father's love, however, was manifested to the man and his wife as they decided to piece their marriage back together. The bishop said, "Some of the questions and issues remain, but he places them in proper context. They just aren't as important to him now that he put the focus on the Savior and the core principles of the gospel. He can look back and see how he allowed Satan into his life and is making great strides to fortify his testimony so that he is not as vulnerable to falling back into serious sin."

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, things you agree with and things you don't, without jumping ship altogether.

How can you know the answers? First, don't rely on AI. Google doesn't have all the answers, not hardly, and as for the primary questions, Google doesn't have a clue.

There are different methods of learning including the scientific, analytical, academic, and divine methods. The divine method is transcendent, definitive, and most important. It incorporates elements of the other three but ultimately trumps everything else by tapping into the powers of heaven. All four methods are necessary to know the truth. They all begin the same way, with a question. Questions are important, especially the primary questions.

The Scientific Method

The scientific method of learning is premised on experimentation or experience. A hypothesis is framed in response to a question which is tested by experimentation. The results are analyzed, and conclusions drawn that either confirm, disprove, or modify the hypothesis, in which event the process continues.

Experience is necessary to discover truth. Alma invites you to "experiment upon [his] words." He said if the word is true and you give it place in your heart and don't cast it out, then "it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good

seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.”⁵

Joseph Smith similarly said, “I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know that it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more.”⁶

The Lord said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”⁷

Regarding tithing He also said, “prove me now herewith ... if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”⁸

The tree of life in the Garden of Eden is the same tree Lehi saw in his dream. It is the same tree but in a different place. It represents the love of God, particularly as personified by the gift of His Son, the Atonement, the gift of the Holy Ghost, immortality, and eternal life.

In the Garden of Eden, the significance of the tree of life was in opposition to the tree of knowledge because the experience by which such knowledge is gained results in death. Both knowledge and life, both trees, are necessary for eternal life.

To learn to choose most wisely is a process that requires experience, primarily experience of opposites of good and evil, success and failure, virtue and vice, clarity and confusion, confidence and doubt, light and darkness, joy and misery, peace and turmoil, sweet and bitter, pleasure and pain, love and hate, truth and error. Our experience in turn gradually teaches us and reveals knowledge of the alternative choices and laws, and the consequences of each—the knowledge of good and evil.

⁵ Alma 32:27-28

⁶ History of the Church, 6:304–5, 312, 317; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton

⁷ John 7:16-17

⁸ Malachi 3:10

We learn in part by experimentation, by experience. A woman in an abusive marriage found strength and clarity from serving as a teacher, daily scripture study, and prayer. As a result of her experience, she knows the efficacy of treasuring up the word of God, prayer, and building up the kingdom of God.

A man who lost his membership in the Church said, "Let me say the years out of the Church were the most miserable years of my life. If we could only get a little understanding of the price of serious sin, we would stop in our tracks."

Someone else said, "Prior to my excommunication I had never before completely read the Book of Mormon. Amazing! I served a mission, served in several bishoprics, taught gospel doctrine, served on high councils and had never read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover. What a joy it has been to do that, to have completed it several times now, to read it and study it. Through this I have been blessed beyond measure." As a result of his experience, he knows the blessings that flow from reading the Book of Mormon.

Seven-year-old Ivie Roylance, said, "I'm trying to follow Jesus by choosing the right even when it's hard. This year I learned that good choices have good consequences and bad choices have bad consequences. I've decided I like the good consequences better."⁹ That is the fundamental lesson of life. It is ABC, the knowledge of good and evil, and in that sense, Ivie became "as gods, knowing good and evil, placing [herself] in a state to act [choose], or being placed in a state to act according to [her] wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good."¹⁰

That is the scientific method. The experience of Ivie's young life taught her all she needs to know to be accountable for her own decisions and baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Although we are always free to choose, in the bright light of knowledge and intelligence any choice but good is seen for what it is, nuts, crazy, sheer lunacy. As a result, pure knowledge and intelligence will prevail over evil. Despite ever-present options, when you internalize the knowledge of good and evil, you will be enabled to choose good over evil, even when no one is watching or advising, thus becoming as the Lord, someone who will act righteously independently, without supervision, not because you will get in trouble if you don't, but because it is the right thing to do regardless. You become an agent unto yourself.

⁹ Ivie Roylance, Primary Program, September 29, 2019, Homestead Ward, Midway West Stake

¹⁰ Alma 12:31

“Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.”¹¹

To become an agent unto yourself seems like a contradiction. Agency has two meanings. One is the ability to choose, but in the context of becoming an agent unto yourself it means to represent and do the bidding of another. Agency of this kind usually presupposes a servant doing only those things his master directs. The agency which the Lord affords, however, is much broader.

In the Lord’s service, it is not a contradiction, because one who is not commanded in all things but is anxiously engaged in good causes, doing many things of his own free will to bring to pass much righteousness, in fact does the same things his Master would do in the same circumstances. But he does them at his own initiative. He is, therefore, an agent unto himself although he acts in the name of His Master. It is the plan of the Lord that the two meanings merge in your life and become one, that you exercise your agency in such a manner as to become the Lord’s agent. That you choose better in order to learn to choose best and do as the Lord would do.

Christ learned in a way unique to Him. Isaiah said of Christ, “Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good.”¹² He knew perfectly well the butter and honey of righteousness which informed all His decisions. In Gethsemane, however, He also unimaginably experienced the other end of the spectrum, not just isolated sin, but the horror of all sin of all mankind combined. He is the only One who experienced both ends of the spectrum and everything in between — perfect righteousness and utter evil, the knowledge of good and evil in its fulness.

The rest of us know something of the butter and honey of obedience, but as the children of Adam, we also taste the bitterness of sin that we may know to prize the good. “And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.”¹³ In that respect we also became as God knowing good and evil which is **A+B∴C**.¹⁴

¹¹ Doctrine and Covenants 58:27-28

¹² Isaiah 7:15

¹³ Moses 6:55

¹⁴ Genesis 3:22; Moses 4:28. The three dots symbolize “therefore.” This ABC framework was explained in Episode 4.

Experience can be a gentle or harsh teacher, but either way an essential teacher and her teaching is not limited to only your experience. The most intelligent learn as much as they can from the experience of others as well as their own. You don't have to wallow in the mire to know what it is like to get dirty. If you are beyond the age of accountability and if you can fog a mirror, you have slipped enough to know what mud is like, and you can watch others roll around and around without having to experience any more yourself.

Experience also reveals two sides of the same coin: We don't know what we don't know until we do, and we often don't appreciate what we have until we lose it.

One person wrote, "I thought I was happy when I was away from the Church, but I now know the joy that only obedience and faithfulness to the Gospel bring." Another man asked for his name to be removed from the records of the Church followed by a dark and destructive journey to bury his grief and pain. After turning his life around, getting back on course, and following his baptism, he said, "I didn't know how empty my soul was, until it was filled."

We often don't appreciate what we have until we lose it. One may be "baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost" and not know it.¹⁵

While ignorance may be bliss, in the sense of not worrying about what you don't know, it is also oblivious to greater enjoyments and fulfillment. You don't know what you don't know until you do, and then you realize what you were missing.

A woman requested that her name be removed from the records of the Church because of her husband's disdain for the Church. She was then baptized a member of another religion. She said, "I remember standing in the church thinking to myself 'this baptism means nothing ... they do not have all the doctrine and they do not hold the keys.' But it made us [the family] all the same and made the wedge between my husband and I disappear ... at least on the outside. The next three years were a dark, confusing journey. *I had little by little started to recognize all I once had in the Gospel, and all I was living my life without now* Little by little I noticed that I couldn't deny the Gospel I knew in my heart was true." The marriage failed in any event, and she returned to the Church and received a restoration of all her blessings.

¹⁵ 3 Nephi 9:20

Again and again, experience invariably reveals the fundamental lesson: those who keep God's commandments prosper and those who don't, don't. "He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things."¹⁶ Truth can be discovered by doing, which is faith. Experience plays a vital role in coming to know the truth.

The Analytical Method and Reason

The analytical method is also important. It involves gathering, organizing, and weighing evidence relevant to a question. Based on the weight of the evidence, conclusions are drawn as to what the truth may be. The Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery saying, "Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right."¹⁷ Evidence and reason also play a role in preparing us to know the truth.

The Mind and the Heart

Nothing is as important to knowing the truth as revelation through the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, but we sometimes place so much emphasis on the heart, feelings, and the Spirit that we not only ignore the mind, but shun reason as intellectual and therefore, bad. That is a big mistake. "Just pray about it" is not always enough, if we don't also "study it out" and understand.

The first several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants reveal much about revelation and knowledge including this important truth: "Yea, behold, I will tell you *in your mind and in your heart*, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart."¹⁸

In addition to teaching with great power and authority, Christ was also analytical. He said to look at the evidence: "the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe me not, because ye are not of my sheep. ... If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him."¹⁹

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 93:28

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 9:7-8

¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 8:2; emphasis added

¹⁹ John 10:25, 37, 38

Both the mind and the heart, understanding and feeling, are necessary to know the truth. “[I]n the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”²⁰ The mind is one, and the heart is another—two witnesses. Conversion happens when the Spirit confirms what the mind understands. Otherwise, it is only a feeling that will float away with the first breeze.

One of the characteristics of the Lamanites who were converted by the teachings of Ammon and his brothers, Aaron, Omner, and Himni, is that they “were converted unto the Lord” and “never did fall away.” How did that happen?

“And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the *knowledge of the truth*, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the *spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God* working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.”²¹

Those who are converted unto the Lord, those who never fall away are those who have both “the knowledge of the truth” and “the spirit of revelation”—understanding coupled with the power of God.

The ground on which people stand who rely on feeling alone without understanding is as sandy as those who base their belief on reason alone. There is nothing wrong with reason, evidence, and analysis, in fact, they are essential to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Lucy Mack Smith, said her son Joseph was less inclined to the study of books than his siblings, but he was “much more given to reflection and deep study.”²²

The Lord said, “Come now, and let us reason together.”²³ He also said, “And now come ... let us reason together, that ye may understand. Let us reason even as a man reasoneth with another face to face. Now, when a man reasoneth he is understood of

²⁰ Matthew 18:16

²¹ Alma 23:6, emphasis added

²² “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 4, p. [1], bk. 4,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 17, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/43>

²³ Isaiah 1:18

man, because he reasoneth as a man; even so will I, the Lord, reason with you that you may understand.”²⁴ Although not scripture, we sing: “Truth is reason; truth eternal.”²⁵

Fundamentally, the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ makes sense; it is reasonable, rational to the core. It answers the great questions of life that otherwise go wholly wanting as mysteries or incomprehensible. Without the gospel, neither the world nor life make any sense. Without the gospel, chaos and darkness prevail.

If you know the answers to the primary questions even things that make no sense make sense, such as bathing in the Jordan River seven times to be cured of leprosy,²⁶ or marching around the walls of Jericho for seven days and then seven times on the seventh day, blowing trumpets and shouting to see the walls fall to the ground,²⁷ or making a bit of cake out of the last handful of meal to give to a stranger,²⁸ or stretching out one’s hand over the Red Sea for an escape as the Egyptian army barrels down behind,²⁹ or inviting those bitten by poisonous serpents to look upon a brass serpent that they not perish,³⁰ or washing blind eyes from the mud made of spittle and the dust of the ground to see for the first time.³¹ Under the umbrella of the primary truths, things that are otherwise incredible are credible, THINGS that otherwise make no sense, make perfect sense.

To “trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding”³² is not blind faith, far from it. It does not require suspension of reason, rather it arises out of reason deferring to the primary truths when beliefs collide as they sometimes do. That is not blind faith, rather the hallmark of intelligence.

Doubts and Questions

Many say, “it’s okay to have doubts.” I wonder about that. The Lord said, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”³³

²⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 50:10-12

²⁵ “O My Father,” Hymn # 292

²⁶ 2 Kings 5

²⁷ Joshua 6

²⁸ 1 Kings 17

²⁹ Exodus 14

³⁰ Numbers 21

³¹ John 9

³² Proverbs 3:5

³³ Doctrine and Covenants 6:36

The Lord also promised, “And whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth.” He added, “Doubt not, but be believing.”³⁴

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gave this good advice, “In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited. ... When those moments come and issues surface, the resolution of which is not immediately forthcoming, *hold fast to what you already know and stand strong until additional knowledge comes*. ... The size of your faith or the degree of your knowledge is not the issue—it is the integrity you demonstrate toward the faith you do have and the truth you already know.”³⁵

Doubting is the antithesis of faith. It ignores what you already know and the greater realities God has given that we may believe the primary truths. Doubting is blind because of ignorance, ambition, sin or pride, but in the end the result is the same, blindness. In light of all we have been given, how can we doubt? It defies logic and reason.

I Have Questions, But I Don’t Have Any Doubts

So, at this point, we have considered Christ as the Way, and we are now in the middle of Christ as the Truth. We have talked about the scientific and analytical methods of learning in this episode. We have yet to consider the academic and divine methods, which we will get to eventually but in the next several (six) episodes we are going to look at the evidence supporting the primary questions that there is a God, Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith was a prophet, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on the earth today. Please join me for those episodes and Stand Forever.

³⁴ Mormon 9:25, 27

³⁵ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” *General Conference*, April 2013