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Testimony & Spiritual Witness Concerns & Questions

Author(s): Jim Bennett

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TESTIMONY & SPIRITUAL WITNESS

Concerns & Questions

“We should not just go on our own feelings on everything...Granted, our feelings can be wrong; of course they can be wrong...We do indeed advocate the full use of the Holy Spirit to guide us to truth. How does the Holy Spirit work? How does He testify of truth and witness unto us? Through feelings...”

– FAIRMORMON BLOG, [CAN WE TRUST OUR FEELINGS?](#)

*“We should not just go on our own feelings on everything...Granted, our feelings can be wrong; of course they can be wrong. **But the LDS faith doesn’t solely advocate the use of our own subjective feelings.** We do indeed advocate the full use of the Holy Spirit to guide us to truth. How does the Holy Spirit work? How does He testify of truth and witness unto us? Through feelings, **but if you have ever felt a witness of the Holy Spirit, then you know it’s not just following your own subjective feelings. It is very different.**”*

– FAIRMORMON BLOG, [CAN WE TRUST OUR FEELINGS?](#) [Emphasis - and full, accurate quote - added]

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– LDS CHURCH-OWNED [BONNEVILLE COMMUNICATIONS](#)

*“Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind **AND** in your heart, by the Holy Ghost...”*

– LDS CHURCH-PUBLISHED [DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS](#) [Emphasis and ALL CAPS added]

“Feelings Aren’t Facts.”

– BARTON GOLDSMITH, PH.D ., [PSYCHOTHERAPIST](#)

“Fish are friends, not food.”

- BRUCE. FICTIONAL CARTOON SHARK WHO DOES NOT EXIST, DESPITE WHATEVER WARM AND FUZZY FEELINGS JEREMY RUNNELLS MAY HAVE HAD WHILE WATCHING *FINDING NEMO*.

SHORT ANSWER:

You assume every church and faith views the Spirit the same way Latter-day Saints do, and they don't. You also equate emotions with the Spirit in a one-to-one correlation, but a spiritual witness speaks both to the mind and the heart to communicate knowledge that goes well beyond warm and fuzzy feelings.

LONG ANSWER:

This is the one section of the CES Letter that makes me feel as if the Church truly let you down. Because if you could have gone through Primary, Sunday School, Seminary, and even a two-year mission and still have such a warped and inadequate understanding of the Holy Ghost, something went dreadfully wrong along the way.

1. Every major religion has members who claim the same thing: God or God's spirit bore witness to them that their religion, prophet/pope/leaders, book(s), and teachings are true.

Not really, no. You'd be hard-pressed to find Catholic sermons where priests implore their parishioners to pray to know whether or not the Catholic church is true, or whether the Pope has been called of God. They rely on the weight of Catholic history and tradition and the argument of apostolic succession to establish their authority.

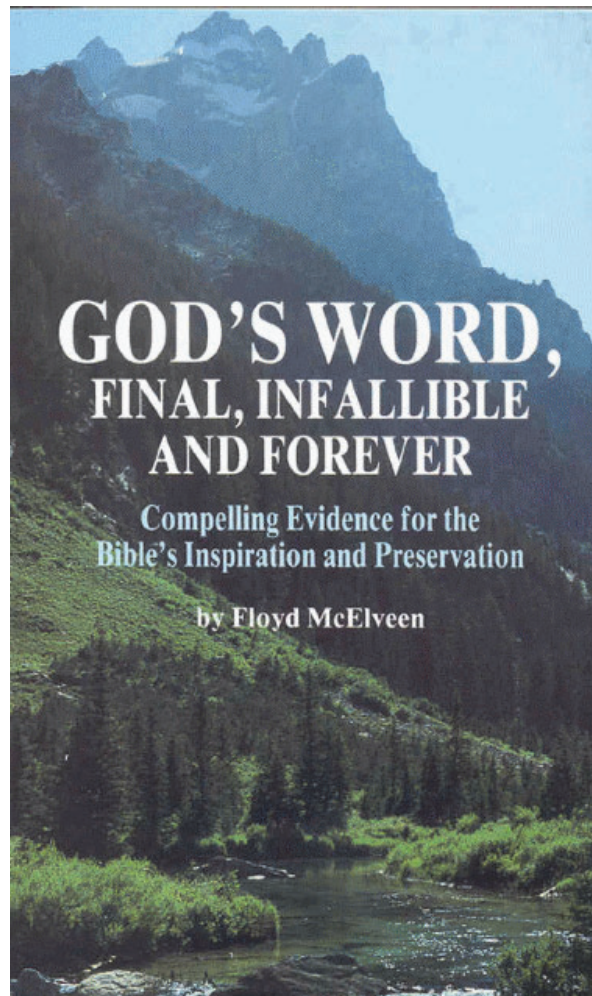
And while it's true that Protestants emphasize a spiritual experience with Jesus, they, too, lean on arguments from authority when it comes to any specific theology. The a priori assumption is that the Bible is infallible, and biblical proof-texts take precedence over Latter-day Saint - style claims of spiritual confirmation of its truthfulness.

Joseph Fielding McConkie, on page 83 of his book "Here We Stand," says that he has "frequently asked classes of returned missionaries if they ever met anyone who, while professing a belief in the Bible, could at the same time honestly say they prayed to know if it was true. I have yet to receive an affirmative response to that question."

More McConkie, from the same book, pages 43 and 44:

An anti-Mormon book that uses the title *God's Word Final, Infallible, and Forever* gives its readers three standards that, if followed, will assure that they will not be caught in the Mormon net. Each of these standards, we are to assume, is rooted in the Bible. First, as readers we are warned not to pray about the message; after all, it is reasoned, people have been deceived by their prayers. The second warning is not to trust our feelings, because, we are told, feelings can also be deceptive. The third warning is not to trust our minds, for "our minds are reprobate." So, the book concludes, if we refuse to pray, to trust our feelings, and to use our minds, there is no chance the Mormons will get us. (That was the only conclusion in a lengthy book which I was able to agree.)

What than are we to trust? The answer is, of course, the Bible [and not prayers, feelings, or our minds.]



Don't trust your prayers, minds, or feelings
But the mountains on the book cover are pretty cool.

The premise that everyone has direct access to heaven and can – and should – receive personal revelation as confirmation of truth turns out to be a uniquely Latter-day Saint idea.

In your next question, you list a number of different religious traditions and simply assume that practitioners of these faiths interpret the Spirit the same way Latter-day Saints do, when, in fact, they do not. This is not to denigrate anyone's faith, but rather to point out that seeing the world through a Latter-day Saint lens might lead us to believe that everyone else approaches God the way we do, and they don't.

2. Just as it would be arrogant for a FLDS member,...

The FLDS have been convicted of child molestation at the highest levels of leadership, and they are firmly in apostasy. I have no problem rejecting any of their claims to spiritual authority.

... a Jehovah's Witness, ...

I would bet serious money that you have never heard a Jehovah's Witness testify of having a spiritual experience confirming the truth of their faith. They simply don't do this. They rely on dogmatic legalistic interpretations of the Bible to persuade, not spiritual experiences.



... a Catholic,...

Catholics don't bear testimony like this, either. For centuries, mass was only in Latin, which the vast majority of Catholics didn't understand. Mystery is major part of Catholic worship, and they see tremendous virtue in believing without knowing. They also point to what they claim is an unbroken line of authority from Peter through the Bishop of Rome - i.e. the Pope - to prove their status as Christ's one true church. They do not ask their members to pray for a spiritual witness the way Latter-day Saints do.



... a Seventh-day Adventist,...

Seventh-day Adventism takes a dogmatic approach similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, except their pet issue is the Sabbath, not the name of God. Their faith is rooted in their confidence that they, alone, are interpreting the Bible correctly due to their understanding that the Sabbath is on Saturday, not Sunday. The kinds of spiritual expressions that are commonplace among Latter-day Saints are not part of Seventh-day Adventist worship.



... or a Muslim...

In Arabic, Islam means "submission." The way Muslims approach God is quite removed from the kind of personal, one-on-one spiritual experience that Latter-day Saints are encouraged to have. We see ourselves as gods in embryo; they see themselves as supplicants who can never approach God as anything but supplicants. They would likely consider it quite forward and inappropriate to question the divine will.



... to deny a Latter-day Saint's spiritual experience and testimony of the truthfulness of Mormonism it would likewise be arrogant for a Latter-day Saint to deny others' spiritual experiences and testimonies of the truthfulness of their own religion, ...

With the exception of the spiritually corrupt FLDS Church, none of these faith traditions speak of spiritual experiences the way Latter-day Saints do. There are no Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh-day Adventist, or Muslim testimony meetings.

...Yet, every religion cannot be right and true together.

To the extent that they believe the truth, they absolutely can. And each of these faith traditions teaches a great deal of divine truth.

Joseph Smith taught:

Have the Presbyterians any truth? Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, [etc.] any truth? Yes, they all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up or we shall not come out pure Mormons.

Gordon B. Hinckley said something similar in 2002:

This wondrous Restoration should make of us a people of tolerance, of neighborliness, of appreciation and kindness toward others. We cannot be boastful. We cannot be proud. We can be thankful, as we must be. We can be humble, as we should be.

We love those of other churches. We work with them in good causes. We respect them... To these we say in a spirit of love, bring with you all that you have of good and truth which you have received from whatever source, and come and let us see if we may add to it.

We also have no reason to doubt that God loves all His children, regardless of what faith they believe and church they attend. There is every reason to believe He hears and answers their prayers, and that he provides them with spiritual experiences that demonstrate His love for them.

LDS MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's true Prophet today.

(It's Russell M. Nelson now, but I get your point.)

FLDS MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that Warren Jeffs is the Lord's true Prophet today.

RLDS MEMBER IN 1975

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know that W. Wallace Smith is the Lord's true Prophet today.

LDCJC MEMBER IN 2017

I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. I know The Latter Day Church of Jesus Christ is the one and only true Church. I know the Book of Mormon and the Book of Jeraneck are true. I know that Matthew P. Gill is the Lord's true Prophet, Seer, Revelator, and Translator today.

Where's the Catholic testimony in your examples? The testimony of the Jehovah's Witness or the Muslim? Your original premise was that all churches operate this way, yet you only use groups rooted in a common theology as your examples. You would never hear a Catholic, Protestant, Jew, or Muslim bear this kind of testimony.

It's also telling that you have to reach back to 1975 to find an example of what the RLDS would say, because a modern Community of Christ member surely wouldn't speak this way. That leaves us with the FLDS and the LDCJC, two tiny splinter groups rife with corruption, fraud, and pedophilia. Do I think we're right and they are deceived? Absolutely.

Same method: read, ponder, and pray.

That's not the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim method. In fact, for the centuries preceding Vatican II, the Catholics actively discouraged Bible reading in favor of study of church traditions. None of the major Eastern religions would prescribe this kind of method, either.

All four testimonies cannot simultaneously be true.

So now it's just four testimonies among churches rooted in the Latter-Day Saint tradition? No more talk of Muslim testimony meetings? Isn't this a bait-and-switch?

If the comparison is between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and these three others, it's really no contest. There are striking reasons why our claims to truth and authority preclude the claims of groups that have either abandoned any pretext of exclusive priesthood authority - i.e. the Community of Christ - or have become so corrupt and venal as to abdicate any right to spiritual gifts - i.e. FLDS and LDCJC.

For you to make a credible case on this claim, you have to provide evidence that the faith traditions you cited from the outset bear these kinds of testimonies. They don't, which renders your point moot.

Is this the best God can come up with in revealing His truth to His children?

Yes, this is the best God can come up with in revealing His truth to His children. We ask, and He answers. That is how it has always been and always will be.

Only .2% of the world's population are members of God's true Church. This is God's model and standard of efficiency?

No, this is God's way of telling us we need to do our temple work, which will eventually provide 100% of the world's population, past and present, with the opportunity to fully accept or reject the gospel. Mormons are astonishingly inclusive here in a way that no other religion can match.



God's model and standard of efficiency
Ordinances provided to 100% of the population, past and present

Also, at no point in the history of the world were God's people anything but a tiny minority of the world's population. Even in the last days, when the Church reaches its zenith, Nephi tells us he "beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few." (1 Nephi 14:12)

Praying about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon does not follow that the LDS Church is true.

No, but a spiritual answer to such a prayer does.

The FLDS also believe in the Book of Mormon. So do dozens of Mormon splinter groups.

And they are right to do so. In the case of the FLDS and the LDCJC, they are also engaged in grievous sin, which distorts their ability to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost. As for the other groups, they're at varying levels of belief in the Book of Mormon. The Community of Christ has essentially downgraded it to the status of inspired fiction, and other groups have done the same.

Praying about the first vision: Which account is true? They can't all be correct together as they conflict with one another.

No, they don't. They're remarkably consistent. We've already covered this.

If God's method to revealing truth is through feelings, it is a very ineffective and unreliable method.

That's why it is only part of God's method. D&C 8:2 gives us this promise: "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your **mind and in your heart**, by the Holy Ghost." [Emphasis added.] Yes, the heart and its feelings are part of the equation, but they are also accompanied by the imparting of intelligence to the mind. Spiritual experiences are intellectual as well as emotional. Joseph Fielding McConkie used to say that the Lord has never given us a mindless revelation. Genuine spiritual experience sink deeply into every part of us, and they are far more profound than just warm fuzzies. They teach us things that we didn't know before.

Perhaps the best example of this is Joseph Smith's own experience in reading James 1:5. He describes his personal revelation in the following terms:

"Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did;" – Joseph Smith – History 1:12

There's a powerful feeling here, yes, but there's also deep intellectual engagement. "I reflected on it again and again." This wasn't just a nice, pleasant feeling - there was knowledge and information imparted in this spiritual transaction, as there is in every encounter with the Holy Ghost.



Joseph Smith later taught that "No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator." Revelation is far more intellectually substantive than just a pleasant emotional buzz. And it's a very reliable and effective way to teach truth, change lives, and build enduring faith.

We have thousands of religions and billions of members of those religions saying that their truth is God's only truth and everyone else is wrong because they felt God or God's spirit reveal the truth to them.

And yet you can only provide examples of precisely four, all rooted in a common theological tradition originating with Joseph Smith. You ought to be able to provide the testimonies that demonstrate that thousands of other religions and billions of other worshipers do this, and you can't, because they don't. Outside of the LDS tradition, that's not generally how other religions define their relationship with their church or with God.

Each religion has believers who believe that their spiritual experiences are more authentic and powerful than those of the adherents of other religions.

If that's true, you should be able to provide examples, and you cannot. This does not mean that people in other churches don't have spiritual experiences, but rather that they do not, as a general rule, take a Latter-day Saint approach to them in incorporating them into their individual faith.

They cannot all be right together, if at all.

If they all believe in God, then they are all right together on that point. All those who believe in Jesus are all right together about that, too. When they believe in prayer, righteousness, kindness, charity and service, which all of them do, they are all right together, and they can receive a witness of the Spirit that the Lord is pleased with what they are doing. The Spirit confirms truth wherever it is found, and it can be found just about everywhere, both in and out of the Church.

It seem that when you were a member of the Church, you clearly believed in a much more adversarial, un-Christian approach to people of other faiths than Church teachings would warrant.

4. Joseph Smith received a revelation, through the peep stone in his hat...

I presume this is the same hat, but is this a new rock or just the old one with a freshly insulting name?

... to send Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery to Toronto, Canada for the sole purpose of selling the copyright of the Book of Mormon, which is another concern in itself (why would God command to sell the copyright to His word?).

Perhaps because it could provide the fledgling Church with revenue in order to fulfill its mission. Same reason he asks us to pay tithing, really. While he has the capacity to flood the Church with riches by miraculous means, He requires us to fulfill the purposes of mortality by putting forth effort to do His will.

The mission failed and the prophet was asked why his revelation was wrong.

No. You ignore the fact that the revelation was conditional. The text of the revelation says the following:

“And I grant unto my servant a privilege that he may sell a copyright through you — speaking after the manner of men — for the four provinces **if the people harden not their hearts against the enticings of my spirit and my word;**” [Emphasis added]

The people hardened their hearts, and so the copyright wasn't sold, and the revelation wasn't wrong. Pretty straightforward. God doesn't interfere with the agency of his children - even the Canadians.



We have agency, eh!
Take off, hosers!

Joseph decided to inquire of the Lord regarding the question. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer testified:

“...and behold the following revelation came through the stone: ‘Some revelations are of God; and some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.’ So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right was not of God, but was of the devil or of the heart of man.”

– An Address to All Believers in Christ, p.31

Testimony written 57 years after the fact when Whitmer was deeply disaffected with Joseph Smith and was providing reasons why Joseph should be seen as a fallen prophet. (Tangentially, this 57-years-later testimony is also our main source for the rock-in-the-hat story you love so much, and its late date and Whitmer's disaffection are the reasons the McConkies and the Joseph Fielding Smiths of the world reject the hat/stone idea, and why I'm still prone to agree with them.)

Whitmer didn't participate in going to Canada, and accounts from those who accompanied Joseph on the trip contradict Whitmer's opinion. The contemporaneous document makes it clear that the Lord told Joseph that the people of Canada had a say in whether or not the copyright would be sold. Whether or not Joseph actually said what Whitmer says he said does not change the fact that the actual outcome was consistent with the revelation.

How are we supposed to know what revelations are from God, from the devil, or from the heart of man if even the Prophet Joseph Smith couldn't tell?

Joseph Smith got better and better at telling the difference as he grew and learned, just like all of us do. Understanding the things of the Spirit requires effort and diligence on our part, and, as with any skill, people improve their ability as they work at it.

We each have an individual responsibility to discern truth from error. "By the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things." (Moroni 10:5) That's a promise given to all, not just prophets.

Elder Boyd K. Packer said the following:



Elder Boyd K. Packer

"Be ever on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. There are counterfeit spirits just as there are counterfeit angels. (See Moro. 7:17.) Be careful lest you be deceived, for the devil may come disguised as an angel of light.

The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual. We occasionally find people who receive what they assume to be spiritual promptings from God, when those promptings are either centered in the emotions or are from the adversary."

– The Candle of the Lord, Ensign, January 1983

That's by far my favorite talk that Elder Packer ever gave, and I don't fully understand your objection to it. Again, we have run into an unquestioned assumption of yours that probably ought to be examined before answering any further.

Mortality is designed as “a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God.” (Alma 12:24) That probation requires us to demonstrate our willingness to choose good over evil, which is the primary challenge of mortality and the only way to learn and to grow. Put simply, it's a test, and you seem to be assuming that God is the ultimate “cheat sheet,” or perhaps some kind of spiritual super-Google. Instead of studying and finding the answers ourselves, you expect God to hand them out to the whole class before the test begins. That would defeat the whole purpose of why we came to Earth in the first place.

What kind of a method is this if Heavenly Father allows Satan to interfere with our direct line of communication to Him? Sincerely asking for and seeking answers?

I don't accept the premise of your question. I believe that when our hearts are pure and we are truly sincere, the Lord's voice will cut through any attempts by Satan to stifle it. Yet the Lord never interferes with agency, and people can too often receive “answers” that conveniently coincide with the answers they wanted or expected, which is a case of mistaking their own desires for the will of God. That's our fault, not His.

Are we now expected to not only figure out when a prophet is speaking as a prophet and not as a man...

Prophets do not cease to be fallible and mortal men when they speak as prophets. There is no Super-Brigham.

... while also trying to figure out whether our answers to prayer are from God, from the devil, or from ourselves?

Yes, of course. What I don't understand is how you expected it to be otherwise. The Church you believed in was one where apparently no thinking or spiritual effort was required on your part, and you could function as a mindless automaton with no danger of encountering evil or error as long as you attended enough meetings and checked off all the appropriate boxes. That Church does not exist and never has.

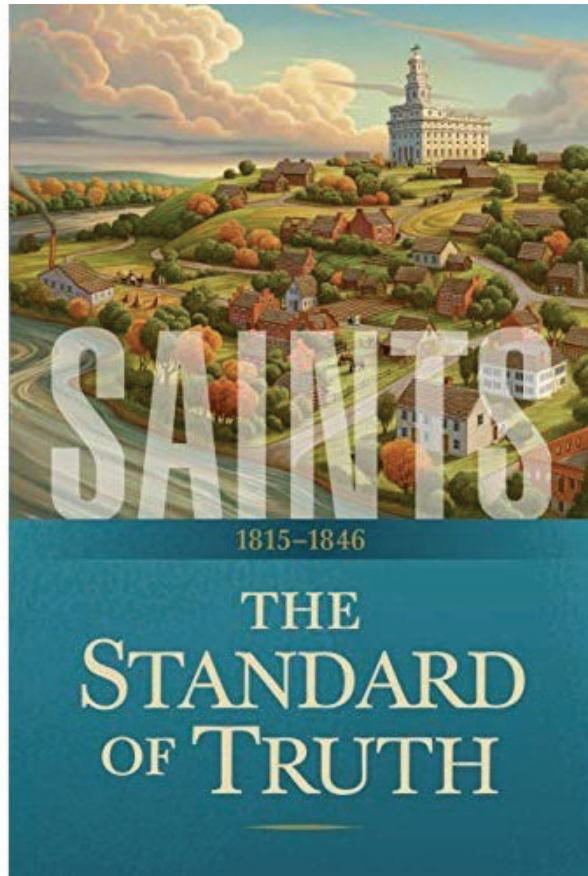
5. As a believing Mormon, I saw a testimony as more than just spiritual experiences and feelings. I saw that we had “evidence” and “logic” on our side based on the correlated narrative I was fed by the Church about its origins.

We did, and we do. Spiritual experiences are not contrary to logic and evidence, and, indeed, strengthen and support both. As for the Church's narrative, the Church is doing a magnificent job in offering greater transparency and information than ever before, particularly with the release of their new book *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, which you can read online at no charge.

Here's an excerpt you might like from page 61:

Meanwhile, Joseph and Oliver started translating. They worked well together, weeks on end, frequently with Emma in the same room going about her daily work.²⁴ Sometimes Joseph translated by looking through the interpreters and reading in English the characters on the plates.

Often he found a single seer stone to be more convenient. He would put the seer **STONE IN HIS HAT!!!!!!!**, place his face into the **HAT!!!!!!** to block out the light, and peer at the **STONE!!!!!!**. Light from the **STONE!!!!!!** would shine in the darkness, revealing words that Joseph dictated as Oliver rapidly copied them down.²⁵



[Emphasis, ALL CAPS, larger font, and gratuitous exclamation points added.]

I lost this confidence when I discovered that the gap between what the Church teaches about its origins versus what the primary historical documents actually show happened, and between what history shows what happened, what science shows what happened...couldn't be further apart.

And yet here I am, still a believing Latter-day Saint who has looked at all the same documents that you have, and I still see we have evidence and logic on our side, as well as spiritual confirmation of that truth. How is that possible? Maybe it's because at every opportunity to interpret that same evidence, you take the point of view that is the most critical of Joseph and the Church and refuse to give the Latter-day Saint argument the benefit of any doubts.

I read an experience that explains this in another way:

"I resigned from the LDS Church and informed my bishop that the reasons had to do with discovering the real history of the Church. When I was done he asked about the spiritual witness I had surely received as a missionary. I agreed that I had felt a sure

witness, as strong as he currently felt. I gave him the analogy of Santa; I believed in Santa until I was 12. I refused to listen to reason from my friends who had discovered the truth much earlier...I just knew. However, once I learned the facts, feelings changed. I told him that Mormons have to re-define faith in order to believe; traditionally, faith is an instrument to bridge that gap between where science, history and logic end, and what you hope to be true. Mormonism re-defines faith as embracing what you hope to be true in spite of science, fact and history.”

I cannot second-guess someone else’s experience. What’s interesting, though, is how critical you are of those who bear their testimonies when confronted with difficult information, yet that’s exactly what you’re doing here. This person is bearing their testimony of the untruthfulness of the Gospel. It’s impossible to argue with a testimony, which may be why so many people, when backed into a corner, toss that out as the best they can do.

For my part, all I can say is that my experience has been markedly different than this one, and I don’t believe for one second that Latter-day Saints “have to re-define faith in order to believe,” and that science, fact, history, and faith all have truth that can be circumscribed into one great whole.

6. Paul H. Dunn: Dunn was a General Authority of the Church for many years.

Indeed! I adored Paul H. Dunn. Still do. Marvelous speaker – funny, engaging, and perceptive.

He was a very popular speaker who told powerful faith-promoting war and baseball stories.

He told a lot of other stories, too. He spoke on a great deal of subjects, and, while he clearly made serious errors in judgment, he was, on the whole, a good and decent man.

Many times Dunn shared these stories in the presence of the prophet, apostles, and seventies.

I presume this is based on the assumption that these leaders had no discernment when Elder Dunn started telling tall tales. Again, it’s your assumptions that ought to be questioned here. If they sensed something was off, what were they supposed to have done? Jump up and interrupt Elder Dunn’s sermons? Maybe some more Tae Kwon Do?

The reality is that the vast majority of what Elder Dunn taught was completely in harmony with the teachings of the Church, and the tall tales he told were the subject of firesides and smaller gatherings outside of General Conference, making them more



Elder Paul H. Dunn

difficult to subject them to apostolic oversight. I think it likely that the Brethren were more concerned than you realize, but they don't correct people in ways that cause unnecessary embarrassment to those being corrected. Still, Elder Dunn was forced to apologize to the entire Church in the Church News, which was likely extraordinarily painful for him. You have no idea what was going on behind the scenes.

Stories such as how God protected him as enemy machine-gun bullets ripped away his clothing, gear, and helmet without ever touching his skin and how he was preserved by the Lord. Members of the Church shared how they strongly felt the Spirit as they listened to Dunn's testimony and stories.

Did they? Did you hear these members testify of Elder Dunn's truthfulness? You're making another assumption here that you can't back up.

I think it likely that members simply accepted all of Elder Dunn's words at face value, but that doesn't mean they prompted spiritual confirmation. I was on my mission in an apartment in Dundee, Scotland, when I first heard a talk with the war story where the guy died in Paul Dunn's arms, and I remember thinking, "Hunh. That sounds a little too good to be true." This wasn't a major revelation – there were no alarm bells clanging, and I didn't feel prompted to toss my Paul Dunn tapes into the trash.

But what that says to me is that the Spirit testifies of truth even when it's being delivered by imperfect vessels, mainly because it is always being delivered by imperfect vessels. Paul Dunn's false stories did not negate the confirmation of his true ones, and I'm willing to bet that other people had the same kind of nagging doubts I did about the stuff he was making up.

Unfortunately, Dunn was later caught lying about all his war and baseball stories and was forced to apologize to the members. He became the first General Authority to gain "emeritus" status and was removed from public Church life.

G.A.s now receive emeritus status at every conference, so this isn't particularly noteworthy. I also remember being in the Tabernacle after the scandal when Paul Dunn received an award for something or other, so I think it's a bit over-the-top to say he was "removed from public Church life."

What about the members who felt the Spirit from Dunn's fabricated and false stories?

I'm not convinced they did feel the Spirit when Paul Dunn was not telling the truth. They may have felt emotionally moved – Paul Dunn was a very dynamic speaker, after all, and his stories tugged at the heartstrings – but despite your assumptions, that's not the same thing as feeling the Spirit.

What does this say about the Spirit and what the Spirit really is?

Quite a lot, actually. It says the Spirit testifies of truth wherever it is found, and even in unlikely places and from imperfect vessels. The vast majority of what Paul Dunn said was true, and the Spirit didn't deprive those listening to him of confirmation of the truths he told even though Elder Dunn made poor choices. It also tells us that we each have a responsibility

to discern truth from error, and we do not abdicate that responsibility to someone else's ecclesiastical position, because even our leaders are fallible.

7. The following are counsels from members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on how to gain a testimony:

“It is not unusual to have a missionary say, ‘How can I bear testimony until I get one? How can I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel is true? If I do not have such a testimony, would that not be dishonest?’ Oh, if I could teach you this one principle: a testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!”
– *Boyd K. Packer, The Quest for Spiritual Knowledge*

This, too, is great advice from Elder Packer, and you seem to be missing the point of it entirely.

Again, it's likely you have not read the whole talk. “You cannot force spiritual things,” he says at the outset. “You must await the growth.” These are not the instructions of someone telling people to get out and lie for the Lord.

The next few paragraphs after the one you quote clarifies his intent:

“Somewhere in your quest for spiritual knowledge, there is that “leap of faith,” as the philosophers call it. It is the moment when you have gone to the edge of the light and stepped into the darkness to discover that the way is lighted ahead for just a footstep or two. “The spirit of man is,” as the scripture says, indeed “the candle of the Lord” (Proverbs 20:27).

It is one thing to receive a witness from what you have read or what another has said; and that is a necessary beginning. It is quite another to have the Spirit confirm to you in your bosom that what you have testified is true. Can you not see that it will be supplied as you share it? As you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase!

To speak out is the test of your faith.”

This talk helped me to understand faith and how it works, namely that if you push yourself to your limit, the Lord shows you the next steps. It's a talk that confirms the principle found in Ether 12:6 – “I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”

Indulge me as I share a practical example from my own life. Every year since the beginning of time, my extended family has attended Aspen Grove Family Camp up in Provo Canyon. Being morbidly afraid of heights, I spent years avoiding Aspen Grove's massive ropes course, where you climb up into the trees and walk around on metal wires that are about thirty feet above the ground. You're attached to belay lines and are perfectly safe, but even though I mentally understood that, that didn't keep my legs from wobbling like jelly with every step I took when I finally tried the thing. It wasn't until I actually fell and the belay mechanisms

caught me that I got a feel for just how safe I was, and I was able to move forward in a terror-free manner.

That's the experience that gave me a hands-on practical lesson in faith.



My son braving the new Aspen Grove Rope Course, 2017

The reason we “receive no witness until after the trial of [our] faith” is not because God is refusing to let us in on His secrets. The truth is that that’s the way faith works. No matter how much one of those nice Aspen Grove staffers were to describe to me the safety features of the helmets and the ropes and the carabiners – I dig the word “carabiner” – it wasn’t until I actually tested the stuff for myself that I was able to develop the faith and confidence to rely on them.

“Faith,” therefore, is not synonymous with “belief,” or passive intellectual assent. Intellectually, I believed I was safe from the first moment. But my negligible faith – my willingness and confidence to act on that belief – didn’t gain strength until after it had been tried. Elder Packer is merely pointing out that exercising enough faith to bear a testimony will provide the spiritual confirmation necessary to strengthen it.

That’s a true principle that has been verified time and time again.

“Another way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it. Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them.”

– Dallin H. Oaks, [Testimony](#)

Context is helpful here, too. In this talk, which you apparently haven’t read either, Elder Oaks also counsels people to fast, pray, and study in order to build a testimony. Neither he nor Elder Packer are asking people to bear a testimony that they do not believe to be true.

As a young man, I remember asking my own father how I could bear a testimony when I didn’t actually know that the Church was true. “Do you believe the Church is true?” he asked me. I said that I did. “Well, why can’t you say that? If that’s the extent of your testimony, there’s no shame in sharing where you are.” I then found that bearing that degree of testimony – I had faith and belief – strengthened my personal conviction. Accompanied with

study and prayer, I can now stand up and testify to my knowledge of the truthfulness of the Restored Gospel, and my bearing of the testimony I had was instrumental in building the testimony I have.

“It may come as you bear your own testimony of the Prophet... Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly... Listening to the Prophet’s testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek.”

– Neil L. Andersen, Joseph Smith

In other words, repeat things over and over until you convince yourself that it’s true. Just keep telling yourself, “I know it’s true... I know it’s true... I know it’s true” until you actually believe it and you have a testimony that the Church is true and Joseph Smith was a prophet.

It’s disappointing, but not surprising, that this deeply dishonest garbage is still in your CES Letter. Because you have tortured Elder Anderson’s message here beyond recognition in what appears to be a deliberate distortion of his intent.

When first I read this with your ellipses, I assumed Elder Andersen was counseling people to record their own personal testimony of the prophet and listen to it, which admittedly seemed strange. You’ve done some very selective and misleading editing here, as that isn’t what Elder Andersen was saying at all.

The first sentence you quote is from an entirely different paragraph and is not connected to the rest of the text. Here’s his pertinent statement without the ellipses:

Next, read the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Pearl of Great Price or in this pamphlet, now in 158 languages. You can find it online at LDS.org or with the missionaries. This is Joseph’s own testimony of what actually occurred. Read it often. Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly, and sharing it with friends. Listening to the Prophet’s testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek.

He’s not asking people to bear their own testimonies and listen to themselves saying “I know Joseph Smith was a prophet.” He’s asking people to read *Joseph Smith – History*, which will strengthen their testimony. He then asks them to consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith – i.e. “I saw a pillar of light, etc.” – not recording their testimony of Joseph Smith – i.e. saying “I know it’s true” over and over again.

If you follow Elder Andersen’s instructions – a suggestion, really, as advice to “consider” something isn’t really an apostolic mandate – you won’t be telling yourself “I know it’s true” over and over again; you’ll be listening to and pondering Joseph’s words, not your own.

You’ve grossly distorted both Elder Andersen’s words and his intent here, and you need to be honest with your readers or simply remove this charge altogether.

How is this honest? How is this ethical?

It certainly isn't honest or ethical to grossly distort an apostle's words and intent.

What kind of advice are these Apostles giving when they're telling you that if you don't have a testimony, bear one anyway?

Had you read their whole talks and not just the cherry-picked crowdsourced Reddit excerpts, you'd know that's not what they're saying.

How is this not lying?

Because no one is being asked to say anything that isn't true.

There's a difference between saying you know something and you believe something.

Yes, and one can bear a testimony of both. Bearing testimony of one will strengthen the testimony of the other. Did you notice that in none of the genuine quotes from these talks do these apostles give any counsel as to what words the testimony needs to include? Never do they say "testify that you know instead of testifying that you believe." Except, of course, in the false Bizarro Elder Anderson quote that you constructed.

What about members and investigators who are on the other side listening to your "testimony"? How are they supposed to know whether you actually do have a testimony of Mormonism or if you're just following Packer's, Oaks' and Andersen's counsel and you're lying your way into one?

Elders Packer, Oaks, and Andersen would agree that nobody should lie when they're bearing their testimony. That is not their counsel, despite your dishonest attempts to pretend that it is.

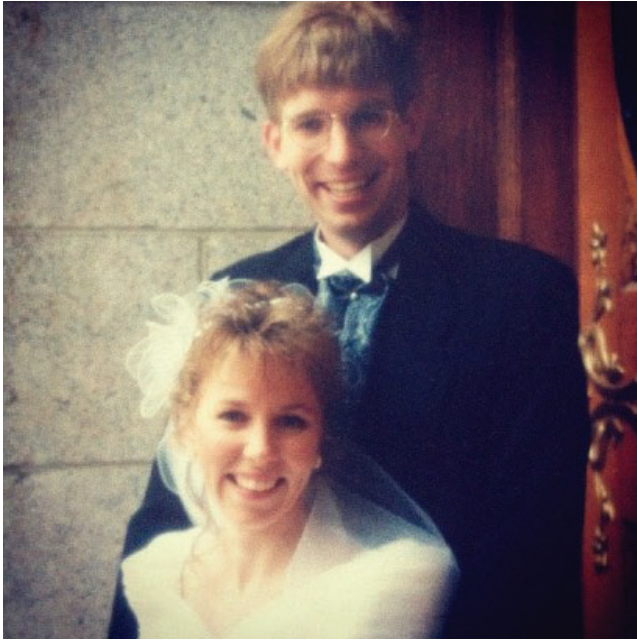
8. There are many members who share their testimonies that the Spirit told them that they were to marry this person or go to this school or move to this location or start up this business or invest in this investment. They rely on this Spirit in making critical life decisions.

Indeed, and I am very skeptical of such members. When teaching Sunday School, I will occasionally ask the class which brand of toothpaste the Lord wants them to use. This usually gets a laugh, as most people realize that the Lord doesn't care. People who expect spiritual confirmations to guide them through every decision in their life are conducting themselves contrary to D&C 58:26, where the Lord says, "For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward."



The Lord has no favorite toothpaste.

The reason we were sent to Earth was to exercise our own agency and use our own judgment. Waiting around for the Lord to tell us what to do at every turn is essentially a low-grade version of the plan we rejected in the pre-mortal life.



*Best decision I ever made
Confirmed time and again*

But what about the big decisions? Who we marry, where we go to school, what we should do for a living? Personally, I prayed very hard to get a confirmation as to whether or not I should marry my wife. I received no answer one way or the other. Then I was kneeling across the altar from her in the Salt Lake Temple, and I got a very clear, sweet message from the Spirit that I was doing the right thing. That actually made me somewhat frustrated. I was thinking, “You know, Lord, I would have appreciated this if you’d given me this message just a few days ago.” But in my experience, that’s not how the Lord works. He expects me to make decisions and act on them, and only afterward does the confirmation come. I receive no witness until after the trial of my faith.

When the decision turns out to be not only incorrect but disastrous, the fault lies on the individual and never on the Spirit.

The Spirit never overrides our agency, so we are always accountable for our own decisions. That’s the plan. And the Lord also knew that we would make mistakes, some of them disastrous. That’s why the Infinite Atonement is at the center of the plan.

The individual didn’t have the discernment or it was the individual’s hormones talking or it was the individual’s greed talking or the individual wasn’t worthy at the time.

Those are all possibilities, but none of us are in a position to judge another’s heart. We’re also not always able to see if things that look like huge mistakes work out as blessings down the road.

This poses a profound flaw and dilemma: if individuals can be so convinced that they’re being led by the Spirit but yet be so wrong about what the Spirit tells them, how can they be sure of the reliability of this same exact process and method in telling them that Mormonism is true?

I think the process you’re describing is not the same process the Lord uses to communicate with his children. There’s a reason the Spirit is referred to as a “still, small voice.” It requires experience and effort and commitment to know how and when to listen, and the Spirit’s gentle promptings can be overlooked or ignored when our focus is elsewhere. You seem to be advocating a process where the Spirit screams at us through a megaphone. Certainly that would be harder to ignore, but it would also defeat the purpose of mortality, which is to learn to exercise faith.

How are faith and feelings reliable pathways to truth?

They aren't. The Spirit is, and the Spirit is more than just faith and feelings. It is also intellectual enlightenment that accompanies feelings. It speaks to both the mind and the heart, and it is not just a pleasant feeling or a passive belief.

Is there anything one *couldn't* believe based on faith and feelings?

That's the wrong question. There is a great deal one couldn't believe based on a true witness of the Spirit, which is much more than just faith and feelings.

If faith and feelings can lead one to believe and accept the truth claims of any one of the hundreds of thousands of contradictory religions and thousands of contradictory gods... how then are faith and feelings reliable pathways to truth?

That's a pretty big "if," and it shouldn't go unchallenged. With the exception of small, apostate splinter groups, people outside of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not typically base their faith on the kind of spiritual witnesses you're mislabeling as just "faith and feelings."

9. I felt the Spirit watching *Saving Private Ryan* and *Schindler's List*. Both R-rated and horribly violent movies.

Me, too. Other R-rated movies where I've felt the Spirit include "The Shawshank Redemption," and, most recently, "Spotlight." I think the counsel to avoid R-rated movies is a good general rule, but I don't think the Motion Picture Association of America is infallible, either, nor do I think they have a mandate from heaven. There are valuable lessons and profound truths in both of those movies, so it doesn't surprise me that the Spirit would bear witness to them.

It's odd, though, for you to say you felt the Spirit watching these movies, as you don't believe there is such a thing as the Spirit.

I also felt the Spirit watching *Forrest Gump* and the *The Lion King*.

Well, okay. Except I think *Lion King* in particular is just plain awful, although I recognize that's a minority position.

After learning these disturbing issues, I attended a conference where former Mormons shared their stories. The same Spirit I felt telling me that Mormonism is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet is the same Spirit I felt in all of the above experiences.

Which would strongly suggest, along with all your previous descriptions of the Spirit as nothing more than a warm and pleasant feeling, that you don't understand what the Spirit is.

Does this mean that *The Lion King* is true? That Mufasa is real and true? Does this mean that *Forrest Gump* is real and the story happened in real life?

No, it means that you somehow managed to spend decades in a Church and get a terribly distorted view of what the Spirit is - or, more appropriately, *who* He is. When you felt the Spirit during *Forrest Gump*, was He telling you Forrest Gump was a historical figure? Because the Spirit isn't an inanimate object; He is a member of the Godhead who imparts information. When confirming truth, the Holy Ghost actually tells you what it is that He's confirming.

When I felt the Spirit during *Schindler's List*, for instance, He confirmed the truth that sacrifices made to save Jews during World War II were noble and good, and that I was seeing a story that reinforced true and good virtues. During *The Shawshank Redemption*, He confirmed that friendship and compassion are of infinite worth. During *Spotlight* He confirmed that it was right to call attention to the terrible child abuse taking place in the Catholic church.

For you to ask whether feeling the Spirit means that Mufasa truly exists, you give the impression that you see the Spirit as something akin to the buzzer that rings at church when there are five minutes left in Sunday School. To you, He's a thing, not a person, and, furthermore, He's a thing that can only impart binary information. (i.e. Warm feelings means this is historical; no warm feelings means this is not.) This actually makes me very sad, because if you could spend your whole life in the Church and ask if a good feeling you have during *The Lion King* is spiritual confirmation that Mufasa was a historical figure, then there is something fundamentally wrong with how we teach children – and adults, for that matter – about how the Spirit operates.



Why did I feel the Spirit as I listened to the stories of “apostates” sharing how they discovered for themselves that Mormonism is not true?

How can you say you felt the Spirit after you rejected the existence of a Spirit as you listened to people deny that there actually is a Spirit? Especially when you think feeling the Spirit confirms the physical existence of cartoon characters?

Why is this Spirit so unreliable and inconsistent?

He isn't. Your own spiritual education, however, seems to have been far more unreliable and inconsistent than it ought to have been.

How can I trust such an inconsistent and contradictory Source for knowing that Mormonism is worth betting my life, time, money, heart, mind, and obedience to?

You can't. Because based on your observations here, whatever source you've been listening to bears little or no resemblance to the Spirit.

The following [mind-blowing video](#) raises some profound and thought-provoking questions about the reliability of "a witness from the Holy Ghost" for discerning truth and reality:

CESLETTER.ORG/SPIRIT

The video raises the same questions and challenges you've raised in your text, and my above responses apply to this video as well. What I find mind-blowing is how off the mark your understanding of the Spirit really is.

Oh, and also [this video about Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon](#) that pretty much blows all your View of the Hebrews/Late War/Napolean nonsense out of the water.

