

I was raised Catholic by a devout Catholic woman. My father was Protestant, belonging to the United Church of Christ. Being raised in a multid denominational household, I learned from a very young age that not everyone agrees on doctrine and that it was important to respect others' beliefs. I did not attend Catholic School, but I did attend catechism until I was old enough to start teaching it, which I did for several years. I was an Altar boy and otherwise very active in my church.

In my early 20's I started to question some of what my church taught – and more importantly, much of what it practiced. It just didn't feel “true.” I eventually stopped attending Mass and felt like there was a big gaping hole in my life. I had friends in many different religions and would often discuss beliefs with them. A dear friend of mine was the daughter of a Lutheran minister, and while I enjoyed attending meetings at his church, it never really felt right. Something was missing. A couple years went by, but the feeling never went away.

Twelve years ago, I belonged to an online organization of movie enthusiasts. I was active in this group for a little over a year off and on when (in mid-2001) I met a student at BYU who was also a member of this group.

We got to know each other pretty well over the course of the next couple months, chatting online almost every day. She shared a very small portion of her beliefs with me over this time, not expecting to influence me in any way. At the time I was not aware of and therefore did not follow the Word of Wisdom. Usually I did not follow the Word of Wisdom in moderation, but not always.

When September 11th happened, I was very angry; especially that we shut down the airlines in response to it. While I had never flown before, I was determined to fly somewhere – anywhere – it didn't really matter to me where.

My job at the time paid about the current minimum wage, but I lived with my folks and my car was paid off, so my expenses were minimal. Being the son and grandson of an accountant and a money manager respectively, I had managed to save some money; enough to fly somewhere and have spending money there, but not enough to pay a hotel too, so I needed to go somewhere I knew someone. By the time the airlines were flying again, I had my destination: Salt Lake City.

Alison agreed that if I flew out, she would make sure I had a place to stay while I was there & that she would take me around town showing me the sights. Given that this was my first trip west past Indianapolis, I was determined to immerse myself into the local culture. I told her that when we met in person that I would no longer be a smoker.

She was a seminary teacher for special education students. Two of the mornings I was there, she took me to class with her ... her children found it absolutely hilarious that I, an adult, knew far, far less about the material being taught than they did.

While I was in Utah, we took a tour of Temple Square. I had seen pictures of the Salt Lake Temple, but seeing it in person was something else. I was bummed that I could not see the inside, but I did get to see the inside of the Tabernacle and it was really cool. After the tour, the Sister missionary asked me to fill out a card. Alison tried to tell me that I didn't have to, but I told her that it was only fair; that the missionary had taken the time to show me around, that I should fill out her little card.

We attended her ward's Sacrament Meeting for which she prepared me for as best she could, but it was a BYU student ward and it was Fast and Testimony Sunday.

Upon returning home, I was left with some questions. I really liked this girl, but I knew that she would not likely date someone seriously who was not of her faith. Mormons didn't seem that weird, but I had only spent a week among them.

I was about to look into this further when I got a phone call from another sister missionary in Utah. She said that she was calling regarding the card that I had filled out and wanted to send me a Book of Mormon. I thanked her, but told her that my friend had already given me one. What I didn't tell her was that my friend knew me quite well and knew it wasn't likely that I'd *actually read* it so she had also given me a copy of the Children's Book of Mormon, which I did read.

She then offered to send me a video, but I didn't want to put her out, so I declined. When she asked if there was anything she *could* do for me, I mentioned that I had been meaning to look up where the local church was, so that I could check it out. She told me where to obtain the information and the following week I showed up at the local chapel.

This wasn't my first meeting, so I had a *vague* idea what to expect, but I did *not* want to be mistaken for someone who knew what he was doing! I showed up about 8-10 minutes early and wore a polo, knowing most of the men would be wearing shirts and ties and that this would cause me to stick out just a little but not enough to be considered disrespectful.

When I walked in, I was relieved to see some young men sitting on the sofa by the door wearing nametags. **Ah-ha!** I knew *just enough* to know that this meant that they would help me. I approached the one closest to me, extended my hand, introduced myself and said that I was interested in learning more about his church.

After a brief pause, he told me that there was a couple my age that he wanted to introduce me to. I found out later that they were the Young Single Adult advisor couple for the ward. I sat with them, and after Sacrament, his companion asked if they could come by and teach me at my home later. I was taken aback and told him that I thought that there were still two more meetings and that I intended to attend them too, if it was ok. I figured I would learn more about the Church by spending time among the members than by just having the missionaries teach me. I also had a problem. Since I lived with my devout Catholic mother who still believed I would eventually come back to

the Catholic church, having the missionaries visit me at home really wasn't an option. Fortunately, the couple I sat with volunteered their home for the discussions.

I don't remember how it came about, but when the Elders discovered that I had quit smoking and drinking for Alison, they committed me to continue to follow the Word of Wisdom while they taught me. This seemed fair enough; If I wanted them to take the time to teach me, the least I could do is follow their customs.

About a month of discussions went by and so far I had dodged all attempts to get me to commit to baptism. By now I was pretty sure this wasn't a crazy cult or anything, and I did agree with most of the doctrine I was being taught, but baptism (*or re-baptism, from my perspective at the time*) was a huge step and while I enjoyed attending meetings in the Toledo First Ward, I wasn't entirely convinced regarding the restoration of the Priesthood. I was on board with the concept of the apostasy from the beginning; if not when the Elders taught me that it happened, then surely during the crusades, or World War II or about a decade ago when some truly horrific acts were covered up instead of being dealt with. *But had the Priesthood been restored in such a way as the Elders were teaching me?*

I had been praying to know the truthfulness of what the Elders had been teaching me for a few weeks, but I had not received an answer.

A couple weeks before Christmas after the transfer of the companion of the first missionary, the new companion asked me if I wanted to take a road trip. **Cool!** I didn't know missionaries were allowed to do such a thing, but yeah sure, I was always up for a road trip. They wanted to go to Kirtland. Now, I was a Toledo, Ohio native but I had never heard of Kirtland, but according to the missionaries, it was only about 2 hours away, near Cleveland.

We started with the Kirtland Temple, which was a really neat building and despite the RLDS video, I enjoyed that part of the tour. The last stop of the tour was the Newel K Whitney Store.

Not everyone has a single point in time where they *just knew*. Most people develop their testimony over time; often so gradually that they can't point to a day or even a week or month where they knew then, but not the previous day, week or month. This was not the case for me.

There is a small upstairs room in the Newel K Whitney store that was nicknamed the School of the Prophets. Here is where Joseph would teach other Church leaders. Sitting in that room, on a simple wooden bench which was much like the bench those early Church leaders sat on, the Holy Ghost came upon me with the subtlety of a sack of bricks.

At that very moment, I knew that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God and before we even made it to the car, we had set a date for my baptism.