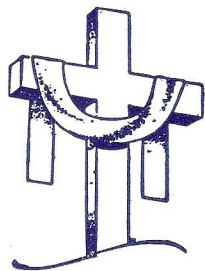


*The Testimony
of a
Former Mormon
Missionary*



BY LEWIS PRICE

THE TESTIMONY OF A FORMER MORMON MISSIONARY

When I was eleven years old, I promised my mother that I would become a Mormon missionary. From that time on I began to prepare. I held many church positions, saved almost all the money a mission requires, memorized about two hundred verses of Scripture, and read the Book of Mormon nine times.

I was given many awards by the church and widely praised in my Utah community. People voiced much faith in me and I had much faith in the Latter-day Saints organization.

All that has now changed. I am out of Mormonism. In its place I have the saving Gospel of the New Testament. The transition came slowly, progressively, as a result of God's wonderful grace.

The first step in being made aware of, and liberated from the church's indoctrination, came as I read the Book of Mormon. Through my numerous readings, I began to note many "borrowings" from the Apostle Paul and other writers. Not wanting to believe that Joseph Smith had stolen the words of others, I finally "solved" that problem by discontinuing reading the Book of Mormon.

More awakening came as I filled a two-year mission in Ontario, Canada. It puzzled me that the church, while saying that the Holy Ghost convinced their converts, relied instead on techniques of salesmanship and psychology.

For example, the missionary handbook said that if a complete world apostasy was stressed heavily enough many people would accept a Mormon restoration almost automatically. It stated they usually would not require proof, which implies the LDS church was not able to provide the necessary proof.

We were also told that the Holy Ghost would provide us with the words to tell people. That did not happen among the missionaries I knew. And it was not factual to claim it would, since they all regularly used lessons memorized from the handbook.

Mormon missionaries promise people that the Holy Ghost will bear witness of the Book of Mormon. They ask contacts to pray for that witness. None whom I asked to do that ever got any witness, except one. That lady said that the Holy Ghost revealed to her that the Book of Mormon was false. We simply denied her witness and departed.

Mormon missionaries commonly use a few Bible verses to back up their claims. The interpretation given Bible passages is often far outside the mainstream of Christian thought. The great theme of the Bible, God's grace for undeserving men, is in effect denied.

Personal testimony is the main tool used by the Mormon missionary. It covers any "soft spots" or gaps in the lessons. Statements that the elder "knows" such-and-such to be true are made and repeated as often as possible. This repetition is sometimes used near the point of brainwashing.

I saw that missionaries with many converts to boast about were those with good looks and pleasant voices. Those with an attractive manner or sex-appeal thrived, while we common ones struggled. Personality counted far more than spirituality—with contacts, with Mormons, with leaders, and with other missionaries. I was saddened at seeing my mission more a personality contest among the missionaries than a work of feeding hungry souls.

Another worldly aspect of mission life was office-seeking. Out of one hundred and twenty missionaries in our mission district, a few could be picked as District Presidents to manage the affairs of about seven others. Some yearned for that honor. Claims of unfairness were heard when District President appointments one year went mostly to an exclusive clique of eight who had entered Canada together and stayed united.

The LDS mission used vanity as an inducement to preaching effort. Hours worked by elders were listed on a "glory sheet," which made pride-seekers scramble to appear good. With vainglory thus advertised, it was difficult to serve for proper motives.

The most vital Mormon doctrine is insistence that LDS leaders are directed by God. Mormons are confident that their leaders are the only persons in the world entitled to receive revelations from God. My belief in this tenet was violently shaken by experiences in Canada.

In one incident my assigned companion would not work much, sometimes staying in our apartment until noon or even until three in the afternoon. We were not allowed to go out alone, so I wrote to the Mission President, asking to be placed with a more energetic co-worker. Instead of granting the transfer, the president used up days investigating the matter. Several missionaries were made inactive as the president's agent tried to find faults in me. My lax companion was virtually ignored.

After that episode, I was conscious of three things: 1. The mission head relied on human probing rather than on revelation. 2. His inability to believe what I knew was true cast grave doubt on his being inspired of God. 3. His past urging of us to preach diligently now appeared hypocritical.

Mission affairs under his administration had much of the strife and intrigue of human politics rather than marks of divinity. I once saw him shout down in a public meeting a young lady who tried to give a testimony for Christ. In one Canadian town he broke up a Mormon church by dismissing the local leader unexpectedly for trivial causes. One member called the mission president a "Communist."

His successor was a kindly man, but he was confused. Without warning he sent out a bulletin one day appointing me as Mission stenographer. He then learned I was unable even to write my name in shorthand! My appointment had to be withdrawn in humiliation. Then too, his public preaching sometimes contradicted usual Mormon beliefs.

Aware by now that Mission presidents were not inspired, I got by with the fuzzy hope that God's work could somehow be carried on with only human means.

My work as a missionary was relentless, and I had a small amount of success, but I had little satisfaction. The Canadian mission was a joyless, competitive struggle within a system.

At the end of my term, I travelled home through Canada to visit my younger brother who had gone to the West Canadian Mission. Upon arriving, I found that he had left that mission. However, a month later my brother's body was shipped home from Colorado to our Utah mortician with the news that he had committed suicide. Unwilling to face family and friends as a mission failure, or to preach again in the 30-degrees-below-zero cold of northern Alberta, he escaped by shooting himself.

In my grief I could not believe that God had had a part in sending a lukewarm Mormon boy like my brother to one of the toughest climates anywhere. Pressured into a preaching job he never wanted, he became a casualty of the system.

Entering the United States Army, I served six months in California and Arkansas. Both of these places had Christian gospel tracts available, and I read many of them. I thought I already had salvation, but one tract entitled, I AM THE DOOR helped me see the big difference between faith in an organization and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not common for a Mormon missionary to admit to his church's errors while on his mission. The drone of testimonies is too constantly in his ears. Testimonies exercise a kind of thought control, sometimes even a hypnosis over him. He is a victim of his own propaganda.

In my case though, there came a time after my mission was completed, when testimonies were not heard so often nor so slavishly. It became possible to reason objectively. It was then that my battered faith in Mormonism collapsed.

Years of study since have turned up large numbers of Mormon misconceptions. Most notable are "prophesies" that failed to turn out as predicted. I learned too, that the LDS

view of man as being "great" contradicts both the Bible and experience view of man as being depraved.

Following the ruin of my life anchor, the Mormon church, I began to be in despair. I felt double-crossed, and I lost much of my will to live. Hoping to find something to cling to, I searched in many places. In 1966 we were in Oklahoma City, where I attended services of Bible-believing churches. Impressed with the doctrines, I joined one of the churches. However, it was about a month later, along an Oklahoma creek, when I realized that trusting in Christ's all-sufficient grace was the vital element in salvation and not in my own works, nor in any organization or system. A wonderful feeling of joy and peace came over me as I made Christ my Saviour, my Hope, and my Anchor.

God would have been justified in letting me sink in confusion and sin to perdition, but His grace found me. By contrast, Mormonism was instrumental in the loss of my brother and almost of myself. I love the Mormon people, but I cannot love a system that keeps people from the Saviour by teaching falsely.

My testimony now is that Christ Himself is the DOOR to all that is eternally worthwhile and He is the VINE in Whom we must always abide. (John 10:9 and 15:4) Christians need no "other gospel" than that which is revealed in the New Testament. (See Galatians 1:6-9)

My advice to all is to cling to Christ and spurn any substitutes. My warning is to beware of false prophets. (Mark 13:22) My prayer is that all who desire lasting happiness and eternal life will accept Christ's grace and deposit in Him their full loyalty. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

— Lewis Price

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