

My Testimony

As with many youth I was raised in a moderately religious home. In my adolescence I became aware that there were many differing religious sects and consequently questioned the belief system in which I had been raised. I researched many churches and their tenets, attended several and found only one that offered a seemingly conclusive test one could perform to evidence the veracity of their claims. After being forced into active military duty with the real prospect of finding out firsthand what, if anything, lay beyond the grave, I decided to invoke the best spiritual test of which, I was familiar.

The test was simply to read a book purported to be the word of God and at the end of the book all one had to do was kneel and pray to receive an unmistakable burning witness in the chest as proof of the truthfulness of the book and its origins. At the time I was stationed on a military base in the middle of a swamp. I understood that in many religions, fasting was reputed to be a method of intensifying transcendental experiences. I thought simply that if there might be a God, my fasting would indicate my sincerity and determination. Knowing very little about the actual practice of fasting, I ate no food and drank no liquids for the time it took me to read and study the book, which amounted to seven days. My mouth did get very dry so frequently I rinsed it out at drinking fountains. During the week I read the entire book and prayed for assistance, although I wasn't sure my prayers were heard by anyone other than myself. After three days I realized my physical strength was all but gone. I continued on with what I can only imagine was just sheer stubbornness and ignorance of the prevailing opinion that humans cannot live that long without food and water.

On the last day, when I finished the book, I planned to execute the test that evening. When it was dark I went outside. I was living in an open barracks, so praying vocally indoors was a poor option. I found a small grove of scrub trees and bushes with a dry patch of dirt in the center not too far from the barracks. I knelt down and began to pray as earnestly as I could. Within less than a minute I was beset with insects buzzing around my head and landing on my head, neck and arms. I tried to ignore the distraction and continue praying, but it seemed I was besieged. I stopped praying for a moment and then

began again but in a more matter-of-fact tone stated that I very much wanted to conclude my quest however, I could not continue because of the insects. No sooner than the words escaped my mouth than there were no insects touching me and none could be heard or sensed in my immediate vicinity. I paused in surprise and then began to pray earnestly for the promised witness that the book I had been reading was truly the word of God to mankind. When my prayer was ended I searched my feelings for any unusual sensations. None appeared. I thought maybe the effects were not immediate and they would come shortly, maybe if I read something more in the book. The next day I broke my fast with tiny amounts of water and food during the day. After several days and more prayers I was left without the promised overt witness in my bosom. I concluded that I had given the test more than a fair opportunity, and in spite of the seemingly miraculous repulsion of the insect onslaught, the test was a failure. I rationalized the incident with the insects as a possibly unknown power of the human mind under duress and the interconnectedness of all living things. For many years afterward I adopted an agnostic opinion that I didn't know if God existed and I was fine with that opinion, after all, there had been no burning in my chest which, was the specifically promised sign.

For several years I occupied myself with the cares of military service and family life, paying no further attention to religious ideas.

Some years and a wife later, I started attending a church to satisfy my wife's desires and found myself committed to teaching a church youth class. I didn't understand why, of all the possible people to teach teenagers, I was selected, and even more surprised that I had agreed to take on the task. Once engaged in this role I was determined to do the best job I could. It meant that I would have to study the material to be presented, and teach it the way the church wanted it taught. I felt that this teaching position was not to be a venue for me to spout my personal beliefs, but a way for the church to offer its view of life to its own members and I had agreed to be the conduit for their message. Besides, I thought it actually made little difference in the end, other than it might teach a few young people some better ideals than just getting high or trying get into each others pants like most teenagers of that time.

During the course of study there were many references to the aforementioned book and to adequately prepare for class, I found myself once again reading excerpts and sections of the book. During this process I began noticing that many of the ideas, descriptions and depictions were much more vivid and understandable than before and their relevance to our modern lives seemed much clearer. I began praying again, not sure in the beginning if I was just talking to the walls. My prayers were mainly for assistance in performing well as an instructor. As I continued to read and better understand the book, I began to notice interesting and unique feelings as I read different passages. Some historical descriptions of events seemed to come alive in my minds eye accompanied by a seemingly deeper and more complex understanding of how and why things came about, what significance these events had in their time and the impact they would have on others and future events and all this was accompanied by a feeling in my chest somewhat akin to the idea of a burning, but it wasn't an actual burning or hot feeling. This was something I did not recollect feeling before. As I continued to teach, read and pray, I came to understand that the feelings within me were being used to reinforce the idea behind what I was reading or what I prayed about, as being true. When I consciously began to recognize this feeling when it occurred, I concluded that this could well be the feeling, which was to attend the reading of the book. I therefore, again prayed to inquire of the truthfulness of the book and this time I received not only a confirming witness that the book is a history of some of humanity and their dealings with each other and God, but also the word of God to mankind, the same as other books purported to be scripture and more distinctly, that God does exist as an entity and that Jesus of Nazareth is His literal Son, and something I didn't expect was also that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of God.

Once I felt confident that my prayers were not just bouncing off the walls, and knowing little about proper decorum while communicating with God, I stipulated in prayer to God that if religious precepts were true, I required knowing the truth of all things applicable to me and other things of this life whether in the past, in the present, or in the future. In return I would honestly do my very best to comply with His legitimate religious teachings

and be the best example I could of dedication to honesty and the performance of important doctrinal requirements. I proceeded from then on in the belief that those stipulations formed an agreement. Since that time I have not been kept from understanding anything I have studied and inquired about regarding the precepts of God's gospel.

In the ensuing years there have been many times I have communed with the heavens in varying degrees. Most notably among them was when my wife asked for a blessing at my hand because she felt beset by troubling spiritual influences. I prepared for several days and then performed what most people would call an exorcism. This was nothing like the melodrama portrayed by Hollywood movies, but afterwards my wife described to me what had happened inside her and according to her, she was immediately released from the bad feelings she had been experiencing. At another time I was investigating the proper pattern and construction of religious underwear. What I received can best be described as "understanding" through an entirely spiritual communication that contained no words, visions, dreams, nor visitations, but just a clear knowledge of many details. In that communication I was given an overall pattern and step-by-step instructions of how to cut and sew these under garments in the proper way, which was different than any being produced at that time, or since, by any group of people wearing that type of underwear. It could be easily argued that one opinion of how a garment should be made is no more meaningful than any other opinion. However, after many years of wearing undergarments made by others and their differing designs, I once again researched the subject of the original design revealed to Joseph Smith, which was not to be tampered with or changed in any of several very specific ways. I finally found several documents from people intimately familiar with the original garments, which wholly substantiate the design I was given many years earlier. The design I was given is now the only pattern I will wear.

Although there have been many spiritual experiences in my life; too many to describe in this document, there is one that must be shared. Only recently have I realized the significance and meaning of the occurrence and my obligation to offer it to others. As a

very private and somewhat reclusive person, I have shared this story very few times to very few people. When one thinks about why one might be given blessings or profound occurrences, many people come to the conclusion that it indicates some special status of the individual recipient or some special call to some form of leadership over others. Even though I think those are within the realm of possibility, I believe, by a far greater margin, that the reason God gives these things to people is for them to share the story of those happenings with others to give people hope and strengthen their desire to have their own communion with God and the spiritual heavens, if that is what they seek. For some, it may provide them with a basis to ridicule others, but such is the nature of human life.

I've always felt that living in such a way as to be the best example of righteous living that one can, fulfilled the scriptural admonition to not hide your light under a bushel. Now I believe that also includes sharing one's truthful testimony of things which God has caused to happen to you, which may bless or benefit others in their journey through this life. To that end I offer this record of certain things that have occurred in my life, and in the name of Jesus Christ I testify to any reader that this record is true to the best of my recollection and I pray God that through His Holy Spirit all those who are sincerely searching for truth and whom the Lord wills, be enlightened by this testimony.

Years ago I desired to once again become closer to the heavens and again make the veil between the Lord and me as thin as possible or maybe see beyond it. I determined that the best way to do that would be to take the information I had learned about the operations of the priesthood and the heavens and hike to the top of a mountain where I might try to pierce the veil of darkness that is over us all. I made my preparations and even though the mountain I chose was formidable I had scaled larger peaks in my youth and was not by any means an old man at the time, so I felt this was an achievable goal. I planned for at least a two-day excursion, but was lightly provisioned.

On the day I selected to begin the trek, one of my wives dropped me off at the foothills to the mountain and I set off focused on the task ahead. I started in the afternoon and by evening had only reached near the top of the foothills. I stopped there for the night

intending to complete the climb the following day. By the time I reached the actual mountain ascent point it was clear to me that I had neither the strength nor the endurance or water to make it to the top of the mountain and back. Since I had come that far I decided to find an open spot and try to approach the Lord. While performing the actions designed to open the heavens I noticed some strange maneuverings of a few overhead clouds, but nothing definitive and nothing truly exceptional happened. Having exhausted the extent of my knowledge of legitimate rituals I decided that if I were to survive this excursion I had better start walking to a small town quite a few miles away for refreshment.

I was roughly half way down the foothills when my strength left me and I was dehydrated and thirsty to the point of collapse. It was the middle part of the day under a relentless sun. There were no clouds in the sky over where I was marooned. There were creek beds but the creeks had dried up months before in this high desert terrain. I sat under a scrub oak, which afforded some spotty and broken shade. As I watched the skies over the mountain I could see some gray clouds traverse the peak and act as though they might come over my position, but then turn away and skirt my foothills. When those clouds filled with such promise reached a distant valley I could see the virga, which indicated they were dropping the water they contained as rain. I watched cloud after cloud take the same path and surrender its precious cargo on the desolate and far way valley floor. After seeing this happen a few times I realized that the pattern might change and it could possibly rain where I was sitting and if that happened I would not be prepared, so I took an army surplus poncho from my back pack and stretching it between some bushes about three feet off the ground, which made a catch-basin of about five feet square with a neck hole at the center to funnel the captured water, so it would be possible for me to fill my long empty canteen and water bottles. This arrangement also provided much better shade as I lay beneath it.

I rested under the rubberized, olive-green canopy trying to gather what strength I could and periodically checking the sky for signs of rain clouds. After a while the sky cleared and there were no clouds to be seen anywhere and no apparent prospect of any. The sky

was blue. The sun was bright and hot and I was getting weaker. I was becoming fearful that I might not make it out of this predicament that I had gotten myself into, alive. I could see the road at the bottom of the foothills where I had been dropped off. It looked farther than I thought I could go, but if I could make it to the road maybe someone would see me even if I collapsed when I got there although, I hadn't seen any traffic on the road that day. There was a something of a village a few miles down the road, but I was certain I would not have the strength to walk that far. After assessing my situation it was clear to me that time was not my friend and that my only hope was to start walking before I got any weaker. I scanned the sky again for the slightest sign of a cloud and saw none. So, I started to take down the rain catching contraption I had rigged up when a voice said to me; "Be still and know that I am God." I stopped what I was doing. I thought for a moment and then refastened the corners of my poncho to the bushes. The sky was still clear, but I crawled back underneath my makeshift shelter and waited with my open and ready water containers. It was only a few minutes and it began to sprinkle. I couldn't get my entire body under the poncho, but only my feet were sticking out. Very quickly the sprinkle turned to tiny hail, about the size of beaded barley kernels mixed with rain. Once the hail started it became a downpour of rain and tiny hail. I had large amounts of this slushy mixture pouring through neck hole in the poncho as I filled my canteen, water bottles and mouth with all they could hold. It wasn't the best tasting water I had ever drunk because it tasted of old rubberized poncho, but I didn't mind at all. The deluge stopped as suddenly as it began and after a few minutes and when I felt confident it was over I crawled out from under my terribly sagging structure to see a sky empty of any obvious rain clouds.

I took down my poncho and knelt on a dry spot of ground that it had protected from the downpour and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God. I then packed up my provisions and after a short rest, walked to the outpost down the road where I found a working phone and called for a ride home.

I count this experience as one of my greatest blessings. It is proof to me of what I could only believe before then; That God lives. It is not proof to anyone else, but I offer this to

others to fulfill my obligation to the God who blessed me that day with life and the comfort of knowing He has not rejected me in spite of all my weaknesses and failures in this life. Amen

SOJ

findingzion.org