

MY JOURNEY OUT OF MORMONISM AND INTO THE ARMS OF THE TRUE JESUS

Janet Mertz-Hill's Testimony

"You're playing with fire", the voice inside my head said. I had just sat down in a Mormon ward for the first time in 21 years. I ignored the warning voice and the service began. How could a Christian woman who had spent the last 20+ years of her life studying the errors of Mormonism come back to what she knew was wrong? Let's start at the beginning...

The year was 1970 and I was 13 years old. My father, being the history buff that he is, took me to Nauvoo, Illinois to tour the old Mormon settlement there. I had no idea what a Mormon was and little did I know, I was about to be taken in by it. As we sat in their visitor's center watching a slide show explaining Joseph Smith and his visions of God and Jesus and angels, I was immediately intrigued. After the slide show was over, I remember turning to my dad and asking him, "why don't we believe this, Dad?", and he answered matter-of-factly, "because it's not true". My dad was spiritually mature enough in his Christian walk to discern a counterfeit. I was too unlearned in the scriptures to know of Paul's warning to the Galatians:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace Of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

I, however, was just a kid without any knowledge of counterfeit gospels or the plan of satan to deceive God's children.

I was brought up in a Christian home and we attended church regularly. Our congregation was part of the Lutheran Church in America. Unfortunately, there were no activities for teenagers. At the age of 13, I was in the middle of confirmation classes and the class had a lot of questions. Things weren't as open then as they are now, and many of our questions (i.e. the Trinity) went unanswered. Our Pastor told us to accept this concept by faith and not to question. I was too timid to go to him to explain my questions and to get help in my walk with Jesus, so I kept my concerns inside. Looking back, I am sure that if I had gone to him and truly expressed my questions, he would have helped me as he was a very compassionate man. But I was at the age where I was kind of afraid of the Pastor, so I did not handle it like I should have.

Secretly, I delved into Mormonism as best I could. I would go to the local library and look up information and read books. I only found Mormon "faith promoting" books. It has been said that local Mormon missionaries will go to the libraries and hide any books that they feel show Mormonism in a bad light. That could be the reason why I never found any books that told the other side. Since this was in the early 70's, this was long before the internet and access to historical Mormon documents that told the truth about Joseph Smith and his involvement in the occult and forces of darkness.

Because I kept my interest secret, my parents could not help me see the errors of my ways and by the time they found out, satan had already convinced me that Mormonism was the truth and the path to salvation. I had no idea that I was on the path to hell.

Then came the Osmonds, the only Mormons that I would know for a few years. Being a crazy teenager and a fanatic Osmond fan, they validated what I was studying. I remember thinking "well, if the Osmonds believe it, it HAS to be true". Wrong!!! They published a lot of pro-Mormon material and spoke about their faith and family. This was also a draw to me as most of my friends came from homes that had problems and my own family had its share of problems. I was too young to realize that all people and families go through rough times...I was looking for utopia and the Mormon church seemed to have all I was looking for.

When I was 16 years old, I told my parents about my desire to attend the Mormon church. They were livid, understandably. They wanted me to talk to the Pastor first (not the same Pastor from my confirmation days). I can still picture that day....I was sitting in his office and told him that I wanted to become a Mormon. He completely freaked out, jumped up and got a Book of Mormon that was on his shelf and, while throwing it on

the floor screamed out "don't you realize you will go straight to hell????". I know now that he was right, but his attempt to convey that to me was lacking in love and compassion and it drove me completely into the fiery pit of Mormonism. Pastors can be a very good source of help if they are learned in the cults and handle situations like this in a loving and caring way. Very reluctantly, my parents allowed me to attend the mormon church, however it was a source of great conflict between us.

A source of grief to me to this day is that I took my best friend with me for the next few years of my journey. She was a good Baptist girl and to this day remains in the clutches of Mormonism. I continue to pray for her and her husband and children that they will desire to know the true Jesus and will be set free from the bondage that they are under.

When we started attending the Mormon church, we were instantly "love bombed" by the members.

This is one of the many techniques used by cults. **I had new friends, lots of activities and was very impressed by the family unity** that I saw. Many of these families would fall apart in the years to come, **but initially I had my blinders on** and was only seeing the good. My best friend and I started taking the missionary discussions on a weekly basis. **I remember praying fervently that God would tell me that the Book of Mormon was true.** I received no answer at all because my mind was already made up and I wouldn't have listened to anything contrary to that. If I had been open to receiving an answer from God and it was against the Book of Mormon, I would have dismissed it as an answer from satan. In retrospect, I know it was satan who was guiding my steps into Mormonism and putting the scales on my eyes. I remember giving a birthday present to a Mormon girlfriend of mine - a beautiful cross. I can still see the look on her face when she opened it...she was momentarily speechless. Then she said "Janet, we don't wear crosses". "You don't wear crosses??", I said. "Why?". She replied "because they represent the death of Jesus...it's like wearing an electric chair on a chain". I now believe that Mormons shun this Christian symbol because they do not accept the saving blood of Jesus. Theirs is a works-based religion and their Jesus only died for original sin. Each Mormon must earn their own way to Heaven and work out their own salvation.

My parents finally allowed me to be baptized into Mormonism in January of 1975. My mom said she would sew my baptismal dress (it was hard to find an all-white dress in winter) and she cried all the time she sewed it. My parents felt that I had already been baptized and could see no need to do it again.

My father would not attend, but my mother and grandmother did. They attended only out of love for me...in their hearts they were mortified by my actions and cried through the whole service. I remember being taught prior to my baptism that the experience was going to be so wonderful and that all my sins would be cleansed...I would literally have a clean slate. When I came up out of the baptismal waters, I felt no change at all. I was so disappointed and secretly blamed myself and lack of faith. But as all cult members do, I faked it and pretended it was glorious. It would be years before I would come to know the true Jesus. It would be years before the scales would fall from my eyes and I would know that it is only Jesus who can forgive our sins and make us a new creature.

Shortly after my baptism I took a road trip with 3 other friends to Utah. It was on this trip that I was able to visit the Salt Lake temple for the first time, to do "baptisms for the dead".

The view that deceased human beings can hear and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ in the spirit world, and through proxy baptism performed for them on earth and attain eternal life in the presence of God, is one of the distinctive doctrines of Mormonism that separates it from historic, Biblical Christianity. Mormons believe that everyone will be given a chance to accept their gospel, even those who have died. Because baptism is essential to salvation, they perform baptisms by proxy for the dead.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. God offers salvation to all people. Many people put off a decision for Christ, thinking that there will be a better time - but they could easily miss their opportunity altogether. There is no opportunity for salvation after death. Mormons spend a great deal of their time compiling their genealogies for this purpose as well as for additional temple rituals to be performed for their dead relatives. The Bible tells us to avoid genealogies, for they are unprofitable and useless (Titus 3:9).

These rituals are done only in their temples. The outfit that you wear can best be described as a jumpsuit with snaps. All jewelry and clothes are removed and then you put on the jumpsuit. I remember being mortified because this was the first time I went bra-less since I became a young woman. After the jumpsuit is put on, you are ushered to chairs around the baptismal font, where you sit and wait your turn. A Mormon priesthood holder is in the font with you and reads the names of the dead off of a video screen, as he baptizes you "for

and on behalf of _____, who is dead". Being that I was such a fervent believer, this should have been my ultimate religious experience so far! Here I was in the "House of the Lord" for the first time in my life. Quite the opposite, though. I was filled with a feeling of dread and darkness and depression. I can't even remember how many dead people I was baptized for, because it was so long ago. However, I can remember the dark feelings that came over me as I tried to perform the rituals that I thought were commanded of God. Now I realize that God was starting to work on me and was showing the errors of my ways. However, I buried those dark feelings of dread and gloom and pretended to my friends later that it was such a wonderful, spiritual experience. Mormons aren't allowed to discuss their experiences outside of the temple, so I had no one to turn to help me. And I still wasn't asking God what He thought. I had the Mormon church to tell me (their) god's will and I continued to listen to their erroneous gospel that Paul warned about.

I attended Brigham Young University for one year where my belief in Mormonism was strengthened even more. However, I remember one Sunday School lesson on sin. The teacher wrote a list of sins on the blackboard and then drew a line between the list. He said every sin below this line would have to be confessed face to face with a bishop, or we would have no salvation. (How contrary this is to the saving blood of Jesus!!). I remember coming home from class and writing in my journal "this is one of the darkest days of my life....". How tragic that any child has to be forced to talk to a man about certain sins, when Jesus is right there with open, loving arms to console us and heal us and forgive us of our sins. There is no need for a mediator, when we can go right to our Blessed Savior. I never did confess my sins to the Mormon bishop and was convinced for a few years that I had no chance to attain one of the Mormon levels of heaven because of it. This same year I was also able to finally meet the only other member of my family who was Mormon, my 2nd cousin Doug. We had been corresponding for quite awhile and he was entering the Language Training Mission in Provo, before he left for his mission in France.

I returned home in 1976, due to family obligations and lack of money. I continued to be active in the Joliet Ward and in Young Adults (the Mormon group for single adults) and just about every activity that they offered. It was during this time that problems that I had with various doctrines began to surface. The two main thorns in my side were polygamy and racism towards blacks. Mormons believe that polygamy is an eternal truth and will be practiced in the next life (if you are "lucky" enough to attain the highest degree of Mormon heaven). They believe that their Father in Heaven is an exalted man who lives on a planet near the star named "Kolob" with his many(if not thousands) of polygamous wives, creating spiritual children the same way children are conceived on earth. I could not comprehend how something as repulsive as polygamy could be what awaited me if I attained godshood someday. Mormon women cannot attain godhood on their own, but if they are sealed (marriage ritual perform in their temples) to a man who attains godhood, they can then become a goddess in heaven. I remember one of the young women's teachers tell us during class, with tears streaming down her face, how she didn't want to have to share her husband in the next life but if that was what Heavenly Father wanted, she would accept it. How tragic what Mormon women have to endure as they strive to please God. I also had a very hard time accepting that blacks were cursed and that black skin was a sign of this curse.

It was because of my concerns over these doctrines that I set up a time to meet with the Bishop. He told me it was my lack of faith that caused me to question these doctrines and that I needed to pray and stop questioning. He wouldn't talk to me at all, nor would he try and help me understand how these doctrines could be from God. He also encouraged me to quit my job because he said it was a bad influence on me. That was completely bizarre to me because I don't think he knew anything about my job or the people that I worked with. I left his office in tears.

Not long after this, my home teachers came to pay their monthly visit. Home teachers are assigned to each family (or single person) in the ward and they offer counsel and support to the members. They also report any problems back to the Bishop, so that he knows what is going on. It was in my parent's living room that one of my home teachers counseled me to leave home and to have nothing more to do with my "non-member" parents. Maybe they were thinking it was my parents that were causing me to doubt and question. However, even though my parents and I had religious differences, I loved them dearly and had no intention of "divorcing" them because of it. I also was smart enough to know that Heavenly Father would never want me to do this. Cults often demand or encourage their believers to sever ties with non-believers. Mormons are encouraged to divorce their spouses when the other one begins to question or leaves the Mormon church completely. For all their talk about family togetherness and "families are forever", the Mormon Church was attempting to break up mine and praise God, I refused to let that happen.

The following is a wonderful example of what was beginning to happen to me, and even though it is not religious in nature, I know it was God who was beginning to take the scales from my eyes and the "paint

chips" off my body and mind:

Paint Chips- author unknown

Being a part of the Mormon church is like having your whole body painted with many layers. First you get the lessons...there are several coats of doctrine. Then you get baptized and confirmed; two more thick coats of paint. The "paint" is intended to refurbish you as a member, to make you more acceptable to the church, to "God," to others. With each Relief Society or Priesthood lesson, another coat is applied. With each meeting, each interview, the layers of paint build. A trip to the Temple takes several coats and is inspected after each year. Then one day, you realize, you can't move! When you question about your lack of movement, the inspector tells you that your foundation is just fine. You try and sit still and remain the representation of a church "remodeled" member. But the questions come from within.

Then you hear something. A crack. A deep crack begins from the inside out. You doubt yourself because you know if you don't keep quiet, someone will hear! Someone will SEE that your appearance is now damaged. Someone might question if you have been properly taking care of your foundation, etc. Then one day, it happens. Just a small patch breaks away. You see something unusual. You touch it and are surprised. "Is that my skin?" you ask. It feels so alive and real. You begin to gently pick it away, then in a fervor you are scraping as much as you can off. Paint chips are everywhere! Soon you are standing there uncovered. You feel free. You breathe. Your body aches from the release of all that weight. You sigh and do not worry that other "painted folks" will see you without your so called "protective shell" You start the clean up job. Quickly and efficiently you sweep up all the chips and flakes. There are so many of them! It seems overwhelming at first, but then the job is done. All the mess is tossed out. You love your clean house; the way your body can breathe and move and LIVE! You are rearranging your life and then BAM you find a paint chip under the rug. Somehow you missed it...or did you save it? One day you go to get a coat and a few missed chips fall from a sleeve. Little reminders of what used to be. "It may take a while to get rid of all this residue" you say. But that is ok.

The paint chips were starting to fall. I slowly became inactive in the Mormon Church. I began studying the Bible and learning the true word of God. I read any Christian apologetics books I could find that addressed Mormonism. And I was haunted by horrible nightmares. Nightmares about going to hell. One evening I broke down crying at the kitchen table and told my parents I was afraid I was going to hell. They were completely shocked and didn't know what to do so they sent me to a psychologist who also happened to be a Christian. He admitted that my concerns were beyond the usual scope of his practice, but he would make an exception this time. He asked me bluntly if I thought he was going to hell. I said no, of course not, you are a Christian. Then he asked me why I thought I was going to hell. I admitted that the Mormon church had brainwashed me so much that even though I highly doubted it was true, the guilt remained. It would take many more years before the guilt and fear would be completely removed.

Because Mormonism undermines all Christian denominations (even their temple ceremony prior to 1990 called Christian pastors "hirelings of satan), a lot of people that are lucky enough to get out never find God. Even though I had a belief in God and considered myself a Christian, for a few years I did not attend services anywhere. I was in no hurry to jump back into organized religion.

I eventually returned to the Lutheran Church and felt great peace when I did. I felt a real burden to inform Christians about the beliefs of Mormonism and gave many presentations to church groups about it and told my story. Praise God that many people had no idea what Mormonism taught and were shocked when they found out. I was lucky enough to be asked to counsel a young man in my congregation who was thinking of joining Mormonism because of his girlfriend. Thank God he did not join and I was blessed to be able to have a part in his decision.

One thing that I always wrestled with was feelings once I was out of Mormonism and in Christianity. I could never reconcile why I was such a fervent, enthusiastic Mormon but could not duplicate (or better yet, increase) those feelings in Christianity. I would stay enthused for a week or so and then it would fade away. I didn't realize at the time this was because I had not completely committed my life to Jesus. I believed but I was holding back, fearful of becoming a "fanatic" or worse, one of those people who were always talking about being born-again.

I was also trying to fit God into my beliefs, instead of letting God change me as He saw fit. I was a member of a liberal protestant congregation. I even worked at the headquarters of this denomination, thinking that if I worked for God full-time, I could feel what I used to feel when I was a Mormon. But that proved fruitless because I wasn't ready to commit my heart just yet.

In the year 2000, my husband and I moved to New Mexico. Even though the scenery was beautiful and we had a lovely home, I was very lonely inside and missed my parents and friends greatly. It was during this time that my extremely devoted Mormon cousin began having family problems. I looked for a Christian book to comfort him but knowing our beliefs were so different, I thought perhaps a Mormon book would help him more. After I purchased the book at the local Mormon bookstore, I started to leaf through it. Big mistake. Looking back on it now, I realize this was akin to dabbling with a ouija board or other occultic behavior. I was opening up the floodgates of all my past beliefs and memories and satan used this to draw me back in. By the time I finished the book, I was almost convinced Mormonism was true again and that I had been deceived for the past 20+ years. It's funny, because after I read this book and all the books that I would read within the next month, I was fearful of the dark again. I would always leave a light on at night and sleep with the covers over my head. Deep down inside my soul must have realized that I was again traveling on the dark side and forces were around me trying to finish me off for good.

"You're playing with fire", the voice inside my head said. I had just sat down in a Mormon ward for the first time in 21 years. I ignored the warning voice and the service began. How could a Christian woman who had spent the last 20+ years of her life studying the errors of Mormonism come back to what she knew was wrong? It was Easter Sunday at the Bernalillo Ward. I was looking forward to hearing local ward members talk about the glorious resurrection of our Savior! None did, though. It was business as usual. There was one talk about how thrilled one of the members was to see one of their general authorities in the temple. Where was Jesus? I ignored that thought for the next month as I attended Mormon services and met with the Bishop to work on getting rebaptized and coming back into full fellowship with Mormonism. I was literally in a daze. I had finally had my name removed from their records just 4 months earlier and I now had to undo what I had done. Part of me knew I was doing wrong, but satan causes evil things to appear good. The bishop counseled me not to tell any of my Christian friends that I was going back to Mormonism. He was afraid they would try and talk me out of it. He wanted me to get rebaptized quickly and get me into the temple to do baptisms for the dead. Normally a person would have to wait a year after they got rebaptized to go to the temple, but he wanted me in there within a few months. Satan was trying very hard to get his claws as deep into me as possible and the temple was one way to do it. The more temple work that a Mormon does, the deeper into the abyss they go. But God had another plan for me.

Another strange experience during this time is that I had the opportunity to talk to one of the Osmonds. He told me that he had just had a dream where Joseph Smith appeared to him and asked him to make sure all of his dead relatives were baptized (by proxy), and that the living ones would become mormon. The performing Osmonds live in Missouri now, where a lot of Joseph Smith's relatives live. Apparently a lot of them are not mormon. This Osmond told me that in this dream, they were all standing behind a window, looking at him, kind of "imprisoned". It was given to this Osmond to see that they found the "correct path". He told me that he felt this literally happened and that the dead ones were waiting to be baptized so they could continue on towards the mormon heaven. Mormons often have dead people appear to them and they are inspired by it...to them it proves that mormonism is true. The Bible speaks against communicating with the dead and mormons encourage it.

Trying to explain to my parents that I had been wrong about Mormonism was a chore. I took the coward's way out and emailed my mother. At least that way I wouldn't have to see her faint or scream out. I know that deep down inside my husband (a wonderful Christian African-American man) must have been completely repulsed, since I had previously taught him all of the racist statements of the Mormon "prophets". However, nobody really said much for fear they would drive me farther into it. A Christian friend of mine immediately put me on a prayer list and I know that others were praying that I would change my mind. Miraculously, their prayers would work quickly.

About a month later while driving to work, I was playing a tape by Nicole Nordeman, a Christian singer. I had purchased this tape before my journey back into Mormonism. As this song played, the words really touched my heart:

To Know You

It's well past midnight

And I'm awake with questions that won't

Wait for daylight

Separating fact from my imaginary fiction
On this shelf of my conviction
I need to find a place
Where You and I come face to face
Thomas needed
Proof that You had really risen
Undefeated
When he placed his fingers
Where the nails once broke Your skin
Did his faith finally begin?
I've lied if I've denied
The common ground I've shared with him
And I, I really want to know You
I want to make each day
A different way that I can show You how
I really want to love You
Be patient with my doubt
I'm just tryin' to figure out Your will
And I really want to know You still
Nicodemus
Could not understand how You could
Truly free us
He struggled with the image
Of a grown man born again
We might have been good friends
'Cause sometimes I still question, too
How easily we come to You
No more campin' on the porch of indecision
No more sleepin' under stars of apathy
And it might be easier to dream

But dreamin's not for me

God literally touched my heart with this song and I began crying uncontrollably and saying out loud "what am I doing??? How can I deny my Savior???" The scales literally fell from my eyes during that drive to work and little did I know that in 2 days I would be permanently born again. I remember having a really hard time concentrating on work that day.

2 days later while again driving to work, I heard a voice inside of me say "go to Calvary Chapel in Albuquerque". This was really strange to me because I knew nothing about this Church. I had no idea it was a vibrant, exciting group of believers with a renowned Senior Pastor named Skip Heitzig. But God knew what I needed and he led me right where he wanted me to be.

This time I did not ignore the voice in my head and attended Wednesday night worship/Bible study. I was scared and tried to anonymously blend in with the crowd. I didn't know what to expect....I worried that people might be screaming out or talking in tongues. But the people around me looked normal, but had a special glow that I hadn't seen before. When the service started, we sang the most wonderful songs...the Holy Spirit was so strong and unlike anything I had ever felt before. I was so full of warmth and the Love of God...tears fell down my cheeks as I finally submitted my life and heart to Jesus. Completely. No holding back, no trying to fit God into my liberal beliefs. I completely wanted to do God's will in my life. I was finally born again!!

I truly believe that God allowed me to go back into Mormonism to reignite the desire I once had to be in a ministry to inform Christians of the beliefs of this cult. And I know that it was God who reached down and yanked me out before I got into it too deeply. I can almost picture my Savior pulling me out of the abyss, saying "No satan, THIS ONE'S MINE. You almost got her once and you're not getting her again!".

My life has changed so much...what blessings I have experienced. God knew exactly what I needed and gave it to me when the time was right. I no longer have to wrestle with trying to duplicate my devotion to Mormonism.

I have such a love for Jesus now and it is beyond compare with anything I ever felt in the spiritual darkness of Mormonism. The love of Jesus is full of divine light and our lives reflect that love when we give our hearts to Jesus.

I thank God every day for saving me and pray that he can use me to warn others. May God bless the Mormon people and lead them to the true saving Grace of Jesus.

Janet Mertz-Hill

Some excellent websites on Mormonism:

Utah Lighthouse Ministries www.utlm.org

Berean Christian Ministries www.frontiernet.net/~bcmmin/

Concerned Christians www.concernedchristians.org

Mormonism Research Ministry www.mrm.org

Mormons in Transition www.irr.org/mit/

Testimonies and resources www.geocities.com/mormonnomore/

Watchman Fellowship, Inc. www.watchman.org/

LDS Temple Endowment www.lds-Mormon.com/veilworker/endowment.shtml

MazeMinistry.com www.mazeministry.com/Mormonism/Mormonism.htm

ExMormon.org www.exMormon.org

Link to even more sights www.utlm.org/navootherwebsites.htm
ExMormon@JesusAnswers.com