

Beth (Ensmenger) Marshall

Buford, Georgia

My Testimony

I am deeply humbled that I have been asked to share my testimony on the Refiner's Fire Ministries website. The fact that I have something to share is evidence of God's faithfulness in answering our prayers when we seek Him. It is my prayer and desire that God will be glorified through all that I've written and that the Holy Spirit will affirm the truthfulness of my words.

My family's history with the RLDS church dates back to 1895. My great-grandparents lived in a small farming community called Lowbanks, which is on the shores of Lake Erie in Ontario, Canada. In February 1895, my great-grandparents and several of their children, including my 9 year old grandmother, were baptized by Elder R.C. Evans. Since it was the middle of winter, they had to chop a hole in the ice on Lake Erie in order to be baptized. They were some of the first members of the church in that area. As the church membership grew over the following years, the need for a church building was realized. My great-grandfather gave a piece of his farm land as the building site for the RLDS Church and it is still in use today as the Community of Christ.

My mother's father was from Buffalo, NY. He was baptized into the RLDS Church in November 1906, a few days before his 21st birthday. He had a great love for the Book of Mormon due to a profound spiritual experience in which it was revealed to him that the Book of Mormon was true even before he read it. For some reason my grandfather never told us what that experience was, maybe it was just too difficult or too overwhelming for him to share with us. However, some years after his death, a family that my grandfather had converted to the church told my mother that he had shared with them the details of that spiritual experience...the angel Moroni had appeared to him. I know the integrity of this family and I do not doubt that what they said could be true. Also, I do not find it hard to believe that my grandfather could have seen an angel, because when he was a boy he saw an angel in his home. He said it was an angel of death, because later that day his baby sister died. I once asked him about that experience and he didn't want to talk about it, it was too difficult for him to speak about even though it had happened about 80 years earlier. I very much regret that I never asked my grandfather to share his conversion story or his testimony regarding the Book of Mormon, for now I would love to know the details. Even though my grandfather died when I was a teenager, I have very fond memories of him; I remember him as a very spiritual man with a deep faith and love for God.

My father joined the RLDS Church when my sister and I were small because he recognized the importance of having a family that was united in their beliefs. He grew up in a strict Bible believing church and therefore had a great love and knowledge of the Bible. Even though he prayed many times for affirmation of the Book of Mormon, he never received a testimony regarding it and couldn't understand why God never affirmed the truth of it to him. Since my father didn't have any testimonies regarding the church, it was my grandfather's great love for the church and the Book of Mormon, and his testimonies and experiences, that were the foundation upon which I based the majority of my beliefs. I was taught and believed that this was the 'true' church, inspired and restored by God, and that it was the only church which had the fullness of the gospel.

As a young adult, I attended Graceland College for two years. It was at Graceland that I met my husband, also a church member. The Lord blessed us with three wonderful children, and naturally we shared our beliefs with them and raised them in the church. I cherished my heritage and the

testimonies of my loved ones, to me they validated the truth of the church and the Book of Mormon, and I have joyfully shared this heritage with my children.

I have always loved God and desired to be close to Him. I would hear people outside of the RLDS Church talk of being born again and of having a close personal relationship with God, but I had no idea what it really meant or how I could have that too. That was something we were never taught or even heard about in the RLDS Church. I remember more than once in my prayers telling God that I desired to have a personal relationship with Him, but that I didn't know how. God was so faithful and answered that longing in my heart. In the fall of 2005, while going through a very difficult time in my life, I reached the point where I was willing to give up control of my life to God and I surrendered everything to Him. I now know that this was what God had been waiting for and had wanted all along, for now the Holy Spirit could have unhindered access to me. The Holy Spirit revealed to me the depth of my sin before God. In my brokenness I repented and asked God not only to forgive my sins but also to put to death everything within me that was contrary to Him and to remake me in the image of Jesus. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit resulted in my spiritual rebirth and I was set free from the bondage of sin. No longer was my knowledge of Jesus based on what I had learned from others and on my own intellectual perceptions, now my knowledge of Jesus was a personal one because He lived inside of me. God totally transformed who I was; I now understood what it meant to be a born again Christian and to have the assurance of salvation. I realized that before my spiritual rebirth I was not saved, even though I had always thought I was. In reality I had been enslaved to sin and in bondage to Satan while trying to live a good Christian life...this is not salvation. Salvation is meant to set us free, not keep us in bondage. During this time of my spiritual rebirth, the Lord brought a dear friend and former church member, Linda Conyers, back into my life. Linda and I have known each other for many years; she was a church member I met while I was a student at Graceland College back in the late 1970s. Over the years Linda had also become a born again Christian and so she recognized my great hunger for the Lord, and she would encourage me in this new relationship I had with Him.

In early March 2009, Linda sent me the pamphlet *Does Truth Really Matter?* from LifeLine Ministries to RLDS. I read it with some interest, and while it didn't persuade me that any of my beliefs were wrong or cause me to change my views regarding the RLDS/Community of Christ Church, it did cause me to examine the basis for my beliefs. I had to admit that I had never once asked God if any of it was true, and I've never had a testimony of my own affirming the church or the Book of Mormon. While I tried to defend my beliefs to her, Linda brought attention to the fact that all of my sources for spiritual food since becoming a born again believer were all from outside of the RLDS/Community of Christ Church and that there was a reason for this. Linda then sent me the link to Refiner's Fire Ministries and she encouraged me to seek the truth about my church beliefs. At that time I wasn't ready to look at the website, as I didn't want to be persuaded by the thoughts of others. I decided if any of my church beliefs were wrong, I wanted God to be the one to tell me...though at that point I was sure He was going to give me a testimony that affirmed my beliefs and the truth of the church.

So I began to earnestly pray each day for God to affirm the following to me: that Joseph Smith was a prophet called by Him and the church he founded was God's true church restored to earth, and that the Book of Mormon and the Inspired Version of the Bible were scriptures inspired by Him. As a born again Christian, I had developed a personal and intimate relationship with God and I had grown to trust His faithfulness in answering my prayers when I earnestly and diligently sought Him. Therefore I had no doubts that He would answer my prayers. But by June, after three months of praying, I had not received any affirmation from God, just silence. So I became filled with anguish at the realization that maybe His silence meant He couldn't validate that which I was asking and had always believed to be true.

I then felt God leading me to look at the Refiner's Fire Ministries website. For a week I spent every spare moment I had devouring all of the information on the site and all of the testimonies. Even though I could easily believe what everyone was saying, I still found it very confusing because there were some things (like my grandfather's strong faith in the church and his testimonies that I believed validated the church) that made it difficult for me to totally let go of my beliefs. I still wanted and needed God to reveal His truth to me directly. As I became more confused and torn about my beliefs I began crying out to God to reveal the truth to me; I just wanted to know the truth and be set free from the terrible inner turmoil I was experiencing.

By Sunday, June 14, 2009, I had the answer to my prayers. That weekend, God brought three things together all connected with the same theme...it all had to do with the *angel*. On the Refiner's Fire Ministries website I read the article telling the similarities between Joseph Smith and Mohammed. Although I found the similarities to be quite disturbing, for some reason the part that seemed to stand out to me the most was the fact that they had both been visited by an *angel*. Then, out of nowhere, this refrain started playing over and over in my head: "Then praise the Lord, O my soul! Abundant mercy, oh how free! In joyful song my spirit doth accord, Since the precious *angel* message came to me." When I went to bed that Saturday night it was there, I awoke several times in the night and it was still there, and upon awakening Sunday morning it was the first thing in my thoughts. The words and melody were so familiar, but yet I couldn't place what hymn it was from. I finally found it in my husband's old pocket edition hymnal that he had used at camps and reunions when he was growing up. The refrain was from the old restoration hymn "I Have Found the Glorious Gospel." It continued to haunt me throughout the day, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get it out of my head! Then what solidified the whole thing was a verse from Galatians that was brought to my mind later that same day. In Galatians 1:8 Paul gives the following warning to the churches in Galatia so they would not be deceived by false gospels: "But though we, or an *angel* from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." I had always been taught that the gospel preached by Joseph Smith, the RLDS Church, and the Community of Christ was the fullness of the gospel that had been lost through the ages, which therefore legitimized its being different from that which was preached by the New Testament apostles. By that evening I just knew that God was telling me that what I believed wasn't true; the message the *angel* brought to Joseph Smith was that of another gospel, a false gospel...this was exactly what the Apostle Paul had warned about! I realized that a false gospel's purpose is not to keep people from knowing about God and Jesus, but to deceive them with fraudulent doctrine that blinds them to Biblical truth and jeopardizes their salvation. Since a false gospel is not of God, I had to come to terms with the fact that the only one who could have authored this was Satan. It states in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 "...for Satan himself is transformed into an *angel* of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness..." Even though I was horrified at the realization of the truth and that I had been deceived my whole life, it felt like a huge weight had finally been lifted off my shoulders and I felt so free. How grateful I was for God's faithfulness in answering my prayers as I sought the truth. I awoke the next morning filled with unspeakable joy and that joy has remained with me.

Since that day in June when I accepted the truth, I have spent countless hours in prayer and study. What a hunger and thirst I have for deep spiritual understanding and for the truth. God has filled this longing in me by opening the floodgates to reveal so many things that had previously been hidden from me and I have grown so much spiritually. It's as if a veil has been lifted and I can now see things so clearly...I marvel at how blind I was before! I have read Paul Trask's books *Part Way to Utah: the Forgotten Mormons* and *The Long Way Home*, Carol Hansen's book *RLDS Church: Is It Christian?*, and Peter Elliott's book *Reasons for Disbelief*. I have also read everything on the LifeLine Ministries to RLDS website and watched the DVD *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*. These resources have

been a tremendous help to me as I have sought to learn and understand the true history of the church. Also, the Bible has never been dearer to me as I now see the truth so clearly and know that I am reading God's word...what a joy to be set free from the false doctrine contained in the Inspired Version.

Through this experience I have also learned many valuable lessons. One of those lessons is that I will never again blindly believe someone's testimony, even if they are a beloved member of my family. Now when I hear a testimony I seek God in prayer and study the Bible to see whether the testimony correlates with that which is written in the Word of God. If it is different, I do not accept it as coming from God.

Also, I now know that salvation doesn't come through any one denomination, it is the gift of God through Jesus Christ's redemptive work on the cross. The Bible tells us that salvation is available to all who are willing to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. This acceptance involves repentance of sin and a complete surrender of one's will and one's life to Christ. Without complete surrender, the Holy Spirit cannot accomplish His work of sanctification within us to set us free from the bondage of sin by replacing our sin nature with the divine nature of Christ. Jesus tells us in John 3 that this spiritual rebirth must occur within us or we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. As I referenced earlier in my testimony, I know first hand that this spiritual rebirth is possible for I have experienced it and have been made a new person in Christ. It states in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Even though I was a born again believer before I ever learned the truth about the church, my salvation and my relationship with Christ are even dearer to me now that I know the truth. Christ has set me free not only from the bondage of my sins, but also from the bondage of Satan's lies and deceptions. I am so grateful...I owe Him everything.

I am so very thankful for my dear friend, Linda, and her willingness to take the chance to expose me to the truth about the RLDS Church. I know she has spent much time praying for me over the years...how grateful I am for God's faithfulness in answering her prayers. I am also thankful to Linda for her guidance once I accepted the truth; her support has been invaluable to me. How wonderful it is to have a dear sister in the Lord, who knows and understands where I have come from. She told me that one day I would even be glad that I grew up in the RLDS Church because it makes us more aware of God's truth and we are able to help others who are living in deception. Linda was right. The truth is so precious to me now, and I wouldn't understand just how precious the truth is if I had never been deceived. For five generations, from my great-grandparents to my children, my family has been held in bondage to Satan's deceptions due to our belief in Joseph Smith and the teachings of the RLDS Church. My heart is filled with anguish not only for the souls of my loved ones, but for all the souls Satan has enslaved to him through false beliefs.

In preparing this testimony, I thought of the other testimonies on this site and I marvel at the variety of ways that God uses to reveal the truth to each of us. No two of us share the same experience. I love the fact that God chose the angel as the means to reveal the truth to me, since it was that very thing that Satan used to deceive my grandfather! I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. It is my heartfelt desire that my words will reach to the depths of your soul and set you on a quest of seeking God and His truth. As John 8:32 says "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

You can send Beth an e-mail at setfree@alwaysthankful.com