

9 More Lessons Learned - Overcoming a Crisis of Faith

By Rich Millar 3/3/2016

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1. Everyone has or will experience a crisis of faith of some level in their life.

You'll have to wrestle with questions in your own mind, and no one is immune to this experience. Whoever your spiritual giants and heroes are in your life, that you look to — whether it be the prophet or the Brethren or one of the church leaders or a leader you have in your ward or a family member or a parent — I would say that all of these people have become great spiritually or strong spiritually by overcoming a crisis of faith on some level. So if you are going through a crisis of faith, know that you are not alone and that there are many who have walked this path before you. Don't be afraid or ashamed of it.

I think one of the big things I learned from this experience was, this is part of the plan, this is part of life, having doubts and overcoming them. There are so many people who have struggled or who are struggling with the same thing, and yet it's part of our culture ... to not talk about it. I think people struggle silently because they don't open up. And it's not that we need to air all our dirty laundry and talk about our problems all the time, because that's not healthy either; but I've found that it's OK to express doubt and to talk things through with people and to know that you're not alone.

You're not the first and you probably won't be the last who will go through a crisis of faith, and probably every spiritual giant and hero that you look to has walked this path on some level. They have wrestled with doubts and they have overcome those doubts. There's hope in knowing that, and knowing that this path or this journey doesn't have to end with you abandoning your faith. It oftentimes and for many people ends with them stronger within their faith.

2. No one will be able to "talk" or "convince" you into a testimony.

Looking back at my spiritual journey I came to realize that no one was going to be able to persuade me of the truth. I was too stubborn. I had to learn for myself through searching, pondering, and following the Spirit. I had countless people close to me try to reason with me and help me understand the path I was headed down. But I was ALWAYS able to rationalize my way out of the conversation and intellectually (at least in my mind) win the argument. Ultimately, it wasn't someone else telling me and showing me the facts that lead to me coming back. I had to come to the understanding myself. It wasn't until I had personal experiences (through small whisperings of the spirit) that I realized that what these people had been saying all along was

right, but I wasn't letting it sink in. I wouldn't allow it to. I had read too much and thought through it all. In some ways I really think I had become "past feeling" and the Spirit was having a hard time reaching me.

You are going to have to come to your own conclusion and understanding in your own time. It will have to come from inside. And I'm not saying you'll experience this in any way, but I know I did, so as a word of warning just remember that fear, anger, resentment, cynicism or any other similar feeling never leads to truth or anything else good. Stay close to light and truth. Again, no one, I repeat NO ONE will be able to "talk" or "convince" you into a testimony...that's not the way it was ever meant to be, or will ever be. True conversion comes from exercising faith and listening to the spirit.

3. Don't ignore small promptings from the Spirit.

This is how God talks to you and answers your prayers. For many, the first step in the crisis of faith is to lose their belief in everything, including God. You feel betrayed or lost, or as if God hasn't held up His end of the bargain. And so you begin to doubt His existence. At least that's what happened to me. But I came to realize that I was holding God to expectations I had set on Him, but these were terms He had never agreed to.

At the time, I professed to having an open heart and mind and told myself, "If God is there, He'll let me know and help me find answers. He'll find a way to show me the church is true. He knows my heart and knows I want to know." But in actuality, I wasn't humble enough to listen to answers He WAS giving me at that time because I wanted something big and miraculous. Looking back, it is very clear and plain to see. But at the time I had hardened my heart and was "past feeling," as it says in the scriptures. I was so blinded by my cynicism and desire to pick at every little thing I could find, I was unable to see what was right in front of me.

I'm not saying this is the case with everyone, but I know for me that I often wanted/expected something large or grand in answer to my prayers...a sign, or angelic visitation. I came to realize from reading the scriptures and talks from the brethren that these experiences are exceptions to the rule, not the rule. That I would be more likely to receive an answer through a small prompting from the spirit or through a friend or family member that the Lord was using as an instrument. I've always been fascinated by this quote from Hugh Nibley, "If you pray for an angel to visit you, you know what he'll do if he comes. He'll just quote the scriptures to you—so you're wasting your time waiting for what we already have."

I came to understand that He WAS already talking to me and had been telling me what to do, I was just ignoring those impressions and promptings. I'm not saying this is everyone but this is what I experienced. There were so many times and different experiences where I felt I should do

this or that, or not do this or that, but I dismissed them as dumb and didn't follow through. I've come to realize that the Spirit is indeed a still small voice (as clearly stated in the scriptures) and that many of the small good, positive impressions I get in my head (that I often equated to my own random thoughts) were from Him.

And I've found that the more I act on these very small (at first) promptings from the spirit (or the little voice inside your head) and act on them, over and over and over, they become stronger and clearer and more frequent in nature.

4. The Brethren and the leadership within the church are not perfect, and that's OK.

They're fallible, and some people want to say that because they make mistakes they can't be inspired and they can't be directed by God. If people believe this then they also can't believe in the scriptures, because if you read about the prophets of old and you look at their interactions with God, it is clear that they constantly made mistakes. But they were still called to be a mouthpiece for God and he still chose to use them. Why? Because that's all God has to work with, imperfect people.

If they're right 999 times out of 1,000, your odds are much better in life following the council of the Brethren than any other option. This doesn't diminish their calling and God's call for us to follow them. If you are looking for a perfect people and perfect leaders, you will never find them, not in this life.

5. You're never going to gain a testimony through historical evidence.

If there are people who are struggling with historical things within the church — things that happened in the church's past — and that's affecting their testimony, I would say that you're never going to gain a testimony through historical evidence. And that kind of goes back to point number two. It has to come from following promptings from the Spirit.

And oftentimes people think that is a cop-out answer, but it's not. It is the way it was intended to be. Heavenly Father doesn't want to prove to you historically that the church is true. He could do it if he wanted to, but he won't allow it because that's not how faith is built. That's not how it works. An essential part of the Plan is to walk by faith. So if you're searching through that mechanism, through that means, you're never going to find it. I believe that's because Heavenly Father intends it to be that way.

6. Don't let what you don't know keep you from following what you do know.

I've talked about this before, but it's so important I want to stress it again. This is so common,

and something I fell for. Often times people want to know everything. They want an answer to every question that they have in life, and that's just not reality. There's no one, literally no one on this earth that has an answer to everything. So there are going to be questions that will go unanswered. You must learn to follow what you do know without knowing everything and be OK with it. That's part of the plan. Don't stress the small stuff and get lost in the weeds.

7. Align yourself spiritually.

The closer you get to the Spirit, the easier everything becomes. Avoid all things that would drive away or offend the spirit. The spirit by its very nature is extremely sensitive towards anything that is not uplifting, positive and full of light. And the spirit will remove itself quickly from any situation that is not such. Pay attention to the media you consume (music, videos, pictures, movies, books, blogs, websites, etc.) and the people and environments you surround yourself with. All of us can think of times we shouldn't have gone to that place, hung out with that crowd, watched that movie, listening to that song...the list goes on. Again, this is the spirit prompting you to stay away.

Conversely, surround yourself with things that will bring the Spirit. The more that you do that the easier it becomes to get your testimony back and to do the things you need to do, because then the Spirit is able to talk to you more clearly and prompt you.

For me as I aligned myself spiritually, over the following days, weeks and months, the same light that began leaving, began to return. It's interesting what happens when this process begins. Your desire to gain more light and knowledge grows while you're simultaneously drawn to things with more light and they are drawn to you. It reminds me of one of my first days in a chemistry class in college. The professor explained to us that like molecules were naturally drawn to each other. "Like attracts like, even at a molecular level." Isn't that interesting? Like molecules, objects, people and spirits are naturally drawn to each other. The more lightness or darkness you have, the more you will draw that same likeness to you. It's a universal principle.

Getting, keeping and following the Spirit is probably the most essential thing you can focus on. Then have the courage and the desire to follow the promptings of the Spirit. And if you do that, everything will work out because that's the key, and the Spirit will tell you what you need to do.

8. Remove yourself from any sin.

If you're currently involved in any sin, stop and remove yourself from it. Begin the repentance process. Oftentimes — not always, but oftentimes — sin accompanies a crisis of faith. As I've talked with people I feel like there is this idea that oftentimes people sin and then that leads them to doubt their faith because they want to justify their sins. For me, the opposite was true. I

intellectually went going down this path of losing my faith, and that led me to sinning. It doesn't necessarily have to happen one after the other, but eventually they usually go hand-in-hand. And again, sinning in all forms just drives the Spirit away which makes it that much easier to justify your behavior and doubt.

9. Turn to your local church leaders.

A lot of people who reach out to me are dealing with something personal. I try to help them as much as I can and give them advice, but at the end of the day, we have been given leaders within the church who are inspired to help us. They have been given keys to help us, so I always tell people that they should talk to their local leaders to help them through their process. Be honest and open with them, they are there to help.

That's not to say that every experience you have will be positive. Again, leadership within the church is not perfect, so your bishop or leader may not handle your situation the best — remember they are imperfect people just like you, trying their best to follow the spirit, but they are still learning, we're all learning.

Despite this, work with your leaders, and if talking with one leader doesn't work, talk with another leader and try to find someone locally who can help you. That's why the church is structured the way that it is so that we can lift where we stand. There are people around you who are there to help you, who want to help you.

Note from compiler: This lesson 10 was from Rich's original 18 lessons learned, but I liked it so much I included it here as well.

Lesson No. 10: You get as much out of something as you put in

“It's true of everything in life. Riding the fence never helps you actually come to a solid conclusion and never allows you to see the full potential benefits. You've got to commit, jump in with both feet before you can know one way or another. In school, you can show up to class and sit through it, 'ride the fence,' but never actually get anything out of it. And it all starts with your attitude. If you go into a situation with a bad attitude, you'll likely leave thinking your time was wasted. But a positive attitude and open mind will produce the opposite effect.

“The same is true of the gospel and church. I know lots of people who went to church, either at a young age, or maybe they're still going to church now. But their attitude was or is negative. They're just going through the motions, riding the fence, but never have actually committed. It's no surprise that these people see very little value in living the gospel or going to church and usually never have a shortage of negative things to say about their experience. This pains my heart more than anything because these people ultimately end up leaving the faith (usually at a

young age) without ever really giving it a chance. And by doing so, they leave not truly understanding what they're leaving behind.

“I can't tell you how many people I've had conversations with who profess to having had a bad experience with the LDS faith but have never truly lived it or tried it. It's no surprise that they got as much out of it as they put in.”