The Loss and Rekindling of Faith — Panel Summary

**Bill Reel:** First off all the speakers today have been, as they’ve been giving their presentations, been looking out over at you which I’m trying to do the same thing but we can’t see you because the spotlight is in our eyes so it’s all a mirage that we actually are looking into your eyes and talking to you.

My name is Bill Reel. I am the host of Mormon Discussion Podcast. It is a podcast that deals with those struggling with faith and faith crisis and I’m grateful for the opportunity to moderate this panel discussion. We have three panelists today, and I hope to participate a little as well, but we have to my immediate right is Janet Eyring. Next to her is Don Bradley who you’ve already heard from, and to his right is Maxine Hanks who just got done speaking to us.

I’m going to turn the time over to each of them to share a brief bio of themselves so that you can get a feel for them, and then we’ll go from there. Janet Eyring, the time is yours.

**Janet Eyring:** Ok, to give a little background on my family, I’m a niece of Spencer W. Kimball and a cousin of Henry Eyring. I went to elementary school in Berkeley, California, and junior high and high school in Moraga, across the hill. I graduated from Brigham Young University in 1976 with a major in Spanish and a minor in English as a second language. I went on a mission to Toronto, Canada and when I returned taught ESL for five years in Utah, and then went back to California to the Los Angeles area and after completing my masters and doctoral degrees at UCLA I trained ESL teachers at Cal State Fullerton for the past twenty-four years.

My crisis of faith began as a child and it was not resolved until I was about forty-six years old.

**Don Bradley:** I’m Don Bradley, I’m a writer and editor and completing a masters in history at Utah State. I have a bachelors in history from BYU. I did my first church history at the LDS archives when I was seventeen, and I was for some reason the only seventeen year old there, I don’t know [audience laughter]. I sort of gradually accumulated a lot of things that I had found that were different that I had started with and eventually that, to oversimplify greatly, caused a rupture in my faith. I spent about five years in the church still active most of the time but not believing, and then I left the church officially. I had my name removed from the records, was out of the church for five years, and then through a combination of things that I’ll say a little bit more about later I was re-baptized three years ago. Maxine actually led the music at my baptism even though she was at the time not a member of the church. I asked the ward mission leader, I said, “Does the person who leads the music have to be a member of the church?” and he said “No”, so I didn’t mention that she was
excommunicated [audience laughter] and I was able to participate in her baptism as well so we’re great friend.

**Maxine Hanks:** Let’s see you’ve already heard from me but I thought I would just add that I was inactive for about ten years then I was excommunicated for twenty so I was kind of out of the church for about twenty-eight years. I was an active believing member for about twenty-eight years, so half of my life was in and half of my life was out and I happened to come back right at the point when they were perfectly equal so I feel like I have the perspective of both: a lifetime member, a descendant of eighteen Mormon pioneers, and I also have the perspective of a convert. I like that, I mean I truly feel like both, la “lifer” and a convert, and it’s a nice perspective to have.

Another thing that really helped me was my friendship with Don because in our journey’s, which were parallel, and we met each other when we were both kind of out there doing a lot of critical inquiry, we began the intensive discussions about Joseph Smith and about Mormonism in order to wrestle with our own issues and concerns and questions and doubts. Through that wrestling that Don and I both did, which was very deep and very authentic, I can attest to the fact that his return and my return are absolutely sincere because we wrestled with everything and we did it for years. Don helped me to come back by being there and wrestling with me and he confirmed me when I was baptized.

**Bill Reel:** So, just a little bit about me... I’m thirty-four years old and I joined the church at seventeen... and I’m the only member in my family... I live in Sandusky, Ohio which is next to Cedar Point, America’s biggest roller-coaster park. Her is the thing... All three of them, and me, we’ve all had a major faith crisis, and I had mine while serving as a bishop for the church which is kind of unique... It was after that faith crisis and coming through it that I began the podcast... Hopefully today we can talk a little bit about the journey of a faith crisis... I know in the two days that I have been here no less than five people among you have shared with me that you have a son, or a daughter, or a brother or a sister who has left the church over challenges, and I think the problem is prevalent.

I would say that while FAIR’s responsibility is to defend the Church, I would remind each of us that are members of the Church we are to strengthen the feeble knees and lift the hands that hang down... And with that let’s begin

**Let me start off with Don Bradley and then if anybody wants to add to this, please feel free... How would you describe your faith and testimony prior to your faith crisis?**

**Don:** Well, this answer might be surprising: My loss of faith was very gradual, it was piecemeal. Before that began, I would say I had a strong testimony... I had spiritual experiences, which were quite strong. What happened over time was I came to not trust my own experiences, and I came to reinterpret them as being from me, perhaps being some illusion, rather than from God.
Bill: Either of you two? If not I would just add to that, very much like Don, and I would add something too. Each of our journeys are different. So I hope you don’t see faith crisis as this little box that we could go and just write a handbook for and fix—I would add that when I joined the Church at 17, I encountered Fawn Brodie’s “No Man Knows My History”, before I joined the Church, and had answered all my questions (about the book). But I had come up with a very dogmatic, very black and white way of seeing the world, and it was at that point years later that the pieces no longer fit in my puzzle, so things crashed, and I had to kind of put things back together.

Maxine maybe you could start us off and tell us what caused your faith crisis, maybe initially, what sent it in that direction?

Maxine: I was a very devoted believing member and I served a LDS Mission. I think the first crack in that picture was when serving as a missionary and encountering sexist attitude towards the sister missionaries. That was really hard on me. I came back a little disillusioned, even though I had a very successful mission, enjoyed myself, and made great friendships while I was out there, and I am still close to a number of those Elders and Sisters today. I came back from my mission troubled, really troubled, because I had grown up in a ward and stake where they sort of let me have every leadership position I wanted. In the mission field I encountered this brick wall kind of inequality, which I wasn’t used to. When I came back from my mission, I went to BYU, which is when I delved into all the historical problems and issues. I actually encountered my crisis of faith 10 years before sort of everyone else did in the 90’s.

From 1981 to 1983 I encountered all of the problems everybody is talking about, you know, historicity, things Joseph did, Polygamy, all of it, Book of Mormon, Book of Abraham, you name it. I lost faith in the institution and I lost faith in the Church. Then in 1983, I went through a series of a couple of really difficult surgeries for endometriosis. And I lost my faith in God. So I really went through a complete crisis of Faith in the early 80’s which is why I moved across the street (from the Utah Valley Convention Center) to be alone with my faith crisis.

Janet: My faith crisis was definitely not a behavioral thing, like “I really want to smoke” or that I had any social misgivings about the Bishop or someone in the ward that I didn’t like. Mine was more of an intellectual one and I don’t think there was any event per say that caused the crisis, but ultimately was from the fact that I was a seeker from a very early age. I was raised in Berkeley California, in the Berkeley 1stWard. If you knew that era, people like Hugh Nibley, Richard Anderson, and Spencer Palmer were all in that Ward, and kind of set the tone for academic discussion. It seemed a natural part of things in the church to me. My mother was also a very inquisitive person, so critical thinking was always from a young age went hand in hand with spiritual matters. I guess one could say I was a doubter and a contrarian from a really early age. My husband has said a kind of Analysis paralysis
is my problem, so I guess it has been with me since age 11 or 12. I remember asking my parents questions like, “Did Joseph Smith actually see God”, “Why is a true book like the Book of Mormon so boring, a true book, how can it be so boring? Why does it include identical sections to the Bible??

How can uncle Spencer Kimball be a prophet when he seems normal like you and me?

I ended up going to BYU majoring in Spanish and I remember being asked by my BYU Bishop to come out of the audience to bear my testimony and I know he was anticipating a very strong testimony from an Eyring. An honest person, that I was, stood up and said “I thought the Church was true but I wasn’t sure. Before I could say much more, I was pulled away from the podium, like a stage actor with the Vaudeville hook, probably to keep me from doing any further damage that day.

I went on a mission to Toronto Canada, in hopes of securing a real testimony. I put my whole heart and soul into it, sincerely loving the Canadians and even the anti-Mormon one who packed me with information about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon that I had never heard before. There I felt I’d received an answer to prayer that Joseph Smith was a fraud and that the Church was not true. I asked my Mission President to allow me go home three months early, because I was really feeling like a hypocrite. He persuaded me to stay, and I am very grateful for that, but that was the beginning of my journey of 20 years outside the Church.

**Bill:** Don, any thoughts you want to add beyond what the two of them have said?

**Don:** It was in my history research, making new findings, that were different from what I had understood what I thought the things should be, and not knowing how to reconcile all of this, and also as I mentioned earlier, just basically losing faith in revelations so that I thought that there was basically one way of knowing and that way was intellectual analysis. If I couldn’t show that something was true in that way then I felt like I had no reason to believe that.

**Bill:** I want to ask the next question, which is a neat insight into what made you susceptible to a faith crisis, and the reason I want to ask this, there are lots of people, I’m sure in this room even, having talked to several members of FAIR who are aware of all the difficult issues, but never ever run into a faith crisis. For me, and maybe for you three as well, I found that very strange to hear. How can you encounter these things and never struggle over them? I wonder if any of you three could add any insight into what made you susceptible to it?

**What made you susceptible to a faith crisis?**

**Jan:** I don’t think I was any different than any other Mormon, other then maybe a little more earnest, a little more analytical, a little less emotional. I’d been taught the Glory of God is intelligence, and that we should seek for truth and the Mormon Church holds the Truth. Isn’t this the substance of every testimony meeting, someone saying they know the Church is true? To me it is no wonder an
educated Mormon could lose her faith, if key points that have been taught, were modified and had to be rethought. It came later but at the time, maybe things were not so true as I had been taught them to be. It didn’t matter how nice Mormons were, I had always liked Mormons, that wasn’t the problem, or how strongly family members believed. That wouldn’t be enough to keep me in the Church. I needed my own knowledge. I was disturbed by discovery like the multiple first vision stories, Joseph Smith the Glass looker, and similarities of the Masonic Ceremonies and the Temple. I have to say I was invited to be on this panel, and I had never read Michael Ash’s book, but I read it before I got here, and I have to say that book “Shaken Faith Syndrome” does a very good job of describing the cognitive dissonance that I felt, and it details all of my problematic areas and actually more. Coincidentally I think he is right onto something for people like me.

**Bill:** Did you find that the common thread in most, not all as I think the lady earlier—today—(Rosalynde Welch) spoke about a totally different type of doubting or journey, so I am not putting everybody in the same boat, but I would say a lot of faith crisis revolve around finding these historical issues. I’ll add one thought to that question, which is a lot of time we make the assumption that people who have a faith crisis, they start off very naive to the issues, and then when they encounter any of this history, they struggle, but just to throw a contradiction to that, having read “No Man Knows my History”, having spent time on “Book of Mormon Answerman” on the New Jerusalem web site, if any of you remember that old site years ago—FAIR when it first started off. Jeff Lindsay, I was aware of all that stuff. It wasn’t until years later when all of a sudden the foundation I had built on, bad assumptions and expectations had fallen apart. Had I had somebody to talk to, I don’t think it would of happened. But here’s the problem, when I joined at 17, by the time I am even 18 or 19, I am the person everybody in the Ward is saying has the answers. People in the stake were coming to me, missionaries outside of our Ward were coming to me for answers on questions. I was throwing at them Chiasmus and writings on other metal plates and I had all that information, but I had nobody to talk to when I was struggling and I was afraid that One— I would hurt somebody’s feelings or open a can of worms for them. I was afraid that somebody would be ever critical. I would say for those who are struggling, a lot of members are afraid to talk about it. They are sensitive to Church leaders being tough on them, and while I think most Church leaders are loving and kind, there are at time people who don’t know how to handle faith crisis when someone comes to them. The other thing is I don’t know who else knows these things so I am scared to death I am going to give them a faith crisis by going to them and asking them about polygamy or asking them the tough questions. So I think when we talk about historical issues be aware of that. People who are struggling need somebody to talk to.

**Maxine:** It is a curious thing how somebody can encounter all of the same information faith destroying testimony, faith destroying information, and it’s not an issue for them at all, it doesn’t even
take them to that place. Other people become consumed with that search. It is not easy to categorize because it doesn’t fall along the lines of sort of scholarly learned intellectual and non-scholarly. And it doesn’t fall along the lines of those who are inquisitive and driven versus people who take things more easily or care free. It’s really hard to figure out why some people are just not provoked and engaged by that permeation and others are. I just know that some people have to wrestle with it and sort of take them all the way down to the ground and wrestle until your spent and other people don’t and I don’t have an answer for that. I was someone who had to wrestle with that. We are all different.

Don: Elder Oaks had spoken before about how our strengths can be our downfall. There’s a saying that to a man with a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Having a good analytical hammer, I tried to apply it to basically everything. Also, I think one thing that often indicates that isn’t easily recognized, people who often have intellectual doubts, it isn’t that they haven’t taken the Church seriously enough, but they’ve taken it so seriously they’ve been willing to dig deeper than people usually are so they encounter more difficult information then others have encountered.

I want to combine two questions together here. We talked about what initiated it, how we were before we run into these problems as far as our faith being structured, but now let’s start to work towards a turnaround. So the two questions are what initiated this turn around within each of you to begin moving back towards the Church, and then a second part to that question, who was a help in that process among maybe family, friends, or a church Leader?

Don: I must be a complex person as my journey was complex and it came in stages. The first step back towards the Church was just in recognizing the good, in having to acknowledge the good that it did in the lives of other people around me. For instance my friend Brian Hales, whom I think is out there signing books right now. I was doing work for him. He was just so generous and recognized how much the gospel gave him, peace in his life. I also started to take seriously again that there were other ways of knowing, then just analysis. That there might be spiritual ways of gaining truth. As I continued to dig deeper in Church History, I dug through all of these layers of difficult things and finally I got down to where the gold was. I found really beautiful, good things in Church History that helped me to return.

Maxine: It was bigger than me, it was larger forces in my life and recognizing them, it was God working in my life and my sense of destiny. I am very much aware of my life, and I try to encourage other people to look at their live this way, because I think it’s true of all of us. But I am very aware of my life as sort of something as destined, it has a pattern and a purpose to it. And I am always, always understand the current circumstances in light of the larger purpose and destiny. So every step of the way in my life when I was Mormon, and then when I was disillusioned, when I was inactive, and then when I was excommunicated, and then when I was pursuing ministry studies and
interfaith studies and all of that. I was always seeking to understand? Path, is this where I am supposed to be, Is this my destiny. I have always felt guided, and led in that way. My return to the Church, I would have to say, was really prompted by God, and you know larger forces and my own sense of destiny. In recognizing the signs, in recognizing it was time to come back and recognizing the divine hand in directing me. That this was the next phase of my journey and destiny.

Janet: I wanted to fill in just a little bit after I decided the Church wasn't true. I pretty much left cold turkey. I didn’t have many associations, there were a few Sunstone friends I kept in touch with. I was also a target of some born again evangelical missionaries that you may or may not know, but they are in Utah County looking for people just like us. I continued my spiritual search. I didn’t give up believing in God. I made associations with Jews, Hindus, and Muslims, and Protestants, wanting to learn what I could. I actively spoke against the Mormon Church, criticized the Leaders, the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith. I believed that most Mormons were deluded, simple minded, and self-righteous. So you can see my arrogance here, I think. Who helped? I think that was your question. It wasn’t so much that I felt guilty about breaking commandments, cause In fact I felt I had received an answer to leave the Church but I do feel that just kind of living, experiencing things, I felt the natural effect of my poor choices. I missed opportunities for service, lost the chance to have children, experienced weakened ties.

I think had many sins of omission, of which you’re aware of, not so much commission, things weren’t getting taken care of. I am just going to say there were four key people for me. A friend of mine who was involved with Sunstone was the only Mormon I felt I could contact, and he invited me to meet some other single friends who were Mormon. With him I had a glimmer of hope I could retrieve, rethink, and repair what had been seriously broken over time. I had a brother in Law who came to Southern California and he somehow suggested I go to a Church Dance. That seemed a lot easier than going to a three hour meeting. I did go there and I did discover some co-dependent and some mentally ill people, but more then that I saw some older singles like myself who also had experienced the pains and disappointments of life. Some never married, other divorced, widowed, others disabled, yet all seeking to find answers in the community of believers. And I felt deeply humbled by that experience. And believe it or not, I had a home teacher who would not give up. He and his wife came regularly for several years. The Church always finds you where you are. They gave me the courage to try sacrament meeting and have a place to sit. It was very, very uncomfortable. At that point, I began to see an opening that maybe I could become active, and I did make an appointment with my Bishop and tearfully repented and then reanalyzed to be immature, naive, and simplistic reaching beyond the mark view of the gospel of Christ.

Every question didn’t need to be tidally answered when seeing through a glass darkly when that is all most of us ever get. When I came to myself when you think of the prodigal son in Luke Chapter
15, that I sinned against heaven and was dead, and I was dead spiritually. I saw the light again because I was lost and now I was found. I assure you that those words during my anti Mormon days would never have crossed my lips. At age 48 I married a Mormon, a faithful Mormon, because I didn’t intend to ever leave the Church again. It is too painful to remember the old life and I am too happy in my new one learning to love people in the Church of all ethnic backgrounds, all ages, all walks of life. Church is a marvelous community.

**Bill:** I just wanted to add one thing to that. I wasn’t much of one to go on discussion boards, I would use some internet sites. I was at my peak of serving faithfully as a Bishop, and I am angry and bitter and I feel like I have been deceived and the Church betrayed me. So I go online to a discussion board and I start asking discussions and I ask them in a tough way because I am angry and right away several people assume I am a critic of the Church trying to string them along with all of these question. But there was one person who private messaged me off to the side and said, “Hey I really want to understand where you’re coming from”. I think so often we want to jump to conclusions about people, but we ought to just slow down and really see what their motives are. The outward behavior may have nothing to do with what is going on in the heart, and we ought to slow down people.

I want to spend about 10 more minutes here trying to address a couple of important questions and at that point I can see there are a lot of questions you want to ask, which is wonderful.

**What had to change in your framework, to allow for a return to faith?**

**Don:** So one thing that has been mentioned already, is being open other ways of knowing, spiritual ways of knowing. In other ways, not trying to put God in my box. Not seeing that God has to operate in certain parameters. I am content now to let God be God and I’ll be Don. However he wants to work is up to him. So I am not setting up artificial boundaries that I used to say no, this can’t be God’s way. I was becoming open to new questions, questions. Each time you ask a question, it focuses your attention somewhere, and the questions I was asking weren’t getting anywhere and keeping me where I was. I was not very happy. They were giving me a view, like in my research, I was asking questions about Joseph Smith who was the primary object of my research. Like cynical questions like “What was in it for him?” about anything that he did. Think about it, if with anyone you know, if you were to always have the question in mind with everything that person did, “What’s in it for him,” or “What’s in it for her?” What would your relationship be like? How would you end up viewing that person by expanding out and ask different questions. Also essential for me was just, I think it’s remarkable, what can change as we become happier, like I am so much happier now then I was, when I lost my faith. Part of that has been the return and the place that I am at. Part of that change of my growing in happiness happened first, which I think was essential, because when we are unhappy, it focuses us on negative things. We get ourselves
trapped. What happened is I worked on becoming a more grateful person, gravitated toward thinking about the people I was grateful to. As I became happier, I was able to think more clearly and see more possibilities in my life, including my faith. Things I hadn’t thought before could work, could work.

Bill: What kind of assumptions did each of you make or do people make that can lead to a loss of Faith?

Maxine: I think it is really unique, different for different people. It is really hard to know or predict what is going to be a trigger for somebody because we are all such complex beings. We relate to information in different ways. I have a hard time answering that. I think you stumped me Bill.

I’d like to go back to the previous question.

My framework has changed so many times during that 28 years, I had started out a true believer and then went through the shattering of everything, Church and God and was an atheist for about 7 years and then I was agnostic for three years. The issues were literalistic issues, historical issues and now if things didn’t literally line up, I was going to believe them. I shifted into the realm of symbol and transcendence and really understanding the symbolic and archetypal and the psychological realm. It was a type of shift from the materialistic to the psychological realm, things started making a lot more sense and Mormonism got a whole lot more interesting to me. When I was looking at it from a unifying lens and a unifying view.

I began to see Joseph myth as a perfect example of someone who is entering the divine transcendent collective unconscious doorway within himself every day. I mean Joseph Smith is someone who is entering that collective unconscious and his higher self and his transcendent self, constantly served 24/7 trying to bring back information and vision and insights and can put them into material form constantly into texts and scriptures and revelations and buildings. That was really powerful for me. Then I shifted as Don’s was describing, really this spiritual paradigm, where you realize religion and a relationship with God is really about the spiritual. It’s beyond the physical, it’s beyond the psychological, it really in the realm of spirit. It is a different realm to be operating from.

That’s what brought me back. Because I see the divine in having and operating and living through the Church and I remember I used to attend the Christmas Concert, the Tabernacle Choir Christmas concert every December, with the inner-faith roundtable. This is before I came back to the Church. Then I had shifted into that spiritual paradigm where I am trying to perceive things spiritually instead of temporally. There were times when I was sitting in the audience and I experienced a visionary experience when the tabernacle choir’s singing, that I experienced realms of angels sitting around them and singing with them. I’ll never forget one year, I think it was the Audra McDonald year. I was so completely undone by the experience, overwhelmed with what I had seen with my spiritual
eyes, that I couldn’t stop crying, I was just sobbing, sloppily all over myself. I went downstairs to get my coat after it was all over. There was an usher standing there and sobbing too. We both looked at each other and we didn’t have to say anything, we had seen the same thing and both knew we had seen the same thing and I will never forget that experience. I think Joseph showed us, if we open our spiritual eyes, there are things to be learned and seen, that we haven’t even begun to appreciate.

**Bill:** What advice do you have for family members or friends who are struggling with their faith?

**Janet:** I think definitely for oneself and for your family, it’s important that we legitimize the doubting Thomas’s amongst us, that they have a place in our ward and they’re there. Also Doctrine and Covenants states that some of us have testimonies and others to believe on those who know. I think again, they have a legitimate place. I am uncomfortable with “shadow of a doubt” testimonies, I guess I would love to see a little more tolerance for testimonies of people who say I believe, I sure think this is correct because of my life experience. That also would be inspiring. For me I found the New International version of the Bible helpful when I was coming back, because of its very good common day English. I could see Christ and his teachings a little more easily. I also gained a lot from Richard Bushman’s book “Rough Stone Rolling”. He helped me to know that Joseph was an honest man and not a charlatan. Last comment, my Aunt Camilla Eyring Kimball, I remember talking to her during my struggle. She had said “You have got to embrace the good in the gospel and there’s questions and you need to shelve those, that’s what I do, for later reflection” when things aren’t clear or appear to be contradictory. Don’t throw the baby or Church with the bathwater.

**Don:** One thing that might be helpful for people with family members who have lost their faith would be to recognize, that they are experiencing stages that people go through. First off if people have lost their faith, they may be angry. Mormonism creates a very strong sense of identity, so sometimes when people lose their faith they feel like they need to break out of that identity. They feel like they need to do and say things that sort of act against, so they may think it’s hilarious to say obscene things about general authorities like the “Recovering from Mormonism” board does. They may go out and have their first cup of coffee. These things are stages. I would say also not to condemn, not to go back to stereotypical thing of what would your secret sin you want to commit. If someone says they are having intellectual doubts, take that seriously. I had very serious intellectual doubts. The question I would raise for people at an apologetics conference, “If nobody really loses their faith over intellectual issues, why do we have apologetics?” Apologetics is the intellectual defense of the faith, but if nobody lost faith over intellectual issues, we would not need intellectual events. We would just all get together and bear testimony. We know in here, intellectual issues and
intellectual defense matters and I hope we will take that knowledge out when we leave and use that knowledge as we approach other people who are having doubts.

**Maxine:** It’s their journey. Boy, I would not try to impose my journey and my paradigm onto somebody else. It goes both ways. Whether you’re an angry ex-Mormon trying to shock and destabilize and hurt those who have believed or whether you’re a believer who is putting guilt and invalidation and disowning someone who’s left. We just can’t impress people with our journey and our paradigm. I’ll say I have a testimony and I really believe we plant, we look at our lives before we come down here. There’s a map written on our soul. We are the only ones who can find it. You know when you are on your path, your inner invisible path and you know when you’re not. Sometimes that path takes you places that you never thought you would go and others people don’t understand and yet you have to be true to your inner map. Because there are things you need to learn, strengths you need to gain from that journey. Don’t judge each other. Just love them, love each other. No matter where they are, love them. People loved me the whole time I was out. I have so many friends and loved ones who are out and I love them. I have friends on the RfM board and Steve Benson and I are close friends. Nobody can understand it. He wants me to come on RfM and talk about why I came back, cause RfM was talking for 3 days about the fact that I am speaking at FAIR and they’re all dying to know why in the world I went back. After being with all of you I have to face RfM now. Steve and I love each other as friends and we could not be further apart on our views on the Church. Love them. Love them.

**Bill:** I would add really quickly. For those struggling and for those who have family or friends struggling. I would offer a suggestion and that is flexibility. If your going to cause turmoil with somebody because you want to be adamant about the age of the earth, or adamant about evolution, or adamant about what one leader said in one book off in this corner off the gospel is the “real” “doctrine” of the Church, your drawing lines in the sand that are unnecessary. For one who was struggling, that added flexibility that Moroni chapter 7 for instance gave me, which was those things that drew me closer to Christ were of God. And to let people sort out their beliefs with support from you and not judgment is absolutely beautiful. I want to finish with one last question.

**How would you describe your faith after you faith Crisis?**

By that I mean by that once you have come through it and returned back to the Church. Because I think most people who are struggling think it can’t end well, it can’t go good. I would add that now, today, is more beautiful than that perfect testimony I had after I joined the Church where I had NO doubts. I have come to think that doubt and knowledge and experience with the Holy Spirit as a combination is 10 times more beautiful than anything I ever had before.
Don: My faith is definitely more flexible. I am less certain the right answer has to be a certain way. Before I lost my faith, I would have told you I was never going to lose my faith. I would have said that in ignorance of what the potential challenges to faith were. I can say now that really knowing now having delved into them deeply. Terryl Givens used this phrase in a recent news article. He talked about a faith that absorbs doubt. I like that. In coming back to the Church, I don’t feel like I have had to give up my awareness of the negative things in Church history or in Mormon Culture or whatever. In the context of the larger perspective where I see so much good, those things are just overwhelmed. It is not a matter of denying or turning a blind eye, but opening my eyes to the beauty and the positive of it.

Janet: I would agree having been out of the Church, I was stubborn and having had to go that route. You choose to come back so it is a richer experience. I often cry during Sacrament meetings and people wonder, “what is she crying about?” The scriptures come alive and you see your own self, you know you’re fallen. You know your flawed self in scriptures that you didn’t see when you were younger.

Q&A

Question: I feel like I am on the edge and am deciding to stay or leave, do you regret distancing yourself from the Church or are you grateful for it? What is your advice? Should I stay? Or Go with the hope that I would one day return?

Janet: If we claim to be the True Church, Go, and if you must go…. search and in my case it led back to the Church. You’re going to maybe take some risks and there can be pain and problems, you got to do what you got to do.

Don: The idea of anyone leaving the Church is painful to me. I do feel like in my own life, there were things, lessons I wasn’t going to learn any other way, than how I did. But I would say rather than take that step of leaving the church. It is much more difficult to come back after you have left than it is to stay and work on things. Maybe, hopefully, there will be some ideas you can take from today or from someone else or some other source that can help you to work through things from where you’re at right now and stay.

BillQuestion: How has the journey you experienced changed the way you would teach young children about the Church and gospel?

Maxine: It has changed the way I teach Young Women’s on Sunday. In every Relief Society class and every Young Women’s class, I am looking for the deeper information we have missed. The women’s story and for example when talking about Priesthood, I talked about Moses and Aaron and then I focused the whole lesson on Miriam and how she was a prophet too and all three of them led the children of Israel. So I am doing a bit of a feminist theology but within the bounds and rely on
scripture and excavating those text and pulling out the feminist authority and power that is buried there that we have not seen. I would say excavating is my mantra.

Bill: I think the key is to just take it slow. When talking of all the issues and things you struggle with—Give context to things. Take things slow. I think when you find the immediate information it can be troubling, but as we’re talking about dig deeper, sit back a little bit, reflect on things, put things in perspective and hopefully if you can do that you can find room for faith.