

My Mormon Story

I believe being half deaf from birth tends to make one a deep thinker. The reason being that the necessity for extreme concentration to try and understand what is being said, particularly when there is a mix of background noise, is so tiring that you tend to stop listening.

I always had a close number of friends who understood this and, when we were in a noisy position, would simply nudge me and talk directly into my good ear to get the necessary answers wanted. The rest of the time my mind would simply wander over the crowds mentally analyzing each of those around me, or would think through the reasons for why one thing or another happens, questioning and analyzing the ideas that passed through my mind.

In doing this my mind would often wander onto the subject of nature . . . thinking about how the world, with all its complexities, came to be.

Hence, I had always believed that there had to be a “power” behind it. Being brought up in the Presbyterian Church I had a Christian understanding of the why’s and wherefore’s as espoused by various ministers of religion.

However, I have a mind that believes that there has to be a logical explanation for all things, as any explanation or idea that is not logical is not worthy of consideration.

I did not think much of it all until my late teenage years when my work entailed the typesetting of, first, a so-called translation of the Bible into what was termed simple English and, second, the typesetting of a monthly publication that would take an extract from the Bible and put an interpretation on it that, to me, was often so illogical that I would spend time investigating the relevant passage. In doing so, it was plain to see that, when reading the paragraphs before and after the extract, you got a completely different, and logical, explanation.

An example of this that has always stuck in my head was an extract about “God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost are one with each other”. The claim was that meant they were all the same person. What illogical rubbish! Does this mean that when Christ was baptized by John and a voice from Heaven said: “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”, that Christ was doing a ventriloquist act by throwing his voice so it appeared to come from the Heavens? Illogical rubbish!

It was this job of typesetting that set me on a path that had me wander into different churches as I travelled around the country just to hear what they had to say. Unconsciously looking for answers, I suppose. I never once had any feeling for the illogical stories offered and being told “we should not question this or that” when a minister was asked a question he could not answer.

Why not question? The only way to learn anything is to question.

I would often lay looking at the stars and wonder about how all this wondrous universe could come about and what controlled it; for some power had to be in control.

The teaching that God “created” the earth, to me, was totally illogical, so has to be a failing in translation. It must be remembered that many of the old languages had no English equivalent. Indeed, this is so with many languages today.

However, for someone with the necessary power, to “mold” the world from existing materials is logical, and this I could understand and has been backed up by science.

Dr Werner Von Braun, the renowned physicist and space scientist, once said (and I paraphrase): “The more I learn about the universe, the more I believe in God as there can be no other explanation.”

It wasn't until I was in my late 20's that I came in contact with the Mormon Church and, thinking them just another off-beat sect who had conned someone I knew into joining, set out to disprove them.

However, for the first time in my life I started to find logic. Yes, there were some things that could not be properly explained but, at the same time, were not illogical.

This was my introduction to the power of prayer and the answers that would readily come when you asked the right question in your prayer. I found that these answers came through a strong, relaxed feeling indicating which path to follow with no doubt about the correctness of that decision. If my prayer was for the wrong reason then no feeling would come...just continued frustration.

I could relate many instances of this but will relate just two that, I feel, describes it well.

When called by the Stake President to be the Elders Quorum President in Sydney I was asked to select and put forward names to be my Councillors. I was told if I prayed about it the Lord would guide me.

So I prayed about it and when I gave the names for the 1st and 2nd Councillors I believed were right, the Stake President said: “But the 2nd name you gave is inactive and has been for several years. He is also known to not be keeping the Word of Wisdom in that he drinks alcohol.” My answer was that I had done as asked by the Stake President and prayed about it and those names were the answer I got. He reluctantly accepted that and, when asked to fill the calling, the Elder in question was just as shocked as the Stake President. However, after thinking about it, he said if that is what the Lord wants he would accept and would henceforth keep the Word of Wisdom. He promptly threw all the beer cans from his fridge into the bin.

That man went on to be the Elders Quorum President after I had moved out of the area and he later served on the High Council and then as Bishop of a Sydney Northern Suburbs Ward.

The power of prayer! We listened to the answer and it turned around someone's life for which he and his family were forever grateful. Not my doing, but that of the Lord.

The second instance I will mention is different, but with the same power.

The two-year-old son of a Ward friend of ours was suddenly diagnosed with what was termed a “racing tumour” behind the eye. I understand it could be clearly seen on the x-rays. Doctors said his only chance of life was immediate surgery. Just before he was wheeled into surgery he was given an administration by the Priesthood. To operate, they had to remove the eye in front of the tumour. However, when they removed the eye they were astounded to find the tumour had vanished. To this they had no answer...but we knew.

Yes, he lost an eye, but just before Christmas 2018, we received a Christmas Card telling us that boy had just become a grandfather!

I have always had an optimistic outlook on life...the glass is always half-full, never half-empty!

This outlook has stood me in good stead, even in the darkest time of my life when I was diagnosed, at the age of 15, with polio. I was told the outcome was usually death or paralysis. Our doctor believed I needed to know the worst so I knew what I had to fight and he didn't hold back. I was grateful for his forthrightness and through the months of paralyzing pain never once worried about what the outcome may bring.

Perhaps, without knowing it, I was placing my trust in the Lord. Even after I was back on my feet and refused the physiotherapy offered as being wrong, I'm sure I was being guided.

This proved correct when, simply using swimming as therapy, I slowly brought all the shrunken muscles back to near normal appearance. However, nothing could repair the nerve and cartilage damage that has plagued my life.

As an optimist I never felt hard done by; no “why me?” as this, I believe, leads to depressive thoughts.

Instead I turned to sport. It turned out I have a very competitive nature. First tennis, a game I loved but had to give up when in my early twenties as the damage from the polio interfered too much. Then golf, a game in which I had to overcome the severe weakness in my legs to achieve a reasonable swing.

You name it, I’ve had a go at it – or most of them. Tennis, golf, rowing, scuba diving, water skiing, yacht racing and finally, as I grew old and the polio damage took its toll, back to golf.

Never, in all this time, have I ever said “why me?”. At any time I felt a bit depressed, I would just look around me. You don’t have to look far to see someone much worse off than yourself. I am well-known for saying – “there but for the Grace of God go I”.

Several times in my life I have been in positions from which I did not expect to come out alive. However, I came out of them all, so accept that the Lord must have a reason for keeping me alive when all the odds were against it.

I don’t know his reasons, but I do not question them. Simply await the reason being revealed to me.

I think I grew up having always believed that, hidden in the shadows of the mind, is the certain knowledge that we came from the past and, here on earth, are only in transit to the future.

The moral of this story is: Put your trust in the Lord and you will have the strength to manage all that may be thrown against you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Stuart Oliver'.

Stuart Oliver