

# My journey out of Mormonism and search for truth



Kathleen Kimball Melonakos

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Please feel free to email the author with comments or questions at  
[researchinglds@gmail.com](mailto:researchinglds@gmail.com)

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By Kathleen Kimball Melonakos

## **Introduction**

I am the second daughter of Heber C. Kimball IV, (1928-1971), who was a direct descendant of Heber C. Kimball, one of the co-founders of the Mormon Church. My mother is Mary Nell Schade Kimball, who is descended from Thomas Grover, an early pioneer and scribe to Mormon prophet Brigham Young. I was born in 1954 in Hollywood, California, but grew up in Fresno, as a member of the Mormon Church. I attended Brigham Young University and was married in the Salt Lake Temple. However, my husband Brian and I investigated the LDS church in the late 1970's, and subsequently left because we discovered it was not true. We were agnostics for years until Jesus Christ claimed us in 2000. This is the story of my spiritual journey.

## **I seek the “burning of the bosom”**

I always wanted to know the truth. From an early age I sought what Mormon leaders claim any seeker will receive if they ask fervently enough, namely, a “burning of the bosom.” I was taught that it was the official sign from heaven that the LDS church is the only true church on the face of the earth. I have since learned that seeking a feeling is not the best method for knowing what is true. However, between the ages of eleven and twenty-two, I prayed and fasted, attended my meetings, paid tithing, observed the word of wisdom, read scriptures and did everything else I was directed to do. Yet, the feeling never came.

Meanwhile, even as a young teen, I wondered about church doctrines such as the merit-based system of earning the highest level of heaven. One dilemma involved my older sister Karen, who was born with an odd mental disorder producing eccentric behavior. I wondered how someone like Karen, who lacked the ability to do good works, could merit the “celestial kingdom.” My mother wondered too, but Mormon authorities did not have the answer.

## **My father died, my mother was devastated**

In 1971, when I was sixteen, my father suddenly died in a plane crash, wreaking all kinds of havoc for my mother, and us five children. My mother became so overwrought at his death that she stayed in her room for a month, hardly eating. Then she became so panicked about finances and busy that we saw her very little. She also became disillusioned with Mormonism, because though she had remained a faithful, temple-worthy Mormon, my father had not, therefore, her chances for gaining exaltation were ruined and she had no hope. In LDS doctrine, women only attain the highest heaven if they are sealed in the temple to a man who lives *all* “the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”

My father's wing of the Kimball family had continued to practice polygamy after the Utah church's 1890 Manifesto against it. My dad had a rough upbringing. I know little about it except that as a child, he was sometimes raised by the Kingston group, sometimes by the Apostolic United Brotherhood, and also spent time with Warren Jeff's FLDS. Although he joined the mainstream Mormon Church when he married my devout Mormon mother, he had been raised to think it was holy to have many wives (and concubines), as Joseph Smith had done.<sup>1</sup>

My mother found out about my father's infidelity after he died. My mother believes that he came under pressure from his mother and siblings to "live the higher law," (polygamy). Though there was always a secrecy surrounding my father's side of the family, my cousins covertly tried to convert my sister and I to Mormon fundamentalism. Thank God my mother prevented me from dating a boy who began writing to me at my grandmother's urging. Being naïve, I could have been seduced into polygamy had not my mother protected me.

After my father died, my mother barely survived the loss of almost everything in which she had ever believed. She not only lost her beloved husband, but a steady income, her faith, and therefore the esteem and support of her closest relatives. All three of my mother's sisters were married to high-level church authorities: a temple president, a mission president, and Brigham Young University professor. They increasingly ostracized us, since our questioning and inactivity meant we were now assigned to "outer darkness."

Less than a year after my father's death, I left home to attend Brigham Young University. Therefore, I was not home to witness a lot of my mother's struggles and anguish. I filed my theological questions away, and concentrated on my studies. But one day my bishop asked me to bear my testimony in church. I went to him and confessed I had never had an emotional experience that testified that the church was true. He said, "Well how do you feel when you hear the words from the pulpit? Do they make you feel good?" I said I never had a "burning of the bosom." He said his testimony was based on his activity in the church. I said I didn't feel I could honestly talk in church about my testimony. He laid his hands on my head and prayed that I would receive a testimony of the truth of the gospel. I left the meeting more bewildered than ever; wondering if I would ever get a "witness of the truth." I didn't "know" the church was true. But I wanted to know, very much.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Doctrine and Covenants* 132, and Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).

## **I meet my husband Brian**

Before I graduated from the nursing program at BYU I met Brian Melonakos, a return LDS missionary who had spent two years proselytizing in Switzerland. He was the grandson of Greek immigrants whose mother had joined the Mormon Church when missionaries came to her door in Detroit, Michigan when Brian was three years old. He had an active mind and we would talk about our philosophical and theological questions.

We had known each other about three months when questions of marriage arose. I was twenty, Brian was twenty-three. At BYU, unmarried people over age twenty-five were said to be a “menace to society,” thus, marriage while in college is highly encouraged. They also teach that marriage is for “time and all eternity.” Therefore, I felt forced to make life’s most important decision at an early age. Because all hopes for eternal happiness rested on my husband, the whole idea of marriage terrified me. I didn’t know if the church was true, therefore, I didn’t know if going to the temple to “take on endowments” and thereafter wear special undergarments, and make lifelong promises, was what God wanted me to do. Though I loved Brian, I had only known him three months, I had not met his family, and he was from far away. I prayed and prayed that I might know if it was the right decision. There was no going back if I made the wrong decision. I saw what had happened to my mother!

I did not receive what I thought was a spiritual answer to my question. At about that time several coincidences made me think I was destined to marry Brian. My mother supported the marriage. I decided to go ahead and take out my temple endowments.

## **My experience in the Mormon temple**

The feeling I had in the temple caused me to doubt the rightness of what I was doing. In those days, the “anointing” ritual required us to remove our clothes and wear nothing but a triangle shaped poncho. This seemed bizarre to me. As I sat with the other temple goers wearing white robes with green fig leaf aprons and listened to the oaths of secrecy, my heart began pounding. I felt anxious and wanted to escape.

I experienced the opposite of the peace and assurance I had been seeking. I especially reacted when we had to swear to “suffer our lives to be taken,” if we should ever divulge the secrets in the temple. We were to mimic the temple worker drawing her hand across our throats, while so swearing. I had nightmares about it. I have since learned that the temple oaths used to be even bloodier, with adherents having to swear to “avenge the blood of the prophets” and to agree to have their throats cut and guts spill out if they divulge temple secrets. I have also learned that the temple rites originated with Freemasonry, a secret group that professes to be a benevolent fraternity, however many associate it with the occult.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tanner and Tanner, *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony, 1842-1990*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990, updated 2005. [www.utlm.org](http://www.utlm.org)

After the temple experience I was more confused than ever, because I had been taught by my Mormon leaders to regard my feelings as a source of truth. What was I supposed to think? My mother had no answer for my spiritual anguish. My marriage was the least of her problems at that time. Nor could I ask my father for advice—he was dead. I was a frightened, confused, anxious young girl of twenty, trying to make huge decisions affecting my temporal and eternal destinies.

The only person I could talk to was Brian. Though we called off our first wedding date, we married six months later in the Salt Lake temple. My mother could not attend, because she had not paid the required ten per cent of her now-reduced income in tithing. Only my maternal grandmother and my best friend were considered “worthy” enough to attend my wedding. We had a small open house for friends in Salt Lake City three weeks later.

What I did not know at that time was that the Lord was preparing me to live a different life than I had planned. Brian and I soon left the west where the Mormon church is well-known. We lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan where I was the only Latter Day Saint in the large hospital where I worked. We attended the LDS ward there while Brian went to business school, but Brian also took classes in church history at the LDS Institute of Religion.

### **Brian studies LDS history**

Ironically, it was studying church history at the LDS Institute in Ann Arbor that revealed the truth about Mormonism to Brian. He had had experiences on his mission that led him to know Jesus is the Christ, but made him doubt Mormonism. Then studying the life of Joseph Smith clinched Brian’s beliefs. He discovered the false prophecies, the false claims and inconsistencies made by leaders of the early church. We were shocked to find that the Institute teachers with whom he studied knew the same facts, but rationalized the implications and glossed over them while teaching.

When the elders of our local LDS ward asked Brian to be the elder’s quorum president, he had to make a choice. He could not simply keep attending church on Sunday. Rather, he was being asked to devote considerable time and effort to leading something in which he no longer believed. So he turned down the calling. He gave me the choice of remaining active without him, but I said no. At that time, I only briefly studied church history myself, (but I was to intensely study it later). I did know that I had never received the “testimony” that I had asked for, but rather, feelings of disturbance. So Brian and I decided to explore other beliefs.

Brian plunged into his business career. Different jobs have taken him (therefore me and our three children) to many places. We have lived in the San Francisco Bay area, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Toronto, Canada, Seattle, Washington and Dover, Delaware. We have traveled all over Europe, and Brian has been all over Asia and Latin America. The places we have lived have taught me many things, and the Lord has seen fit to sustain me through times when I have felt extremely alone.

## **I study music and the liberal arts at eight universities and Stanford**

Because the desire to know the truth never left me, I took classes everywhere we lived. I took a class called “The Historical Jesus,” twice; once at Loyola University in Chicago, and once at the University of Toronto. I now know that these classes were specifically designed to turn young people away from Christ, by telling them that “there is hardly anything known” about the historical Jesus, and pointing them to books meant to obscure the facts about his life. I also studied philosophy and the ancient Greeks. I now know that there is more known about the historical Jesus than just about any other person from the ancient world, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Alexander the Great. But at the time I took these classes, I believed my professors.

We lived in Palo Alto, California for eleven years. It is there that my two oldest daughters were small children. Our transition out of Mormonism meant that I left a world where women were taught from birth to be good wives and mothers. I now entered one of the world’s centers of radical feminism, where women were expected to earn all their own money and have brilliant careers. Again, I was very confused. I had a husband and two small children, yet no extended family support nearby to help me raise them; nor did I know what I believed.

The Lord provided the Peninsula Women’s Chorus to sustain me through that time. The chorus is a group of women who meet to sing uplifting, exquisite music. At that time it was under the direction of a gifted woman who was a Stanford PhD. I did not know the truth about God or the true church, but I did know that singing that music lifted me out of my petty concerns and closer to an unseen, beautiful world for which I yearned, but seemed just beyond my reach.

We sang songs praising God in Latin from before the Renaissance, four and eight part harmonies from the Baroque era, and songs by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Benjamin Britten. We sang songs in Old English, French, Dutch, and other languages. We sang the 23rd Psalm put to music by Franz Schubert with the text in German. It is an exquisite piece. We sang songs originated by African slaves in the American South who cried out to God for deliverance, or told Bible stories rhythmically. We sang songs that European women in Japanese prison camps lifted up as their only means of enduring the horrors of World War II. One, called “The Captives Hymn,” was a beautiful prayer asking God for strength and forgiveness for enemies. These songs and my classes in liberal arts and literature reflected that there have been people throughout history that love Jesus Christ, have been transformed by his life, death and resurrection, and wait for his glorious return. I did not understand what it meant at the time, but I filed it away in my mind.

The women in the Peninsula Women’s Chorus were friendly to me. I don’t know what I would have done without the help and support of those women in the chorus.

When the Continuing Studies program opened up at Stanford, I eagerly enrolled. I thought that if Mormonism was false, and not very much is known about the historical Jesus, then maybe I would find truth in the halls of academe. What did all these highly

successful, brilliant scholars at Stanford believe? Surely people at the top of our society would know the best way to live.

I spent five years taking classes from full professors at Stanford and working on a master's degree in liberal arts and philosophy. Because the program was for adults, my fellow students were there to pursue "learning for learning's sake," not just an impressive resume. Therefore my colleagues had mature perspectives when discussing the great books of history. Though my beliefs were vague, I never stopped believing in a Creator, and challenged professors when I heard something that to me sounded suspicious. I found there were many dubious ideas held by learned professors.

In fact, I found the core of what they believe to be dubious. Darwin, Freud and Marx are the icons of secular humanism. Humanists hold these authors in high esteem because they provide naturalistic explanations to replace Christian explanations for human origins, the self, and the purpose of life. The gospel of the humanists is that the universe came about by accident, and man creates his own purpose usually by pursuing power and pleasure or a utopia provided by technology or some variant of Marxism. Though I thoroughly investigated these ideas I could not accept them, particularly their logical extension—that suffering is meaningless, that nothing is eternal, and that the deepest longings of our soul have no answer.

Though so many professors tried to convert me to naturalism, all it takes is looking around to know that the world is much more complex, orderly, and intricate than could have happened by random chance. Yet a learned professor exclaimed that his truest insight was when he discovered that "life is random." If that was true, then why was I studying in philosophy that life is not random at all, but so precisely ordered that one's mistakes in logic result in harm? It is common sense and an axiom of science that observing nature correctly in all its orderliness is necessary for human survival. It seemed bizarre that intelligent people would rhapsodize on the presumed randomness of the universe.

I found it startling that my professors even admitted that the ideas of Darwin, Marx and Freud fail scientifically, yet those same professors claimed to believe in logic, reason, and the tests of science. Moreover, it does not require a degree in philosophy, which I achieved, to see that different people have conflicting ideas of what constitutes utopia. Therefore, as has been proven over and over in history, when Godless beliefs prevail, those with the most power will decide whose imagined utopia wins out and the rest so often become their victims or slaves.

It also became clear that science, supposedly every learned professor's ultimate authority, cannot provide moral wisdom for everyday living. Science is simply a method for testing hypotheses about natural phenomenon. Science cannot determine what *ought* to be, or what is morally right or wrong. However, we all are forced to make moral choices every day. I wrote my thesis on William James' essay, "The Will to Believe" and received my master of arts degree.

At Stanford I witnessed both the contradictions of atheism and the lifestyles of those who believe it. I met many smart, accomplished people there, but they often seemed to be emotionally needy. They focused on themselves. I did too. I wanted something that I wasn't finding. I could not shake the hunger for a deeper peace and a desire to quiet the restlessness in my heart and solve the difficulties in my relationships. I sought an answer to what I call the driving neediness that people try to fill with drugs, alcohol, sex, pleasures, or achievement.

### **We move to a neighborhood with Christian families**

In 1993, we moved from the Palo Alto area to a new neighborhood in Seattle, next to three families. Two of the families were professing Christians. Both of these families impressed us with their generosity, friendliness, and decency. They invited us to dinners and to church, which we attended a few times. We got to know their kids and they knew ours. We joined their efforts to remove a strip joint from our local shopping center. When we moved to Delaware in 1997, we left with warm feelings and a good impression of Christians.

In Delaware we got to know more Christians. I needed to educate my youngest daughter, Lyssa, so I began investigating the options in our small town. I began reading about public schools, charter schools, Christian schools, and home schools. Now the internet was available which meant a tremendous amount of information at my fingertips.

I read about the history of public schools, and how the secular humanists had taken them over, though they started out to be Protestant Christian. I volunteered to head a charter school. A kind, intelligent, Christian man named Ray Clatworthy was appointed to be on my board. He ran for the United States Senate against Joe Biden and Brian and I got to know him and his wife quite well.

We visited Brian's brother Dave one Christmas. Dave and Becky are devout Mormons yet Becky lent me *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis. Lewis made good, solid arguments as to why he believes that Jesus is the Son of the actual Creator, who came to earth to die for us, and was resurrected. It seems like a fantastical story, but as he said, it is not the kind someone could easily make up. There is solid historical evidence that Jesus changed the world like no other person. And the central theme of the Christian story is love. Love! I never stopped believing that learning to love is the basis of a meaningful life.

In 1999, I walked into the Christmas service at Grace Presbyterian Church in Dover, Delaware. I heard the heavenly music and began to weep. The music took me to the same place as had the Peninsula Women's Chorus. It told me that without a doubt there is another world of which we only perceive glimpses through art, music, beauty, acts of compassion, amazing stories, and what the Bible calls The Holy Spirit.

I heard the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time from our pastor at Grace church. The Biblical gospel is so different than the adulterated gospel that the Mormons had taught. For the first time I heard that no one can earn their way to heaven, because we can never be good enough or live all the laws perfectly. I learned that Jesus is real, and through his grace, he transforms people. I became curious to know more of what the Bible contained. The Bible is either actual history, or nothing. I learned that atheists like C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, and Josh McDowell had set out to disprove Jesus' resurrection, and had become converted instead.

I began taking Community Bible classes and the more I studied, the more I sensed that it was a real historical record. We began attending Grace church more frequently. When I would hear the singing and the sermon all about love, it would bring tears to my eyes. I eventually came to commit my life to my Creator, and found what it means to live by faith.

### **My New Life**

Since I have come to know the Lord, my life is different. I no longer have the burning questions and restless spirit I had before. I had sought a testimony of Mormonism, because it claimed to be the truth. I studied philosophy to know the purpose of life, but the philosophers could not tell me what it was. I was confused about my role as a woman because Mormonism puts women in one box, and secular humanism in another. Now I know that to live by faith means to be in a relationship with my Creator, and to seek his will which may require actions outside of any box. *To learn what love means is what I seek to know.*

Since we have moved back to California in 2004, we have been blessed beyond measure. I have found more and more reasons to believe in the God of the Bible. The Bible goes beyond, but does not contradict actual history, archeology, and honest science. One of the most valuable things I gained in my university studies, especially at Stanford, is the training I received in logic, critical thinking, and historiography. These methods are among the best ways to seek truth.

Seeking a feeling does not lead to truth, but seeking wisdom does. The Bible expresses it this way: "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good." (I Thessalonians 5:21). Wisdom is gained through diligent study, rigorous thought, and the discernment of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom, love, and knowing God are the goals of life, not the power and pleasure of the humanists or "the godhood through good works" promoted by the Mormons. Ironically, I have found that Christianity stands up to the tests advocated by the philosophers better than any man-made philosophical system.

In 2006 I became curious to know the origins of polygamy and what exactly had happened in the early Mormon church in contrast to the false story we had been told. I met Doris Hanson who had started a ministry called Shield and Refuge that aimed to help people trapped in polygamy groups to escape. I began researching the history of

polygamy, and encountered recurrent references to counterfeiting money among the early Mormon leaders.

I became intrigued with studying the counterfeiting subculture in early America and collecting the evidence that early Mormons were involved in counterfeiting. I researched primary sources all over North America—archives and libraries in Vermont, New York, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and Salt Lake City. I worked with other historians and spent hundreds of hours collecting information and synthesizing it into my book, *Secret Combinations: Evidence of Early Mormon Counterfeiting 1800-1847*, now available through [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [utlm.org](http://utlm.org), or [mormoncounterfeiting.com](http://mormoncounterfeiting.com). I'm proud to say that my article briefly summarizing a lot of the information has now been published in the respected, peer-reviewed *John Whitmer Association Journal*, and other scholars, such as Joseph Johnstun and Will Bagley are also speaking publicly about early Mormon counterfeiting.

The realization that there was outright fraud at the founding of the Mormon Church at first depressed me, but I realize that the Lord has a purpose for everything. I have a deep sense of compassion for the early Latter Day Saints who were misled, my Mormon relatives, and others. Though we may not know how, or why, the Lord can use evil for good. I challenge anyone who wants to know the truth to study the life of Jesus of Nazareth and then compare it to any other life in history. The Lord says he rewards those who truly seek him (Hebrews 11:6), and “the truth will make you free.” It is true.

### **Recommended Resources**

Utah Lighthouse Ministry [www.utlm.org](http://www.utlm.org)

Mormon Research Ministry [www.mrm.org](http://www.mrm.org)

Shield and Refuge Ministry [shieldandrefuge.org](http://shieldandrefuge.org)

Utah Partnerships for Christ <http://www.upfc.org/>

Ex Files: Journeys from Mormonism to Jesus Christ <http://www.exmormonfiles.com>