

Why We Believe

*Doubts, Dogs,
and the Path to Faith*

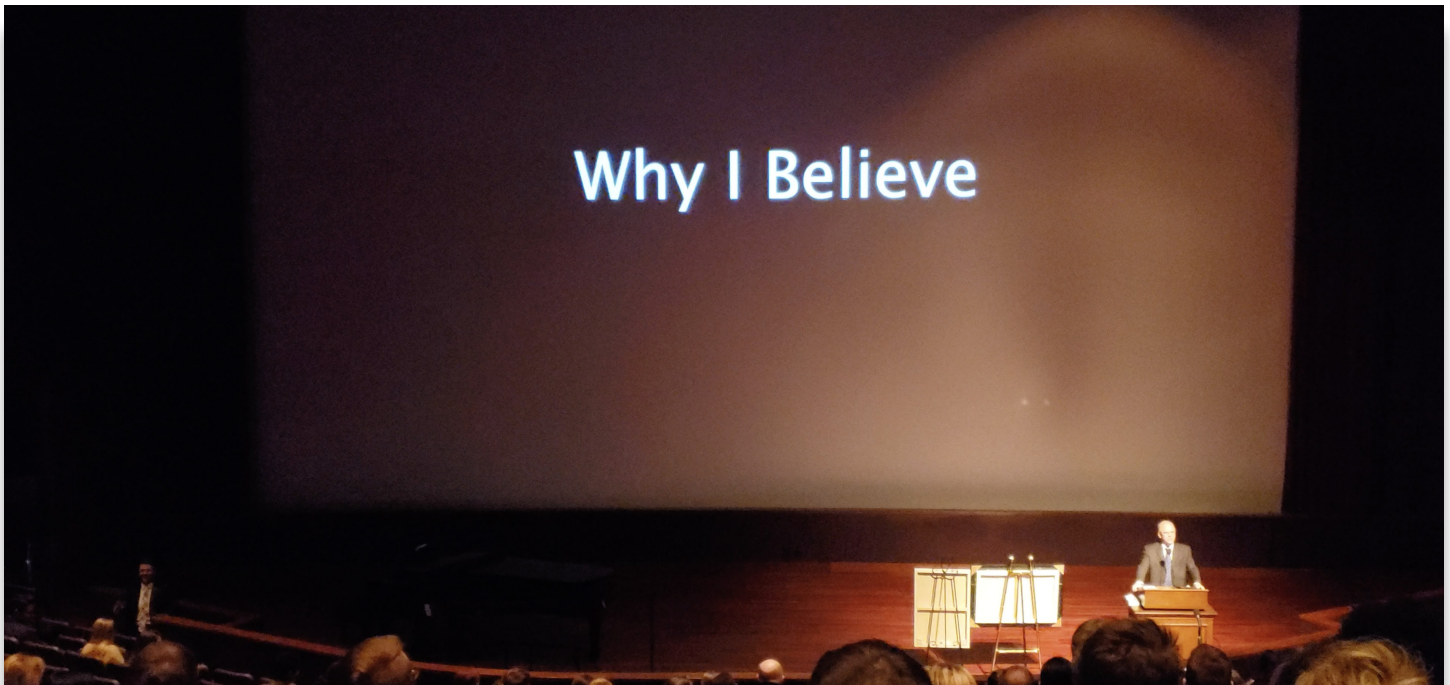
Lester Yocum



From an address given at a Why I Believe
fireside at the Washington, D.C. Temple
Visitors' Center of The Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints,
January 20, 2019.



In this series, speakers express their
feelings about their faith, their church,
the Savior, the gospel, and the effects
each have had on their lives.



THE VISITOR CENTER AUDITORIUM

Why I Believe

Why I Believe

I am willing to say amen. I hope earnestly that you can feel the Spirit here. This is a powerful environment and has made it a little difficult for me to talk. You will find out that it can be difficult for me to talk in certain situations, although most people find I'm not usually short on words. But sometimes when the Spirit is that powerful it can be challenging.

I am grateful for the testimonies of the Mengistus (a husband and wife who had just finished speaking). I don't know them at all but I can feel their love of the gospel and how the gospel has changed their lives.

Sister Kristina Harkness-Granados and her accompanists (who had just performed an original sacred song)—how marvelous to have such gifts and talents. What blessings it is to us—all the sisters and brothers that I have met here, the missionaries, and the leaders involved in making all of this happen. I hope and pray that I will be able to add something to it.

The Spirit is enabled by the power of your faith and your works. You exercised both in being here. My earnest prayer is that you will be blessed for those efforts with an outpouring of The Spirit that speaks to your mind and to your heart, answers some of your concerns, and brings you closer to The Lord.

A few days after Thanksgiving last year, I was walking on a trail near my home. As I was doing so, nearing a neighborhood, two large, snarling pit bulls charged out

from behind a house and made a beeline straight for me.

Instantly, several responses flashed through my mind: “Should I run?” (Nah) “Fight?” (Ah, no.) “How about if I scream? Screaming is good.” (Uh, I don’t know...). “Uh, what if I stand my ground and just stare at them in indecision?” By that time they were almost upon me so I chose to stand and stare.

Now I don’t know if I did what you’re supposed to do, and you’ll have to rely on your own experience and research — your instincts — when such a thing happens to you, which I pray that it never does. But watching this scenario play out in my mind as it happened, as if in slow motion—literally, the entire world around me had just frozen into concrete almost, step by step. This experience, as I was watching it unfold to my mind, was revelatory.

You see, a few weeks before that, I had been invited to speak here. Since then I had been praying and studying, and interviewing others, trying to find out what God would have me say. After putting together several drafts of my speech, it was on that same scary trail walk that I just mentioned that the inspiration came. I know each of you have had some form of revelation happen to you, and when it happens, it can be breathtakingly clear. I dictated almost the entire talk into my cell phone in one big flood. It felt really good to me; I liked it. I said “Yes, this is it!” And then, like most of us, I said, “Hmm...” I started to doubt.

And then the dogs came.

As I pondered what I would say afterward, patterns appeared that I believe apply to all of us. As such, I expanded my talk from “why I believe” to ...

Why We Believe

... “why WE believe”. Because we all believe at some point, whether we recognize it or not. I will use some of my paintings to help illustrate these patterns.

The Paintings

A little about my paintings: I’ve always been interested in the arts. I remember drawing from comic books while I was in elementary school. I always had a sketch-book with me and illustrated my class assignments. I remember drawing little figures climbing up and down the sides of my vocabulary papers. In 1976 I was awarded an associates degree in art and design at Ricks College, now BYU-Idaho, and eventually found a career as a graphic artist.

Making money in the arts, as I’m sure Kristina and others can tell you, is very tough—I haven’t figured out that formula yet. So I do paintings like those you saw

Why We Believe

in the lobby in my spare time. This gives me freedom to express what I want to without commercial constraints; which, if you're familiar with the industry, can be quite valuable. It also allows me to evolve an independent voice and has opened to me many blessings, furthering my belief in God.

So here's a few of the reasons why I believe. Perhaps they apply to you as well.

Influence of God

One reason why we believe is because of the influence of God over time.



<< SIMEON

Like Simeon, here, who waited many years in the temple for the birth of Jesus Christ, we each have marvelous things that will happen in our lives, or which have already happened but which we don't yet recognize, that are dependent on the timing of the Lord. It's been 56 years — I know it looks much less than that, but 56 years since I was baptized into this church at age 9. I've had questions come up, to which I have so far not received answer. Patience, apparently, is critical to receiving the answers you are looking for. No matter how long you wait, however, the assurance that God listens, is listening, and will answer, is real. The answers will come, when you and those involved in the answers are ready. It happened with Simeon.



>> SIMEON'S BLESSING

Here, in a very recent work—in fact, if you touch this painting which you will see tonight, you will find out that it's still wet—I depicted Simeon's answer. He was blessed to see the child and prophesy about its future to Mary and Joseph. His answer came at the end of his life, illustrating how long we may have to wait before receiving our answer.

His response was classic. After blessing the infant Jesus, he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:25-35). Sounds like he got his answer.

Personal Experience

Sometimes, the answers come as a result of personal experience.

Some miracles happen right before our eyes and we don't recognize them. Sometimes we do, but we don't recognize the source. There is a time, and this is the Lord's promise to each of us, when we will see the light, we will see the miracle and

He who is responsible for it, and we will understand why it was done. Not necessarily all at once, not according to our timing, but according to the Lord's timing. That promise is certain.

CHRIST HEALING THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS >>

Here, I depict Christ healing the daughter of Jairus. She had died. He brought her back to life. The parents rejoiced over the child and the miracle itself. Their daughter, however, knew from where the blessing came, and her eyes remained steadfast on Him who made it happen.

Change

Sometimes we believe because of change. I have had many changes in my life, as we all have, some of them quite painful. The level of pain and the specifics of the events are not important; I will touch on one of mine later. What matters is that they brought about change. Jesus Christ went through all of our darkest times and suffered for our sins as depicted here in my painting called ...

IN THE GARDEN >>

... "In the Garden". Together, before this earth was created, we agreed to a plan that would overcome those sins and was built to maximize our learning and progress and minimize our pain.

ON THE CROSS >>

In Gethsemane, here, and on the cross, Christ suffered for our sins so that, through the miracle of grace, he could take upon himself the punishment of our sins, satisfying the demands of justice which otherwise would have kept us from returning to live with Him. Since we are all guilty of sin, none of us would be comfortable living with Him and his perfect world if not for His sacrifice. His sacrifice allows us to have opportunities and the time to learn about and become like Him, to understand His ways and what He wants. What He wants is for us to realize love, devotion, clean hearts and souls, to have happiness, the best for us and beyond the best that we can possibly imagine.

TRIUMPHANT >>

His path is the path to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. As we follow His path, we will find that happiness.

Walk Our Own Path

But we have to walk our own path. We will each have to go through our own Gethsemane, as it were...





<< PERSONAL ATONEMENT

...as this woman is doing in this painting.

She has discovered the need for change in her life and is pleading for her Savior to help her make that change.

Effort

Change is often hard; it requires effort.



<< CHANGE OF HEART

This painting depicts a person named Alma the younger, who even though he had a prophet as a father, chose to live a life in direct opposition to his father's wishes. That life was described as being very destructive for him and for those around him. However, through the faith of family and friends, the Lord was able to speak in a voice loud enough for him to hear, and the experience prompted him to change his life.

He had to give up riches, honor, pride, and his sins to do it, but after he did, he helped bring thousands of people out of darkness into the light.

As he said, "Oh, what joy, what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

"Yea, I say unto you ... that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you ... that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy."¹



<< FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Joseph Smith had a similar experience, although not as rocky. In 1820, as a 14-year-old boy, he was surrounded by competing religions and was confused about which church to join. Knowing that God was not the author of confusion, he followed the promptings of his heart and asked The Lord. The result was the restoration of the original gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness, untied to any other faith or religion. It also signaled the restoration of hope.

By the way, the ultimate reason why we believe is because of Jesus Christ. But we owe everything to this man, this young boy who became a man. Through the influence of God, he revealed God to us, revealed truths buried for centuries and founded the church we embrace today.

Prayer and Study

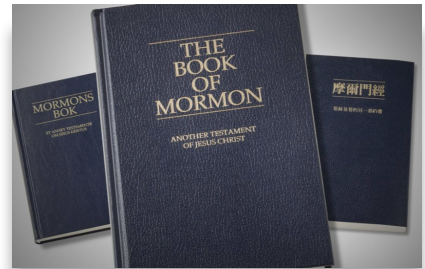
Sometimes, we believe through earnest prayer and spiritual study.

PROMISED LAND >>

In this painting, the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi and his wife rejoice² over receiving a set of brass plates, a record of the people and the prophecies of their ancient prophets, which they took with them from Jerusalem to the New World. Those records became the foundation of two new civilizations and is the core of our faith today and the perfect companion and support to the Bible.

Their record is in The Book of Mormon. It is the word of God, like the Bible. It clarifies the Lord's continuous pattern of revelation from long before the world began to long after it ends.

I urge you to read this book. When you come to the last chapter of this book you will find a promise³ that you can know—personally, yourself—whether or not the words in this book are true. You will receive the answer you need in a voice loud enough for you to hear and understand. Perhaps not today, perhaps not tomorrow, perhaps not until you straighten some things out in your life, but it will come to you when you are ready, and when those around you are ready. The promise is sure and you will see that revelation continues to flow to us and through authorized servants as it always has.



Crisis

Sometimes we receive revelation and answers because of a crisis.

NEPHI AND LABAN >>

Here, the Lord guides a young man named Nephi, who was on a mission from God. One man stood in his way, a man who had threatened his life and the life of his brothers several times. Now Nephi had come upon him, passed out on the street and alone. The Lord showed Nephi what to do and why he must do it. The result is a blessing to us all, even today. You can find that story in the third and fourth chapters⁴ of this book, but I recommend you start reading from the beginning.



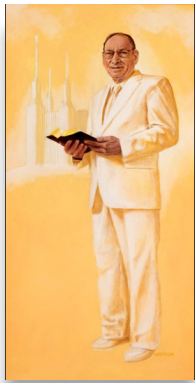
Walking Where God Walks

Change often comes by walking where God walks.



<< PRESIDENT HINCKLEY AND THE WASHINGTON, D.C. TEMPLE

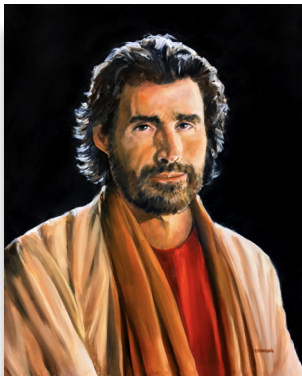
I want you to know that this beautiful building that is under construction outside these doors is a setting for revelation. On the outside of the building is the inscription, “Holiness to The Lord”. This building is a sacred, reserved temple specially set up and sanctified as a house of God, just like in ancient times. He does visit there. I can testify of that. You can only imagine the importance of such a holy place. There are temples like this all over the world, and He visits each one. Ask any member who has a testimony of family history: In doing the work of The Lord to bring your ancestors to Jesus you will feel the power of those buildings and the ordinances and covenants enabled inside.



<< NORMAN DURRANT

The building itself is just stone and steel, but faithful, testimony-seeking people like yourself who want to change for the better and want to help others change for the better will be influenced by the power that resides inside.

Okay. Now we can get to the difficult part.



<< MAN OF SORROWS

This painting, which you saw out front, is a recent one called “Man of Sorrows”. I created it during the darkest times of my life. The image mirrors for me the many times in The Savior’s life where pain, disappointment, and challenges challenged Him.

I see Jesus as a person of perspective, someone who was infinitely joyful and hopeful, optimistic and cheerful, who enjoyed a fullness of constant and instant revelation, who knew the beginning from the end. Though he could feel pain, no sorrow could take down those pillars of His life.



<< IN THE GARDEN

Though He suffered beyond anything any mortal could suffer, as this painting shows, His joy and his pleasure was to do whatever His Father required of him. He knew it would bring an eternity of joy for Him and for us.

So even as a man acquainted with sorrow, he never lost faith or doubted. The roots of his joy were absolute. He offers to each of us the same joy.

Okay. My sister, which whom I consulted on this, said I might have trouble here. My apologies.

You may have noticed that my beautiful wife was not mentioned in my biography. That's because, after nearly 35 years of what she, I and almost anyone who knew us believed was enviable bliss — after those 35 years, we parted. Our marriage ended last June. It is still a tender subject for me, one I have prayed and fasted about for months before mentioning it here. Since then, I have examined in tears and on my knees every aspect of my life, every omission and commission, every forgotten, ugly little corner; every selfish deed; every careless jest and thoughtless cruelty that I may have done to her, intentionally or not, to find answers as to what I could have done that caused her to leave. I still don't have all the answers. I found many things to repent of and of which I still am on my knees about. Still, as I wander through my now-empty house—even with the support of loving family and friends, some of whom are here tonight—it is at times an agony for me.

I love this powerful, worthy, testimony-bearing woman with all my heart. I know she was hurting, too. I am glad she found peace.

Many of you have experienced similar pain. Overcoming separation and divorce is a gradual process. It has taught me much about myself. Since I first discovered her intent, God has blessed me in profound and astounding ways, including a touching array of God-directed coincidences that led to my being here tonight. It was amazing to see all of that. I know that He continues to bless her as well. For those of you struggling with any challenge in your life, if you seek and are faithful to God, blessings will come. My own experiences cemented my faith in that. Just hold on. Be humble. Have faith. Love. Do good.

The Dogs

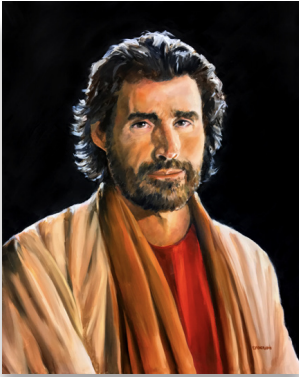
Remember those dogs I mentioned earlier? The ones that raced toward me, barking ferociously, right after I finished dictating this talk into my phone?

I've been bitten by dogs three times. It's not fun. I was scared. Each time I got another small scar. But they just nipped me, sort of a warning kind of thing, I guess. And it wasn't my fault, okay? I don't go out looking for dogs to bite me. This time, though, the situation looked like it could be much, much worse.

I stood frozen in place, as I said. The dogs skidded to a halt right at my feet and sniffed me all over. I felt an impression that things would be all right. They looked around, barked a couple more times to make sure that I was properly put in my place, and ran off.

A friend commented later that the dogs had been sent by the Lord to tell me to stop overthinking this talk; "You've got it." I don't know how accurate her statement was but I took her advice. I trusted the feeling. I never again doubted the Lord's intent

here. That was one of His revelations to me.



<< MAN OF SORROWS

I love this man. In taking upon himself my sins, he also took upon himself my fear of the dogs. He took upon himself the doubts I had about this talk that I later repented of. He took upon himself everything. He went through everything in all of our lives, all our fears, all our doubts, all our pains, sicknesses, sorrows—everything. It is to this man of sorrows, this loving, sacrificing, perfect god of understanding who knows all our hearts and all our feelings, who suffered for our sins more than we ever shall—it is to Him that I apply for comfort. And it is He who gives that comfort.



<< COMFORTED

You can receive the comfort you seek. You can live together with your family for eternity. You can have the power of God to make a difference in the lives of yourselves, your family, and those around you.

You are here for a reason; you have a purpose. God will help you achieve that purpose if you earnestly seek Him. These people here tonight, throughout this building and right next to you, will help you achieve that purpose if you earnestly seek Him. They will do everything they can to help you understand the power and meaning of this message and how it can change lives, because that is what people who have been touched by The Holy One of Israel do.

I testify that God, our God of Love, is real. He is compassionate. He hears our pleadings and will help. There is nothing you can do, no corner you can hide in where He cannot find you. He will empty all pain and confusion from your soul and bring you the peace you seek. He is the light, the life and the hope of this world and of your soul. I believe in Jesus Christ because He is real and He loves me. It is for that knowledge I express inexpressible gratitude and joy. I pray His choicest blessings upon you and your loved ones, and that you will receive the answers you seek, gain strength to bear your burdens, and be freed from your pain, and that you will believe in Him, too. He believes in you. I leave this testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.



ONLINE

Click images for more information about them.

Video of this address: <https://youtu.be/T3UNusG7qOI>

My paintings: lesteryocum.com/

My Facebook page: www.facebook.com/lester.yocum

My Instagram page: @lesteryocum

Kristina Harkness-Granados: www.facebook.com/KristinaLarae/

More about these topics: mormon.org

ENDNOTES

1 [Alma 36: 20, 21](#)

2 [1 Nephi chapter 6](#)

3 [Moroni 10:3-5](#)

4 [1st Nephi chapters 3 and 4](#)