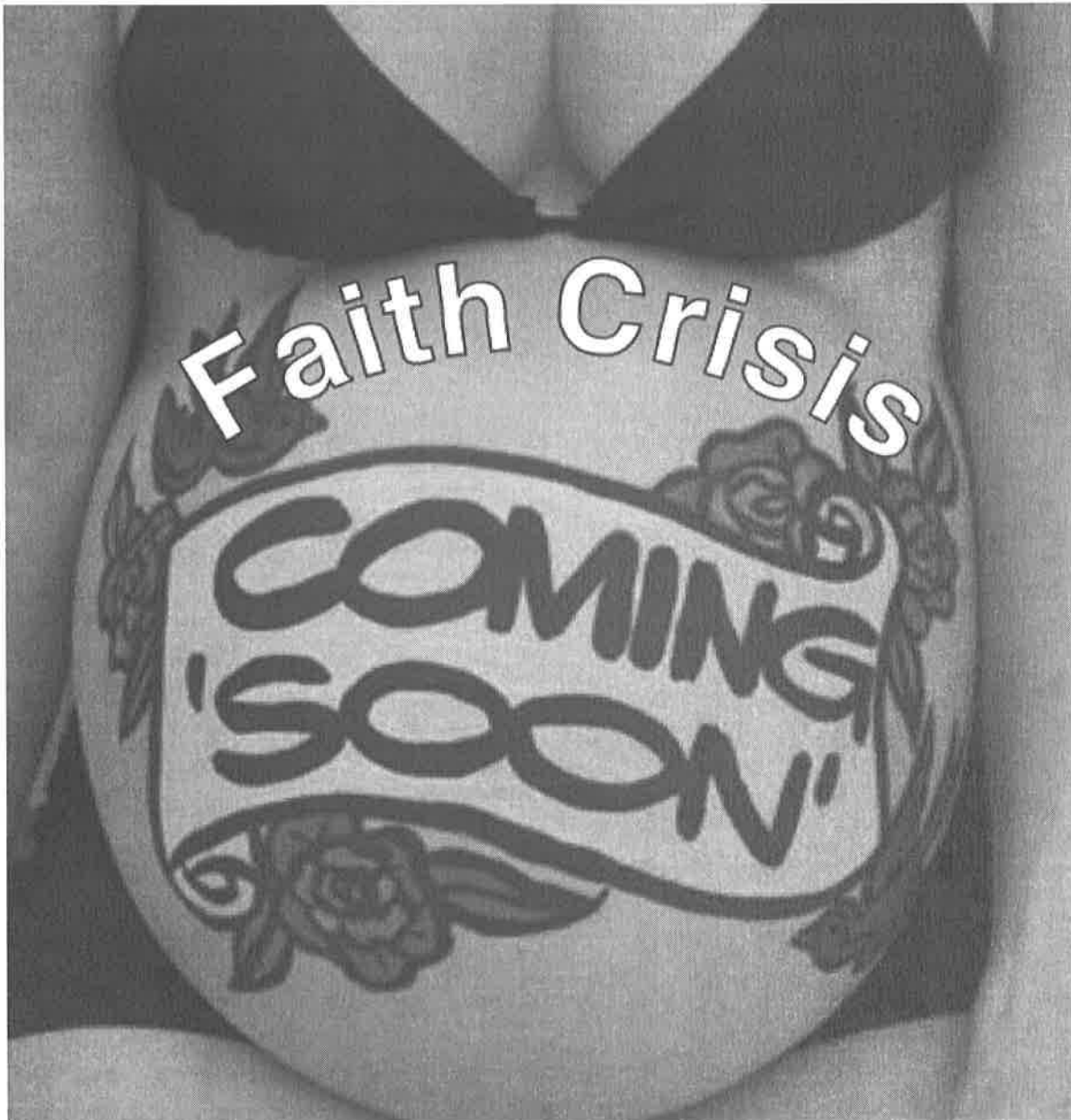


## WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU ARE EXPECTING A FAITH CRISIS (p.s. IT SUCKS)

by Michael Barker | Jan 25, 2016 | Faith Crisis, faith crisis, Featured | 20 comments



As I have actively watched the online discussions regarding faith-crises/faith-transitions, I've noticed something strange. While there is excellent advice on how to work through it – for example the Givens' book, *The Crucible of Doubt*, and Patrick Mason's, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of*

*Doubt* – I haven't found anything that tells us what to expect when going through a faith-crisis. That is what this post is about. Let me narrow it down a bit.

This post is what to expect with your faith crisis – if you make it out the other end with your relationship (although sometimes complicated) to the LDS Church still intact. For those who have left, or are on their way out, this post won't have relevance. The reason being, I haven't left the Church. I am still active in my ward and I hold a calling. So, I can't speak much to the experience of those who have left. I acknowledge there are good reasons to leave and I don't believe my experience is any more valid than the experiences of those who have left. This post is meant to be descriptive and not prescriptive – that is, what I have observed, not what I think you should do. It is based on my own faith journey and what I have experienced and observed personally and from watching the online Mormon community. Here is what to expect:

- It sucks.
- It hurts.
- It will take years for you to “work things out.” Expect it to take around ten years – at least.
- There is not a silver-bullet answer.
- The answers will be less about answers and more about you transforming into someone different.
- It sucks (I know I said that already, but it's true).
- Your relationship to the LDS institution will change.
- Your relationship to your ward will change.
- Your relationship to your family will change.
- You will feel lonely.
- You will feel isolated.
- You might feel certain, right at this moment, about some things, but your certainty will later change.
- You will feel angry.
- You will think that you have it worked out and then...
- You will feel angry again.

*This will happen multiple times. Think of it as second, third, fourth, fifth, etc “Dark Nights of the Soul.”*

- Although you might be careful with how and what you say at church, you will screw it up a lot. *With time, instead of screwing up nine out of ten times, it will drop down to five out of ten times.* <sup>1</sup> 🙄
- You will regain your own moral compass and moral authority.
- You will end up giving some things up in order to remain part of the LDS community.
- You will come to realize that everyone is wired differently.

*Some people want to know about all the problems, some don't want to know about any of the problems, and some just want to know that someone has it all figured out.*

## Wait! There's More!

Now, at the beginning, I said this post was about describing what to expect with your faith-crisis/transition. I'm going to give some advice too. The advice, again, is based on mistakes I have made or seen friends make over and over again. It's almost like Ground Hog Day. It's not what you

normally hear in these discussions, but here you go:<sup>4</sup>

- Don't try alcohol.

*This advice comes from several sources. The first source is from a psychiatrist/therapist who used to be LDS. He says that Mormons in their 30s and 40s usually don't mix well with alcohol. The second source is also from a non-LDS friend (who has never been Mormon) who lived in Utah for about six years. He observed that when adult Mormons, who had never drank before, began drinking, they went overboard and often ruined their lives (this comes from a man who likes to drink). Perhaps this happens because Mormons have never learned moderation. It's either do or do not – there is no middle ground. The third source is me and my observations. Just think about it. You are in your thirties. You are established. You probably are married and might have a good career. Most people experiment with drinking in their late teens and early twenties. They have little to risk if they go overboard a few times. You don't have that luxury when you are in your thirties and forties with a career and family. So, the advice doesn't come from a morality-Word of Wisdom stance. It comes from a practicality stance.*

*This advice to avoid alcohol also comes from another angle that I haven't quite vetted yet. I've discussed it with my wife, but it needs some tweaking. Regardless, I'll throw it out to you. There is something powerful and binding in sharing a common meal with someone. Perhaps that is why so many family celebrations, such as Thanksgiving, involve food. It seems that there is also something powerful and binding in knowing that others share your same food likes, dislikes, and prohibitions. I have observed this among my friends who are vegetarians, vegans, or really into nutrition (ie gym-rats). Not being a Jew, and not being a scholar of religion, I assume one of the things that has bound the Jewish people as a people for so many centuries is the common food prohibitions. I believe the Word of Wisdom functions the same way. What I am saying here is this. Look at abstaining from alcohol, not as a moral prohibition, but as something that binds you to your community. I can't quite put my finger on it, but there is something in drinking alcohol that further distances Mormons from their community. Most of my friends who have tried alcohol, end up leaving and I think it is the communal reason (that I have poorly argued) and not a moral/sinning reason (that we so often hear at church) as being **a** (not **the**) reason that they leave. It distances them. So, if your intention is to stay, stay away from the booze.*

- Don't try drugs (see above problem and multiply to infinity).
- Don't have sex with someone other than your spouse.  
*Open marriages, polyamory, and three-ways are bad ideas.*
- If you are married be mindful of your spouse and if you have children, be mindful of your children.

*If you are constantly online, you are taking time away from your spouse and family. Period. This will drive a wedge between you and them. Be mindful of that.*

- Don't assume that your faith-crisis should be everyone else's faith-crisis too.

- Don't talk about the Church and your faith-crisis all the freaking time.
- Don't be "that dude" in Gospel Doctrine class that is always bringing up the messy stuff. Pace yourself.
- Be strategic in what and how you say things in church. It takes practice.
- Don't assume because someone doesn't want to talk to you about your problems with the Church, that they are ignorant.
- Realize that the Church, "just works" for some people.
- Find someone that you can trust to talk with and that will give you honest feedback and pushback when you go off the rails.

*Finding online support groups are great. Even better is if you can find someone that is a little "further along the road" than you in reconstructing their Mormonism into something meaningful. Too far ahead, and you won't be able to relate to them. You need someone just a few steps ahead of you. Be open to their critiques. Too often I see people talking into echo-chambers where everyone always agrees.*

- Be open to the idea that you might be wrong about something.
- Do service.

*Many people have written about this idea but it has mostly been within the context of "show up to help people move," or, "help out with meals for the sister in the ward who just had a baby," or "do your calling." I mean something a little different and that takes a little more listening and work. This idea I like to frame around Mark 12:31: "And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." When I think of obedience, I use this second great commandment as the standard for measuring. I don't immediately think of all the "does and don'ts" of Mormonism. Pay close attention to what people are saying about other people in your ward who might be in physical, mental, or spiritual need. That sister who is in the hospital because of a fractured hip? Go and visit her on your own without anyone else knowing. The young man who came home early from his mission? Go to his house with giant cinnamon roll and sit and chat. Do it quietly. This takes a lot more active effort than going to preplanned activities or doing your calling, but it's worth it.*

- Read a lot.  
*This includes responsible scholarship as well as essays that talk about spirituality.*
- Consider looking outside Mormonism for spiritual nourishment.  
*My favorites are Chaim Potok's, My Name is Asher Lev and The Chosen and listening to Krista Tippett's podcast, On Being.*
- Maintain a spiritual practice.  
*Notice I didn't say "a religious practice." If prayer and church attendance isn't working for you, consider meditation, walking in the woods – anything that will still your mind and is spiritually fulfilling.*
- Joseph Smith is no longer relevant.  
*That is a little click-bait but let me try to explain. This is another idea that I'm still developing. There are some Mormons, who are active in Church, who are aware of all the issues, and are just settled and peaceful. When you talk to them about polygamy, polyandry, the Kirtland Anti-banking Society, the Book of Abraham, anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, etc, etc, they realize the problems they are*

*for many, they don't try to defend Joseph's actions, but Joseph and some of his nonsense, almost become irrelevant to their spiritual practice as a Mormon. Irrelevant may not be the right word, but I can't think of another that describes what I'm trying to say. Jesus becomes the central part of your faith.*

- Blog posts and FB updates don't count as scholarship.

*This one drives me bonkers. Too many people read a blog post or a Facebook update and that's truth for them. Scholarly books are written by people who have been published in professional journals and whose writings have been vetted by others in their professions. I'm **not** suggesting that reading scholarship will solve your problems. In fact, that might be the root of your problems. It was for me. Todd Compton's book, *In Sacred Loneliness*, sent me for a tail spin.*

- Don't be an asshole.
- Don't paint your Facebook wall with all your issues.
- Take a Facebook Sabbatical. Closing your Facebook account, for even just a week, will help tons.
- Don't "pedestalize" people.

*We as Mormons are hard-wired to put people up on pedestals. If it's not a prophet we are following, it's someone we admire from the online Mormon world or someone we have met personally. If you do this you will be disappointed. Always.*

- Don't get into arguments on Facebook.

*A lot is lost when things are typed out. People don't see body language. They don't hear voice inflections. Here is a great Key and Peele skit that does a great job of making this point (warning, lot's of F-words).*

### Key & Peele - Text Message Confusion - Uncensored



- Try to preserve a good relationship with your ward members.
- Try to preserve a good relationship with your family.

I want to expand on the last three bullet-points a bit. I acknowledge that family and ward members

can sometimes be huge a-holes. I also acknowledge that fractured relationships are often the faults of family and ward members. But, many times those going through a faith-crisis can add fuel to that fire. In all honestly, I know I have done this either in retaliation, or to "prove I'm right" to win an argument, or just in sheer frustration. It's not easy, but just don't do it. Family is important. Friends are important. Try to preserve those relationships. Learn to say, "I am sorry," even if you don't think you did anything wrong. Imagine if you do end up leaving the Church and you end up losing your family too because of your a-holery.

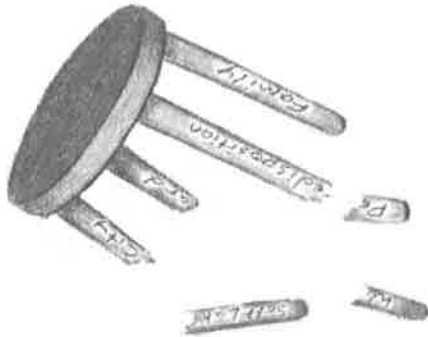
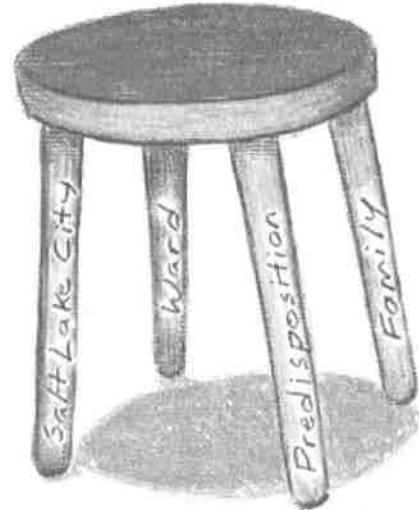
## The Great Predictor

I will close my post by offering a pretty solid predictor of whether or not you will remain LDS. It all comes down to relationships. Imagine your Mormonism is a four-legged stool. Three of those legs represent relationships:

1. Your relationship to your family
2. Your relationship to your ward family
3. Your relationship to the LDS institution at large.

The fourth leg is your own predispositions/genetics. That is, some people are just wired to be black and white thinkers while others are more liberal in their dispositions. The former have a harder time nuancing, the latter have an easier time.

If only one or two of those legs from the stool are broken, (for example, you are a black and white thinker and your



relationship to the institution is fractured, but your relationship to your ward and family are still good) you will probably make it through with your Mormonism still intact. However, if three of those legs are broken, you will most likely leave the Church (for example, your family hates you and you haven't been kind either, your ward has made things rough, and Salt Lake City just continues to piss you off -- your liberal predisposition and ability to nuance won't matter -- you will most

likely end up leaving). Now, this isn't 100%, so don't look at where you are now and go, "Oh, hell. I might as well throw in the towel." Remember that you might change and others might change as well.

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### NOTES

**1** I stole that from Dan Wotherspoon.

**2** This list is not exhaustive. I provide another list in a December 2014 blog post I wrote as a response to the *Ensign* article entitled, *The Answer to All Your Hard Questions*. The list from my 2014 blog post shares some similarities with the list I provide here. If you would like to read the blog