

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND

My incarceration began on January 4, 1990, but the bondage tightening around me began long before. Mysticism can be an all-encompassing obsession. When misused and misunderstood, there is no greater gate to the deluding power of that mysticism than through a passionate belief in God. I now find great pleasure in reading His word and the description of His grace to me, a sinner. The height, depth, width, and breadth of God are more than the scholastic mind can comprehend. I suppose this is why patience, as a virtuous fruit of His spirit is so essential for those of us who seek to understand Him. Isaiah 45:7 speaks of the endless capacities of God as He is in complete dominion over all. “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”

He brightly illuminates our path by His saving grace, yet allows a way for us to fall by way of the agency he gives us. We must look forward with confidence in what our Lord has done for us, that we might not stumble while in search of distractions that do not lead us to His kingdom. Christ’s words to the Pharisees are very fitting for the times in our lives when we feel so far from His kingdom and seek some visible sign of its coming. “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21). His kingdom is the house He builds within you, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1).

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BORN INTO AN ARDENTLY RELIGIOUS FAMILY, I lived the first 18 years of my life in Independence, Missouri. Ritually baptized at the age of eight within the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), I took membership very seriously at my young age. Youth activities placed me in an atmosphere with a purpose. That purpose was the building of God’s kingdom on earth, Zion, a place prepared for the second coming of Christ. The city of Independence, Missouri (headquarters of the RLDS church) has traditionally been believed by its members to be the “center place” of Zion, and the location for Christ’s return.

Along with the missionary accomplishments of my great-great grandfather, he established a sort of family heritage within the church; he did not, however, establish Zion. By age 14, with love and devotion I had participated in at least a dozen missionary ventures, called “witnessing weekends.” I trav-

eled with young members of other nearby congregations to Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado for the purpose of witnessing to inactive members of the RLDS church. Our common love for Jesus Christ guaranteed that these would be mountaintop experiences for me.

With zealous desires at an early age, I became frustrated at the ever-distant prospect of the principle the church called Zion. The church had managed to continue functioning since its founding in 1830, but never seemed to be any closer to accomplishing the goals set in writing within its doctrines. In my young mind, it was simple: belief makes it happen. Yet it wasn't happening. As I watched members get older, I noticed that even my parents began to lose their zeal and accept the fact that Zion may not transpire in their lifetime.

Adolescence is a commonly frustrating stage and mine was in no way different. In fact, it was a particularly lonely time I've often tried to eliminate from memory. However, the ramifications of that time seem to have followed me, as weakness, ever since. Everyone feels the need to belong: the urge to be a part of something, but the only way to actually be part of anything worthwhile is to first be a whole, healthy person, not a dependent one, with feelings of deficiency.

I finished high school having made little preparation for college. Desiring to do something constructive with my life, I joined the U.S. Navy for the training it would provide. I was denied my training of choice because of extremely low entrance exam scores. Knowing I had the capacity to learn, I took a field of training in which I was qualified, and enlisted. I completed six years in the Navy, eventually cross-training into a new field that I not only enjoyed but which would also prove useful to me as a civilian.

During this time I married Susie, a very precious lady. She was a distant cousin, so we had not only the same religious upbringing, but also the same family tree and strong church heritage from my great-great grandfather. We became active with the local congregation where I was stationed. Later I would be called and ordained to the priesthood. The priesthood within the RLDS church is mostly a layman structure, with no theological training required. Priesthood members believe they are called into the ministry at specific levels by the prompting of the Lord through the local pastors and church officials.

My specific office of RLDS priesthood was that of Teacher, which is defined as a congregational level of ministry. With service demands of both my church and the Navy, I found it increasingly difficult to be away from my family for long periods of time. Discontinuing church service was not an option, so I began to feel that finding a career outside the Navy was what I should do.