

“philosophical, theological, doctrinal, and practical,”

—Anthony Sweat, MEd, PhD, author of *Seekers Wanted*, and *The Holy Invitation*.

COME AND SEE

FINDING FAITH IN A
GENERATION OF DOUBT



JOSHUA TAYLOR & JESSICA TAYLOR

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Our Search for Truth

Come and See (John 1:39)

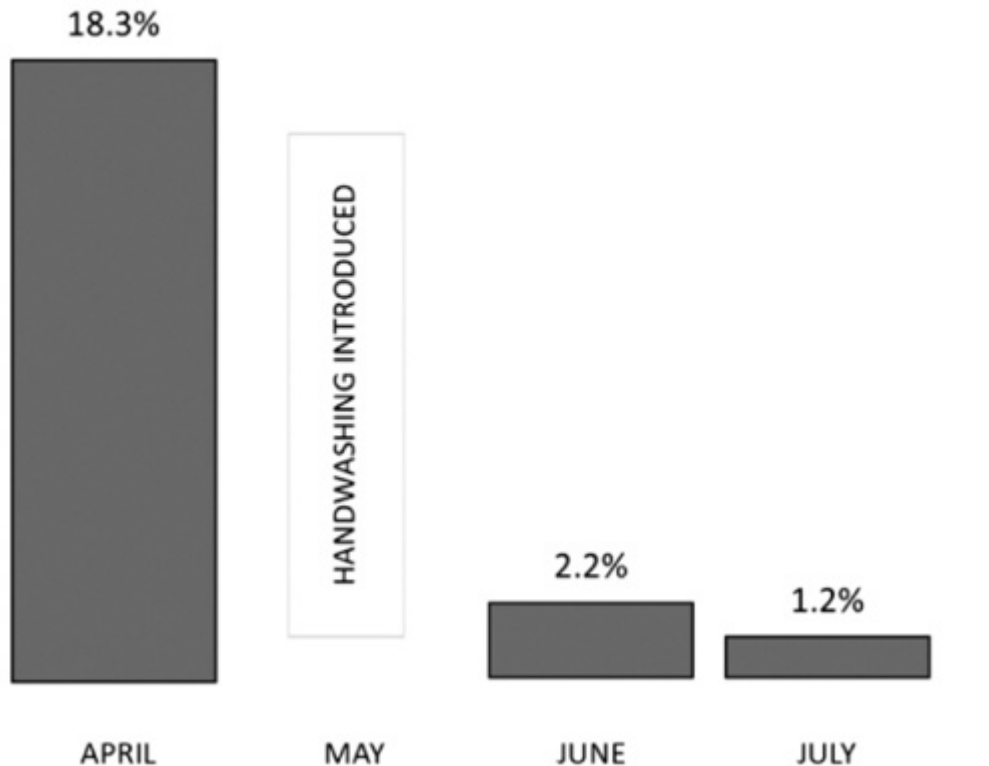
Ignaz Semmelweis was a brilliant doctor ahead of his time. After receiving a medical degree in 1844, he began practicing obstetrics in Vienna. At the time, one in every four pregnant mothers who sought hospitalization in Europe died shortly after giving birth. Although the medical community had concluded that the disease causing these tragic deaths was unpreventable, Doctor Semmelweis undertook a fervent investigation into the source.

He soon discovered that the death rate in his clinic was two to three times as high as the rate reported in a nearby clinic. Semmelweis then meticulously eliminated possible differences between the two care centers and determined that they were nearly identical in every way.

The only notable exception was that his facility served as a teaching hub for medical students in which corpses were examined and dissected. Doctors went from performing autopsies to delivering babies. Conversely, the neighboring clinic was used for the instruction of midwives only. Semmelweis concluded that he and the students in his facility must be 'carrying' something undetectable on their hands from the examination room into the maternity ward. Though the problem may seem obvious to us today, the germ theory of disease was still largely unknown, and it would not be discovered until nearly two decades later.

Semmelweis advised his students to wash their hands in a solution of chlorinated lime. He found that this practice worked best to remove the smell of autopsy tissue and thus hypothesized that it might destroy whatever the doctors were transmitting to expecting mothers.

HOSPITAL MORTALITY RATES 1847



The impact of this instruction was as astounding as it was immediate. After handwashing was implemented in the clinic, mortality rates for mothers plummeted and maintained record lows.

How did the medical community react to such an incredible breakthrough? Instead of embracing the discovery, doctors throughout Europe viciously denounced all handwashing recommendations. Some physicians thought it preposterous to suggest that a doctor's hands might contain impurities. Others refused to listen because there was no acceptable scientific explanation for the improved outcomes. Even as Semmelweis's obstetrics department achieved an average mortality rate of less than one percent for six years, the editor of the *Vienna Medical Weekly*, a major medical journal, wrote: "Semmelweis [must] stop this nonsense."²⁵

Why did so many doctors reject the dramatic results of handwashing? The evidence appears overwhelming, yet intelligent and purportedly caring professionals refused a simple change in behavior.

Though we do not have all the details in front of us, and while doing our best to account for the bias of presentism, there are relatable human tendencies that might explain at least part of the situation. To accept Semmelweis's findings, physicians would have been compelled to acknowledge that they themselves—not some unavoidable outcome from an unknowable source—had caused tens of thousands of preventable deaths. Responsibility would fall on the shoulders of individual doctors and the entire

medical establishment, possibly damaging reputations and credibility. Therefore, it would be far more convenient to label the messenger as mad and promptly reject his claims than to honestly consider whether one's own hands might be unclean with impurities invisible to the natural eye.²⁶

Perhaps there is something we can learn from drawing a parallel between the nineteenth-century medical community and the Jewish establishment at the time of Christ. How was it possible that so many knowledgeable religious leaders failed to recognize the Son of God for who He was?

Rather than being revered for His authoritative sermons and unprecedented miracles, Jesus was repeatedly met with contempt. In one instance of many that could be mentioned, the Savior noticed a man whose hand was crippled, and He compassionately restored the afflicted limb. Think of it—a person was made whole instantaneously by the touch of the Master. Pharisees standing nearby were eyewitnesses to a spectacular miracle. The Gospel of Luke records, however, that they were “filled with madness” and angry with Jesus.²⁷ How is that possible?

To acknowledge Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, Pharisees and other leaders would be forced to confess the error of their ways and accept their subordinate status to Him. Instead, most chose to see the Son of God as a seditious heretic, a public nuisance, and a destroyer of the status quo which benefited them. Prejudice distorted perspective, and their self-selected blindness eventually cried out for a cross on Calvary.

• • •

Do we at times refuse to open ourselves to the possibility of something being true because it might be inconvenient, make us look bad, or require us to change? We, individually and as a couple, are frequently guilty of this. Too often we prefer to listen to opinions that make us feel validated instead of ideas that would require us to change. On this topic, an early apostle offered timeless insight: “The human mind is loath to search deeply into anything it desires not to believe.”²⁸

As illustrated in the story of Ignaz Semmelweis and in the life of the Savior, each of us can *choose* whether to allow something to influence us or not, including truth itself. It seems that no amount of evidence—be it physical proof or a heavenly sign—can compel us to embrace temporal or spiritual actualities if we choose to suppress a receptive disposition. Professor Terry Warner writes: “In order for the truth . . . to affect us, we must be receptive. We must have eyes to see. . . . When we go in search of [truth] and do so sincerely . . . a crack has opened in our shell, and a little light has broken through. We have become able to entertain a possibility . . . and have given ourselves a genuine chance to be [instructed] by truths we have yet to discover.”²⁹

Amulek presents a convincing case study into this concept. In describing his life prior to accepting the gospel message, he explained, “I never have known much of the ways of the Lord. . . . I said I never had known much of these things, but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power. . . . Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore *I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know.*”³⁰ Even the light offered by the Son of God respects the agency of an individual's heart and mind.³¹

You Don't Have to Believe Anything that Isn't True

A little more than a century ago, a father and his son Henry paused after a long day of ranching in the dry heat of Pima, Arizona. In a few short days, the young man would be leaving home to begin college with hopes of becoming an engineer. Sitting down next to his son, the father turned to give one final piece of advice.

"We're pretty good friends, aren't we?"

"Yes, I think we are," his son replied.

"Henry, we've ridden on the range, and we've farmed together. I think we understand each other. Well, I want to say this to you. . . . In this Church you don't have to believe anything that isn't true. You go over to the university . . . and learn everything you can, and whatever is true is part of the gospel. The Lord is actually running this universe."³²

What may seem to be a rather ordinary interaction between a father and son sets a clear benchmark for our religious beliefs. "Mormonism is truth," taught the Prophet Joseph Smith, "and every [person] who embraces it feels himself at liberty to embrace every truth."³³ This is why Brigham Young was captivated by the restored gospel, "for the simple reason that it embraces all truth in heaven and on earth."³⁴ Thus, the theology found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is as liberal as truth allows, encompassing all correct principles, theories, and laws from scripture to science, philosophy to physics, and every other sphere of discovery. If someone were to ask us to describe our beliefs as succinctly as possible, we might respond, "We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer."³⁵

To not be misunderstood, we do not believe all truths are of equal value. The gospel of Jesus Christ places its greatest emphasis on *saving* truths, or in other words, the doctrines, laws, and ordinances that exalt the human family.

With this context around an openness to truth—both temporal and spiritual—each of us can better appreciate the Savior's invitation in the introductory scenes of His mortal ministry:

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

He saith unto them, Come and see.³⁶

Jesus asked those early disciples what He asks each of us: "What seek ye?" or "What do you desire?" In response, we might ask, "Master, where dwellest thou?" Or perhaps in other words, "Master, where can I turn for peace? For happiness? For healing? For lasting joy? For divine truths that save and exalt?"

His answer to each of us is, "Come and see."

Notice that the Savior did not require that His disciples close their eyes and blindly follow, nor did He invite them to *look* merely to satisfy a curiosity. Rather, His invitation represents an authoritative admonition to cast aside prejudice and self-serving attitudes, opening ourselves instead to eternal possibilities. He wants us to see "things as they really

are.”³⁷ Pursuing such a course with a sincere heart, a willing mind, and real intent always leads to increased vision.³⁸

Truth and Belief

It is an article of our faith that men and women everywhere claim the privilege of believing how, where, or what they may.³⁹ Every individual has the right to “free exercise of conscience” in their opinions and faith.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the distinction between belief and truth is often blurred. Personal beliefs, which can be heartfelt and based on what appears to be a firm foundation, may include only fragments of truth or even mistruths.

For example, as much as academic and scientific research represent laudable efforts to discover truth, those methods are often incomplete.⁴¹ As one professor observed,

It may seem paradoxical for a scholar to say this, but there is nothing more unstable than basing one’s life and outlook purely on the latest scholarship, let alone one’s casual perusal of it. What appears to be solid is actually quite transient. The entire modern academic enterprise is founded upon the notion that scholars will say something novel in their published writings. That means they either have to expand upon current understanding or argue with received wisdom. The system is remarkably good at doing what it intends to do: create new knowledge. Yet by definition, then, scholarship makes for a fairly wobbly foundation upon which to build one’s profoundest commitments.⁴²

Truth exists apart from and independent of belief.⁴³ Even the most desperate desires of one’s heart cannot alter the truth, for redeeming faith “must be based upon correct knowledge or it cannot produce the desired results.”⁴⁴ President Dieter F. Uchtdorf further clarified:

We too often confuse belief with truth, thinking that because something makes sense or is convenient, it must be true. Conversely, we sometimes don’t believe truth or reject it—because it would require us to change or admit that we were wrong. . . . There is such a thing as absolute truth— unassailable, unchangeable truth. This truth is different from belief. It is different from hope. Absolute truth is not dependent upon public opinion or popularity. Polls cannot sway it. Not even the inexhaustible authority of celebrity endorsement can change it.⁴⁵

In a culture that evangelizes individualism and promotes moral relativism, some might feel that such a position appears oppressive or judgmental. However, in revisiting the experience of Doctor Semmelweis, we have asked ourselves if other physicians’ skepticism of handwashing benefited patient outcomes. Or posed differently, did the germs that led to disease cease to exist or fail to infect merely because of the doctors’ ignorance or disbelief? Certainly not.

This truth should then lead us to reflect on Doctor Semmelweis’s inherent obligation to share his discovery. What if he had chosen to embrace his medical breakthrough personally but then refused to share the information with peers for fear of rejection? What if, at the first sign of hostility from colleagues, he quit proselyting his findings?

He could easily have rationalized, “Well, I know I should continue washing my hands, but I shouldn’t try to influence other doctors to do the same. They are good, intelligent people who can make the best decisions for their patients. Perhaps I am being a little judgmental with what I believe to be true, and ultimately, I can’t prove to them that I am correct.”

In such an imaginary case, Ignaz Semmelweis would be a villain of the story, as the knowledge he held could save countless lives. Resembling the third servant in the parable of the talents, he might confess, “I was afraid, and went and hid my discovery,” to which the Master condemning him replies, “Thou wicked and slothful servant.”⁴⁶ Revelation, then, is both a blessing and a responsibility. Like Doctor Semmelweis, we as members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ share our life-changing discoveries with others.

The Parable of the Two Lamps

A genuine search for truth is fueled by an open mind and a soft heart. This principle is illustrated in the life of James E. Talmage, whose experience took place in the late 1800s before widespread adoption of the electric light bulb:

One summer evening I sat musing studiously and withal restfully in the open air outside the door of the room in which I lodged and studied. A stranger approached. I noticed that he carried a satchel. He was affable and entertaining. I brought another chair from within, and we chatted together till the twilight had deepened into dusk, the dusk into darkness.

Then he said: “You are a student and doubtless have much work to do of nights. What kind of lamp do you use? . . . I have a superior kind of lamp I should like to show you, a lamp designed and constructed according to the latest achievements of applied science, far surpassing anything heretofore produced as a means of artificial lighting.”

I replied with confidence, and I confess, not without some exultation: “My friend, I have a lamp, one that has been tested and proved. It has been to me a companion through many a long night. It is an Argand lamp, and one of the best. I have trimmed and cleaned it today; it is ready for the lighting. Step inside; I will show you my lamp; then you may tell me whether yours can possibly be better.”

We entered my study room, and with a feeling which I assume is akin to that of the athlete about to enter a contest with one whom he regards as a pitifully inferior opponent, I put the match to my well-trimmed Argand.

My visitor was voluble in his praise. It was the best lamp of its kind, he said. He declared that he had never seen a lamp in better trim. He turned the wick up and down and pronounced the adjustment perfect. He declared that never before had he realized how satisfactory a student lamp could be.

“Now,” said he, “with your permission I’ll light my lamp.” He took from his satchel a lamp then known as the “Rochester.” [He lit the lamp and] its light made bright the remotest corner of my room. In its brilliant blaze my own little Argand wick burned a weak, pale yellow. Until that moment of convincing demonstration,

I had never known the dim obscurity in which I had lived and labored, studied and struggled.

“I’ll buy your lamp,” said I; “you need neither explain nor argue further.” I took my new acquisition to the laboratory that same night and determined its capacity. It turned at over 48 candlepower—fully four times the intensity of my student lamp.⁴⁷

The student could have turned away his visitor at any moment had he perceived the prospect of an alternative path to be a threat to his world views. Like the physicians in Semmelweis’s day or the Pharisees at the time of Christ, the young man might have felt defensive after the presentation of the two lamps, choosing to remain in a less than ideal dimness. But instead, his heart and mind were open to heightened possibilities.

This is the invitation that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints makes to all: bring your light—which we will wholeheartedly embrace—and see how the restored gospel of Jesus Christ offers added happiness, direction, and peace. Disciples of the Savior are encouraged to be seekers of truth because it is the path that leads to more meaningful growth, power, and freedom than any established upon ignorance, falsehood, or an impassable, closed-mind of partial truths. As Elder John Widtsoe noted, “Truth is [our] most precious possession. . . . Light is its fellow traveler. [They] who walk in the light, may travel intelligently and safely.”⁴⁸

SUMMARY

An open heart is essential to understanding and accepting truth. No evidence, sign, fact, or proof can compel us to embrace temporal or spiritual actualities if we choose to suppress a receptive disposition. The invitation of the Savior and His Church is to embrace those exalting truths—the doctrines and principles of the gospel—that bring about our greatest happiness.

Question to Consider: *Am I open to the truth, even if it might be inconvenient, uncomfortable, or require me to change how I live?*

^{25.} “Ignaz Semmelweis,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, contributed by Imre Zoltan, published online, August 9, 2020.

^{26.} One psychologist described how social pressure can sway our opinions: “People are embraced or condemned according to their beliefs, so [they often] hold beliefs that bring [them] the greatest number of allies, protectors, or disciples, rather than beliefs that are most likely to be true” (Steven Pinker, “So How Does the Mind Work,” *Mind & Language*, Vol. 20 No. 1, February 2005, 18).

^{27.} See Luke 6:6–12.

^{28.} James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 382.

^{29.} C. Terry Warner, *Bonds That Make Us Free*, 162.

^{30.} See Alma 10:5–6; emphasis added.

^{31.} Elder David A. Bednar observed, “Nephi teaches us, ‘When a [teacher] speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the message] unto the hearts of the children of men.’ Please notice how the power of the Spirit carries the message *unto* but not necessarily *into* the heart. A teacher can explain, demonstrate, persuade, and testify, and do so with great spiritual power and effectiveness. Ultimately, however, the content of a message and the witness of the Holy Ghost penetrate *into* the heart only if a receiver allows

- them to enter” (David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” CES fireside, February 3, 2006).
- [32.](#) Henry J. Eyring, *Mormon Scientist: The Life and Faith of Henry Eyring*, 3–4.
 - [33.](#) *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 264.
 - [34.](#) Brigham Young, quoted in Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 190.
 - [35.](#) “We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure” (Joseph F. Smith, quoted by Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and Tolerance,” BYU Speeches, September 11, 2011).
 - [36.](#) See John 1:35–39.
 - [37.](#) See Jacob 4:13; Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
 - [38.](#) See Moroni 10:3–5; Doctrine and Covenants 5:23–25.
 - [39.](#) See Articles of Faith 1:11.
 - [40.](#) See Doctrine and Covenants 134:2–4.
 - [41.](#) There are also unfortunate instances in which data, research, and information are manipulated to satisfy a political, social, economic, or business agenda. For example, see Lawrence Krauss, “The Ideological Corruption of Science,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 2020. See also Tunku Varadarajan, “How Science Lost the Public’s Trust,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2021.
 - [42.](#) Patrick O. Mason, *Planted*. Hugh Nibley echoed this sentiment: “Science, philosophy, and common sense all have a right to their day in court. But the last word does not lie with them. Every time men in their wisdom have come forth with the last word, other words have promptly followed. The last word is a testimony of the gospel that comes only by direct revelation. Our Father in Heaven speaks it, and if it were in perfect agreement with the science [and philosophy] of today, it would surely be out of line with the science of tomorrow” (Hugh Nibley, “The Prophets and the Open Mind,” *The World and the Prophets*, 134).
 - [43.](#) “Opinion? Of course, there is a difference of opinion but again, opinion cannot change laws or absolute truths. Opinions will never make the earth to be flat, the sun to dim its light, God to die, or the Savior to cease being the Son of God” (Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” BYU devotional address, September 6, 1977). W. Radcliffe echoed this when he wrote, “There is no progress in fundamental truth. We may grow in knowledge of its meaning, and in the modes of its application, but its great principles will forever be the same” (Quoted by N. Eldon Tanner, “The Laws of God,” Conference Report, 1975).
 - [44.](#) Bible Dictionary, “Faith.”
 - [45.](#) Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “What is Truth?” First Presidency Devotional, January 13, 2013.
 - [46.](#) Matthew 25:14–30.
 - [47.](#) James E. Talmage, “Three Parables—The Unwise Bee, the Owl Express, and Two Lamps,” *Improvement Era*, September 1914, 1008–9; Jan. 1914, 256–58; July 1914, 807–809.
 - [48.](#) John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 4.

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