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President Packer Interview Transcript from PBS Documentary

The following is an edited transcript from the interview [President Boyd K. Packer](#), acting president the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles — the second highest governing body of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — gave for the PBS documentary [The Mormons](#) :

Helen Whitney (HW): How far does your family go back in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Boyd K. Packer (BKP): Well, our family goes back about to the beginning. Three brothers walked from Ohio to Nauvoo, Illinois, to see the Prophet Joseph Smith. My great-grandfather came west in the second company of pioneers and my great-grandmother came west in a wagon. My other great-grandma came in a handcart.

HW: Could you tell us that story and what it means to you?

BKP: They were a family in Denmark. My family name is English, but I'm three-fourths Danish. That accounts for my being resolute, which is a better word than stubborn. The parents migrated first with three teenage daughters. They went from New Orleans up to St. Louis and bought a handcart then came west with the company in 1858.

My great-grandmother was kind of a trim, prim Danish girl. She

bought three pair of shoes, saying, “I will not go barefooted.” By the time they were in Wyoming, two pairs of shoes were gone. She put the other on a string around her neck and said, “I will not march into the [Salt Lake] Valley barefooted.”

They had a terrible time. It was late in the season, and the Platte River wanders. They crossed it a time or two — it isn’t too wide and it isn’t terribly deep, but if you wade across, it is about up to your shoulders. They crossed it three times that day, and she said, “I can’t do it again.” They went around a bend and there was the river.

They started across, and the current began to take the handcart. A couple of teenage boys ducked in and pulled them out. By the time they got here to the Salt Lake Valley, it was cold and fall had set in. She came into the valley barefooted. Her feet were blistered and bleeding, and she sat down to put on her shoes — but she couldn’t get them on, so she walked into the valley barefooted. That’s a part of our heritage — part of the sacrifice that our people went through. There are a lot of stories like that.

HW: Is that a story you think about when you’re faced with something difficult?

BKP: Oh, yes. I think we owe them something for what they did; they came here with nothing and went to work. You know, we were driven out of a number of places, and the saying is that we finally came west because we had to.

HW: We spoke a little bit about the pope earlier. Looking at this extraordinary man, I think part of what was defining about him was his idea of suffering and his appreciation of suffering. Some people

would even think it a *celebration* of suffering and how it can lead to spiritual wisdom. I was struck with some of your spiritual talks, speeches and writings about your own journey as a child through physical suffering with polio, and then later on as a cadet. Could you tell us a little bit about what you went through as a boy and later on as a man and how it prepared you for spiritual insight?

BKP: Well, I was number 10 in a family of 11 children. I thought we were poor. We weren't — we were *poor!* It was a wonderful family life, however. My mother was a wonderful cook and a wonderful mother — she devoted herself to our family. I grew up in Brigham City, Utah, which is north of Salt Lake City and had a very happy childhood life. You mentioned the polio — I had that when I was about 5 years old. We didn't know much about it then — I was treated for pneumonia. Our old country doctor would come every few days to look at me. I was lying on a cot in the front room of our home. He'd look at me and then check me over, and then he'd swear a little. He was a swearing doctor!

In due time, when he said I could get up and I found I couldn't walk, I remember pulling myself around on the floor, on the linoleum floor, and climbing up against the bed. It wasn't really until I was an adult that it was determined that I had had polio. I had some minor deformities. But in those days, polio was real — a girl from our community had it, too. I met her years later and learned that one of her legs was several inches shorter than the other. I missed the crippling part of it.

HW: And later on as a cadet, there was other physical suffering that you endured as well as result of the polio. You said to me as a result of

that suffering, you finally learned to pray.

BKP: That's right, yes.

HW: That's the connection I was making — and the pope's feelings about suffering leading to spiritual insight. I was wondering if you could make that connection with your own suffering and the decisive moment during that prayer.

BKP: I think it was growth, rather than an epiphany or a decisive moment. We prayed at home, and when I went in the military — it was uncertain and unsettled, the war was on — I prayed. My older brother was a bomber pilot in England. He later retired as a brigadier general — he was something of a hero. When I went into the Air Force, he told me once that when they were on the bombing runs over Europe — he was in the Battle of Britain; he was shot down once in Sardinia and once in England — and said when he would get afraid, he would let the propeller “sing” to him and then he'd hum inwardly a hymn, and I learned that it served in two ways: one, that you could erase fear, and two, that you could erase unworthy thoughts. I gave a talk once — “Worthy Music, Worthy Thoughts.” If you have a favorite hymn and sing it to yourself silently, it changes the environment from what's around you.

HW: Our PBS audience is interested and smart, but I would say mostly secular, and I don't think well tutored in one regard — and that is about Mormonism and about its key founding events. I would like to begin here and ask you to choose one of those events and tell us how and why it sustains you.

BKP: Can I have two?

HW: You can have two. [Laughs.]

BKP: The *founding* event was what we refer to as the First Vision. Here's this 14-year-old boy who became unsettled about religion and read in the New Testament, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given." And he, as a youth, was teachable enough to believe that promise. So when he was confused, he went in the woods to pray.

In the course of that, the first thing that happened was a suffocating power of darkness that settled over him. As he said in his account, he was about to abandon himself to it — what he felt was not an imaginary being, but a real being from the unseen world who had marvelous power.

And then he remembered to call upon the name of Jesus Christ, and in a way, that turned the key. The darkness vanished, the light settled, and the Father and the Son appeared to him.

As a 14-year-old boy, he didn't know how to respond to that, especially when he began to talk about it and persecution began. He said, "I knew it and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it." So in the course of his unfolding life, that light was with him. And that light is with the Church.

That vision taught us some things. We learned about the personality of God the Father, a resurrected Being, as part of our gospel.

In due course, an angel by the name of Moroni appeared to him. The story of the golden plates must seem so fanciful for you — they *were* golden plates, the story on them ancient. When you get into it, the

only sensible explanation about what happened is that he received the plates and he translated the Book of Mormon. Then he *read* the Book of Mormon. He was only 23 years old when it was published.

The basic doctrine of the Church and a marvelous thing about the Church is that from those plates he translated an account that is consistent with the New Testament and Old Testament and with common sense. That's the foundation of our doctrine. And then added to that are the revelations that came to him and were recorded, and a number of them published in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Book of Mormon is really the cornerstone of our religion. A few years ago we added a few words to the title. The Book of Mormon (and it was added): Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

HW: As I look around churches today, *mainline* churches, many of them though not all are moving toward myth and metaphor. And I've been struck and moved by your church's insistence on the literal truth of the foundation's stories. And when I look at what Apostle Orson Pratt said, or Joseph Fielding Smith, or President Gordon Hinckley, it's presented in very smart terms. Either these events happened exactly as Joseph claimed they did — therefore it's the most wondrous proof in the universe — or they didn't, and Joseph is lying.

BKP: Pretty clear-cut.

HW: Can you talk to me about the starkness of those choices and whether there is any middle ground at all?

BKP: There's a lot of middle ground. Among the things that came by revelation was the restoration of the priesthood and the pattern of

clergy in the Church. There's a verse in the Doctrine and Covenants that "every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, the Savior of the world."

There's an old saying that "no matter how tall your grandpa is, you've got to do your own growing," and that's the pattern in the Church. We can teach this truth to someone, and they will say, "Well, that's too fanciful," and we then say to them: "Do what Joseph Smith did. Go find out for yourself."

In our missionary work, we don't have trouble with people who listen. The big challenge is to get them to *listen*. If they get to the point where they'll test it and wonder, "Could that possibly be true?" and then do just as Joseph Smith did, ask the God the Eternal Father in the name of Christ if these things are not true, then, at that point, it becomes very individualized. The witness that that person has is the witness all of us can have. *That* is what animates us.

HW: So is it fair to say that to accept — to be a Mormon and to accept the founding doctrines — there is no middle ground. It should be accepted as it has been told, in the ways that President Gordon B. Hinckley has described. Either it is true exactly as it has been told, or it's not. Is that a fair thing?

BKP: Yes, that's a fair analysis of it. The freedom is you can either accept it or reject it. Take it or leave it. But once somebody finds that truth and knows that truth, then he or she experiences what others before them have. He knew — and now I know — that pattern.

HW: I'd like to talk about revelation, which is the foundation of your religious belief. Over the past months we've been talking to a range of

people, Mormon and non-Mormon, about revelation. Rodney Stark, a scholar who is immensely sympathetic to Mormonism, described revelation as “a communication believed to be from God.” And he makes a very clear distinction between *communication* and *impression* and *insight*. Other people feel revelation is more of a process, rather than an event — obviously it affects the heart very differently for each person. My question is, how do you see revelation? How do you experience it?

BKP: Revelation is both a process and an event. “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” And so revelation is constant. It’s not confined to the president of the Church. He receives revelation for the whole Church; each one of us receives revelation for ourselves, for our families. Revelation comes in many patterns. Over the years with visitations — impressions are part of it — it settles again in the doctrine.

God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost — the Godhead — three personages. And this we learn from revelation, the scriptures and from personal inquiry. And when you join the Church, you’re baptized by immersion for the remission of sins. That’s part of the ordinance — the second part is the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, then, has a promise to be a companion, a prompter and protector. It can influence your life. Revelations come in various ways — in dreams, in visions and visitations. That applies to membership, not just the leaders or the presidents of the Church. We constantly live by revelation and by the

spirit of prophecy. Then how's it done? That's a little hard to explain. I can explain it to you through the experiences that you have.

Let me give you an example. I was on a plane once and sitting next to me was a man that was reading a newspaper. And he said, "Awful, terrible, wicked." And I said, "What is?" And he said: "Life itself. The world is worthless and useless. It's all for naught."

I disagreed with him, and we had a very interesting talk for an hour or so. I said: "No, you're wrong. Life is wonderful." Then I made a mistake as far as that conversation was concerned. He said, "How do you know?" I said, "I know!" And he said, "*How do you know?*"

He had me kind of stumped. How do I *know*? Well, I asked him, I said, "Do you know what salt tastes like?" And he said, "Yes, of course." And I said, "What's it like?" He said, "It's not sweet or sour."

"You've told me what it isn't, not what it is!" I said. "Are you sure you know?" He said: "Of course I know! I had some salt when we had dinner." Then I said, "Then you tell me what salt tastes like."

He started again, "It isn't sweet, it isn't sour." Now we could talk about the taste of salt because we've both experienced it. When you come to the spiritual things and having a spiritual experience — and you probably have — then you understand getting an impression, a prompting. That's a pattern in our lives.

In this western country, our lives depend on water, and water is stored in the mountain as snow. It comes into the valley and is parceled out in irrigation ditches — we have irrigation turns and so on. I got an impression one day I ought to buy some water shares, but there's this

problem. No ditches came into my property — I’ve got five acres, no water. The idea worked on me until I thought, “Well, I’ll solve that.” So I got searching around and bought a share here and a share there until I accumulated a few shares of water. I now had the water, but thought: “What do I do with these now? I can’t use them — there’s no way to get the water onto my property.” I had paid for them — paid the annual fee — but couldn’t use them. I told a neighbor who had a ditch that he could use them if he wanted to. Then suddenly something came up, and the water authority said that because of the increased building in the area, the foothills and the ditches were in trouble and they were going to pipe the water. All at once, I had pressurized irrigation. And that came from that early prompting. I tried to get a neighbor to buy some water once and he thought: “Why? We can’t use it.” Well, I just had an idea. It’s a little hard to explain. Inspiration comes a little at a time. We don’t always know the outcome when we are prompted to make a decision. But if we listen to that and observe it, we often find that there was a purpose behind it that we didn’t at first understand.

HW: I’d like to ask a further question about it which possibly is a more dramatic express of revelation. Am I right that you were among those whom President Spencer W. Kimball assembled on that momentous day in answer to your prayers when the revelation came about the ban on the priesthood? I’ve read numerous accounts from different apostles about that extraordinary moment and how they received the Spirit. Could you tell me about that time as you experienced it?

BKP: Well, we had the challenge and the restriction having to do with the priesthood. We thought, “Well, we can’t change that, except it be

by revelation.” President Kimball was concerned about that for several years. He was praying about it, going to the temple about it, and then he called a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the temple. We counseled together — we do a lot of counseling — and then we had a prayer circle around the altar of the temple. The answer came. We all knew what the answer was — we didn’t have to have it explained to us. No great lights went on, no voice was heard, we didn’t know when we began that this would be the result. It began years before as an inspiration, a thought. Members of the Church can always put to the test things they don’t understand or have a feeling they need inspiration about a thing. They can go pray about it. We’re given assurance that we are fairly safe when we act in that way.

HW: I guess that is an important challenge. How do you test the promptings and know whether they come from God or from yourself?

BKP: It’s a very fine line to determine whether the impression or prompting is *revelation* or just a personal thought. One of the tests is to ask yourself, is it good? Does it make you happy? Or is it destructive? You can test. I’ve known many people who have had promptings and found later that they were not right. When they are not right, you can see that they are not right. There’s a power called *discernment*. To discern is to see. And the power of discernment is one of the gifts that attends the priesthood. If all we knew is what we see and what we hear and what we read, we don’t know much comparatively. The power to discern and to see and to understand is one of the motivating influences of the gospel. And that’s how you know.

Let me tell you a whole other story.

In our family, a large family, we lived on a little farm west of Corinne [Utah], in the north part of the valley where the soil has a lot of alkali, so they were poor folks. I think there were four children then. They had a little frame house. And they were trying to hardscrabble a living out of the poor soil.

One day Mother was doing the wash — I know it was Monday, because in those days, Monday was wash day. She had a big copper boiler on the stove. Then in the bedroom there was a little heater. Father came in to say he'd broken the plow and needed to go to Brigham City. She got the children ready, and he got the buggy. She lifted the children onto the buggy and tried three times to get in. Father asked what the matter was, and she said, "I feel like I shouldn't go." That word — *feel* — was a key word. And so Father said, "Well, if you feel that way, you should probably stay home." So she lifted the children out of the buggy. You know what they started to do. So then he shook the reins and disappeared.

She told us on a number of occasions, "There I stood with crying children, and I couldn't call him back, he was too far away." So she went back to go ahead with the washing. And after not too long she could smell smoke. She went in the bedroom, and the ceiling was on fire!

She didn't go to town that day because she *felt* she shouldn't go. Everything was in that home — the mortgage money, everything. Now that's typical — that's one of the stories I grew up with on how this works.

The Book of Mormon is an account of Nephi, the young prophet, who

was abused by his older brothers. He was scolding them. He said, “Now you’ve seen an angel, you’ve heard his voice, but you were past feeling, that you could not *feel* his words.” There’s a lot in that verse. You *feel* words as well as hear them. And if you understand that and cultivate that then you come close to revelation and can be led by that light in all of your dealings.

HW: So you feel that the feeling your mother had was a revelation?

BKP: That’s a revelation. That’s a type of revelation. As I said before, there are visions and revelations of many kinds, but that’s the kind of “homespun” pattern of revelation. When one of my daughters went away to college, someone asked her about me, saying, “What’s your dad really like?” And she said, “I don’t know, but I do know he knows when to call.” How did I know when to call when she was away at school? I just thought. A thought came.

Another example happened not too long ago. I got thinking. One of our grandsons moved away to medical school, and I thought: “How are they getting by? We should send them a little money. We should send them a couple hundred dollars.” So I went home and said, “I’ve been thinking of him” and my wife said, “I sent him two hundred dollars yesterday.” And that’s the magnitude of this kind of spiritual communication.

HW: You’ve said many times — and it’s important for our audience to hear this — that it would be impossible to make sense of this life without the Mormon plan of salvation.

BKP: Yes.

HW: Especially if you're in pain, afflicted. There's a whole list of people for whom this plan would be a special consolation. Could you briefly, in concrete language, describe what that plan of salvation is?

BKP: The plan of salvation is unfolded into revelations. It has a number of definitions — one I like best is the “great plan of happiness.” The knowledge of the plan is that we lived before we came into mortality as spirit children of God the Father and that we were born in mortality for a purpose to receive a mortal body. Here we'll go through life to be tested. This testing is an essential part of life. In due course we'll be released from mortality and go back into the spirit world, and the spirits will resurrect. Life is like a three-act play. The first act, premortal existence; second act, mortality; and the final act, resurrection and reuniting of the body with the spirit. We don't know a lot about the premortal existence, but we know of the reality of it. And so if we know and are certain of the future, that gives a lot of courage when troubles come. And troubles do come, and we grow from them. That great plan, revealed to us through the scriptures and modern-day revelations to a prophet, guides our lives. We live according to the plan.

HW: I think in this last century, many of the Christian denominations have moved away from a heaven that is concrete and specific. The Mormon Church stands as an exception to that — its concreteness and its specificity about heaven. Would you agree about the concreteness and specificity?

BKP: Yes, and I agree about what's happening to the other churches. We don't like that — we're not against them, we are independent from them — but they have moved away and dissolved God in a sense, from

being a Father, an actual Being, to being some influence — not corporeal, not actually there.

We know Him to be our Father and that He lives and Christ lives. We cling to that. And in the strength of that we can meet the challenges that come. We are very rigid and strict on some things. You've noticed that. And yet individually, we're very independent, very free.

HW: The concreteness and specificity of the afterlife — how would you describe that?

BKP: Well, we're back to salt. [Laughs.] We live in mortality, we came into mortality — our spirits existed forever. We are born into mortality, we're tested. When we die, we go into the spirit world. There, in due time, be tested and then resurrected. Now the veil is thin — we're not strangers to that world. It's hard to describe, but we know we'll live beyond the veil and are very comforted and can say with great assurance that that's true of everyone who's ever been born.

As far as how to describe how that is exactly, we don't know that. We know that it is. We know that folks who led the Church in earlier days are very close to us at times. You can feel their presence and it's very real.

HW: Something that I hear about and is talked about in the scriptures are these three levels of glory in the afterlife. Could you talk about what that means?

BKP: Yes, the three degrees of glory as they're referred to in the scriptures. We believe that when you go into the spirit world after resurrection that there are three degrees of glory, not like boxes or

rooms that you go into, but you will be rewarded or penalized for what you did or didn't do in mortality. It goes back to the great plan of happiness and the way we live life on earth. If you're happy here, you're going to be happy there.

That brings us back to the doctrines of baptism and ordinances — baptism by immersion. The Lord said, “Baptized by water and the Spirit.” He didn't qualify that. Baptism is essential by one having authority. In this life we're baptized and confirmed a member of the Church, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Other ordinations come along — men are ordained to the priesthood. When you go beyond the veil, you will have what you have earned here. So we live under patterns of leadership and ordination. That's another thing that I'm sure is puzzling to those outside the Church. Every worthy man in the Church can hold or does hold the priesthood. And it's by ordinance. Everywhere in the world, we don't worry about leadership. It's there. We can call Brother Somebody to be a bishop and he'll respond.

HW: I know that the devil, or however you describe him, does not have a body. But he's a real force. Could you please articulate for me?

BKP: Well the devil does exist. We know that from the doctrine and from life. You put a *d* on *evil*, and you've got the word. The devil and his purpose are to lead us to do that which is wrong, make us unhappy. That which entices us to do good is of God. That which entices us to do evil is of the devil. So it's a real force, but not the all-powerful force. That is something we're always concerned about. We stay on the Lord's side and receive promptings from the Father and not from the adversary. And if we do, we'll be happy.

HW: Have you felt those promptings yourself?

BKP: Those temptations? Oh, yes, temptations come — more when I was younger. I'm too busy now. [Laughs.]

HW: You told two or three quite concrete, powerful stories about revelation in your life. Is there a story you could tell us about the dark one inside you?

BKP: No, not inside me.

HW: Or coming at you — that's what I meant.

BKP: I was in Japan after the war. We were going into Tokyo to a meeting. We came through a little village and there was a large rice paddy on the one side which formed a wall and then a walled building where there was this narrow path. And as we came down this narrow street in the night, there was a large boulder, about twice as big as a chair in the road. I wasn't driving, I was sitting next to the driver, and he began to slow down. I got an impression — kind of an impression of terror. And I said, "Don't stop, don't stop!" And he pulled the Jeep over, nearly tipped it over going around the rock and went on to Tokyo to the meeting.

Much later that night, we came back and it wasn't there. And knowing the circumstance — that was a prompting. Certainly real. And it saved us from we don't know what. You just know that you shouldn't be in a place. I've said many times that Latter-day Saints, living worthily, can't make a major consuming mistake in his life without being warned. "I know I shouldn't have done that."

HW: I've been struck as I've read your talks, and I've read a number of

them, by the urgency of your language about darkness, about how you describe that there is a war going on. It's warning language. Talk to me about that in a very concrete way, about what you see as you look around. Your language is consistently urgent.

BKP: I think I live that way when I'm at peace. We have a responsibility to teach and to share what we have and to warn. The prophecies of the scriptures speak of calamities that are to come. We are to warn — whether anyone heeds the warning or not is their own choice. It's a little harder to ignore the natural disasters, such as Katrina. We ought to be prepared in such a way that we're worthy, no matter what happens.

HW: As you look around the temporal world, most all of us are troubled. When you read the newspapers, what is it that you see in a concrete way?

BKP: As we look around us, it's clear that things have changed. Things are less stable, less confining. To do whatever you want to do and there's no penalties is deceptive. We need to warn, particularly the young people. And in colleges and universities, the patterns of life on campus are so much different than when I was going through school. It's harder to keep a straight, moral life. Moral standard is very significant to us — the sacred power of creation is not to be degraded.

We expect it not to be that way. We raise young men and women to keep the moral standard. We have about 51,000 missionaries out. They were carefully interviewed. Look at our missionaries. Our children go on missions — Latter-day Saint missionaries are pretty good examples of morality in this world. You can tell by the way they dress and groom

and the way they speak. Well, we're the ones called to warn and to lead.

HW: We're going to devote a lot of this to the missionaries. I was really impressed — I had the opportunity to go on out with them. One of your stories I was struck by — the crocodile story — how it made you really take your role in to instruct and warn. Would you take a little time about that story and what are those “spiritual crocodiles” out there? That's a wonderful phrase.

BKP: We were over in Africa, and I asked the game warden about the crocodiles. I said, “This is very shallow water, there are no crocodiles here.” But there in the mud was a crocodile. Things are not always as we are told or as we perceive them to be. As a teacher teaching youth, you can teach by example. I told that story to illustrate to young people how to determine between what the world often teaches us, and what is true. The point is that there are spiritual crocodiles that you can't see that are lying in the mud. You don't go near those.

HW: I'd like to discuss dissent in the Church. I recognize that every church has to take steps to maintain orthodoxy. I'd love to go back to something you wrote about 15 years ago. I heard a lot about it when I started this film. You isolated three movements you felt were a particular danger to the spiritual health of this Church: the gay and lesbian movement, the feminist movement, the intellectual movement. And that was quite a while ago that you wrote that. And so my question is, the world has changed a lot — do you still feel those dangers are present? And if so, why?

BKP: First, in the Church, we don't criticize; we don't discipline

members for what they think. But if they *teach* things that are going to lead people astray and to unhappiness, then we sound the alert. We don't discipline them for their attitudes or their tendencies. We warn people if they go on that path: there are snares there, so stay away from them. It's just that simple.

HW: But could you help me understand why those particular groups or movements were of special concern to you?

BKP: In the center, we do feel and think and know that the ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children can be happy at home. When influences come that challenge or disturb the possibility that our home will exist in the next world, provided you have the ordinances, we find great dangers in them. Families come apart if they follow those paths — individuals pull away from families. I remember saying those things. And if it's in print, I said it. That's part of the alert and learning. It's very simple. Down some of those paths, you have a right to go, but in the Church, you don't have a right to teach and take others there.

HW: Talk about the intellectual dissenters. You have a Church who thinks, right from the beginning, intelligence is the glory of the God. The life of the mind could weaken faith. If that's possible, please talk about it.

BKP: The glory of God is intelligence, light and truth. We are commanded to bring up our children in light and truth. Another scripture says, "To be learned is good *if* you hearken unto the counsels of God." You should know from your explorations that we encourage education. We encourage people to get all the education they can.

We're not afraid of it. We're not afraid to have them go into any field. If someone says, "What should I do with my life?" We say, "Whatever you want to" as far as an occupation, go as far as you can. But if you get hung up and involved and intellectually lose your way — and some do leave — they're questioning everything. But their questions don't have a productive insight. The mind is the source of inspiration, but if you get wandering too far the inspiration will stop. And that's a bad place to be in life — to be without guidance and help, to be without a conscience, in other words.

We keep encouraging our people to learn all they can — there's a safe path in all of that.

HW: Is there a conflict between a faith-promoting work of scholarship and factual scholarship? Is there a conflict at all?

BKP: There can be. Some things that are true aren't very useful. And there are those in the past who have looked at the leaders of the Church, for instance, and found out that they're human and want to tell everything. There are steps and missteps that don't help anything. Some think that to be totally honest they have to tell everything. They don't. If they've got the mindset for that, then they're always grumbling — they have an appetite for it. They're free to do that, but it isn't really productive, it doesn't really make anybody happy.

Someone you knew, say when you were in college, made a terrible mistake. You knew about it, and it was forgiven and lived beyond. There's little purpose in going back and digging that out and speaking of it when their children might be present — a lot of things that are true historically aren't very useful and don't generate happiness.

HW: I'd like to tell you a story from my own life. I spent almost a year on a film. I made this film in which they told me a great deal about their hopes and fears and sins of omission and commission. Let's talk about your thoughts about that. It was a portrait of monks, and it got more mail and response than any other. It came in by the busloads. The Catholic Church was saying by showing us how human the monks are, it gives us hope. I'm sharing that because history may not obsessively focus on just the bad, but the faith-promoting. Do you see that as a possibility?

BKP: Yes. I think that on that very subject, away from your illustration, is a matter of timing. In scripture the Lord said we've got to have milk before meat. Some things you can say with little reaction — it's a matter of timing. Some things you can say privately and not broadcast. We refer to the gospel often as the "gospel of repentance." I'm very glad for repentance, because repentance is to erase the mistakes of the past.

HW: To make mention of another point, going along with your point about milk and meat: children, parents, educators — they're wondering if they're preparing their children well enough for the bumps in the road in any religion including the world on the Internet. Wouldn't it be better for kids to be trained by smart, faithful educators who can provide the necessary context, as opposed to letting them see a whole range of things on the Internet?

BKP: I remember reading years and years ago that the neighbor of a mother with small children had chicken pox. She could see that it was coming their way, so looking at the pattern, she thought she'd get that over with. So she sent her children to work with those children so

they'd get the chicken pox and get it over with. And it worked wonderfully until she found out it wasn't chicken pox. It was smallpox!

That's where we are. It's one thing to learn things individually — educators are all different, they do things differently. We don't encourage our children to go out and have the so-called experience of it all, because a lot of them don't come back.

HW: Regarding intellectualism, excommunication is a last step, a final step. What is the policy of excommunication?

BKP: If people are being destructive of themselves, their families or others, there are some things about which you can be cautioned, warned, admonished. After a time, one can be put on probation. The intent is to give our members every possible opportunity to learn and change their lives. But ultimately, if we cannot help people to make the necessary changes in their lives, there is excommunication. That means your membership is erased. You can still come back into the Church, but it is a separation for a time. In a way, it's a very cleansing thing to be able to start over again.

If our people are teaching false principles — distributing it, destroying others' faith — there has to be a protection. Someone is willfully destroying faith. They can do that, but they can't do that under the credentials of membership in the Church.

HW: Faith and doubt. I have been truly struck by the range and the certainty of the words *I know*, which are rarely used today. It seems the two — faith and doubt — are connected.

BKP: Oh, yes. In our lives we have to be careful that we don't give the Lord instructions. "I want this and this and this, and I want them in this order." It's really safe to say at the end of the day, "Thy will be done." Unlike the man who said: "I'm impatient and I need patience. Give me patience and I want it right now!" [Laughs.] We act in patterns in our lives that a lot of times need to grow.

There's a statement in the Book of Mormon about a group of disciples. It says, "They were filled with the power of God in great glory, but they knew it not." They could see they were more or less being led blindly. It was happening all the time. That's part of the test of life, good and evil, faith and doubt. Fear and faith cannot occupy the same space at the same time. If you have faith, the fear will go.

HW: Does it seem to you, though, that there's this expression of certainty within the Mormon faith as opposed to other faiths? The words *I know* are very powerful.

BKP: Yes, they are. Don't dismiss it. There comes a time when that confirmation comes and *they know*. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "Then I knew of a certainty." Another prophet said, "Nevertheless I do not know the meaning of all things." So you go through life collecting experiences of certainty until you're very secure. You can say, "I know."

That's kind of a power on which the Church works. Each individual has to come to that himself, so we have a pattern in the Church of keeping people busy doing good things so they can come to that certainty.

HW: I read President Hinckley's biography. He was very open about

what he called a dark season in his life. In it, all wasn't clear and it lasted for a while. I'm asking you, personally, did you ever go through your own dark season? Could you talk about that?

BKP: Well, in bits and pieces. I didn't go through a long period of time in which I was in darkness. There are times when I didn't understand and wondered. But I had faith the answer would come. And in time it has come. You come to know, and I know.

There is one area, one bridge that if you cross, you cross alone. You can't explain it and you teach others so they can find it. Hopefully they can find it early in life. But the testing goes on. The challenges of family and what other people do — wayward children, for example — these things break your heart. But through it, you have to have faith that things will be all right. And in time, they are all right. That's why an old grandpa like me can tell a young man, "If you follow this path, you'll be all right." And I know that, that's encouraging. And it builds security around our people. We are an interesting lot, aren't we?

HW: You certainly are, you certainly are!

BKP: I once had the experience of discussing the topic of genealogy with a professor, not of our faith. I could see him looking at me and saying, "Well now, he's a Mormon. They're the funny folks that ran away to the West and have been persecuted. What do they know?" But he was very kind. He showed us the record in the books that hadn't been opened for several hundred years, but there we found "John Packer." After that, I decided I'd take him a leather-bound copy of the scriptures — the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price and the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James

Bible. I told him I'd brought this as a gift of appreciation. I could see him say to me: "Now wait a minute. Mormons are the funny folks that ran away to the West." But he called up the college chaplain and received them. I had it there and said, "Before I hand you this, let me show you something."

So I took the Topical Guide [of the Bible] and said: "Here, under the heading of Jesus Christ, you have 18 pages of small print on the topic Jesus Christ. This is the most comprehensive record on the Lord Jesus Christ that's ever been collected in the history of the world. And it's consistent. You can follow it up and down or sideways, anywhere. It's consistent with the New Testament and Old Testament, with the doctrine." He looked at me differently then.

In one way we are just being discovered. You're discovering us. It is being discovered that a lot of things that you hear about us that are so strange perhaps seem less strange today. If some of those things were true, I wouldn't stay in the Church. [Chuckles.]

HW: What are the stereotypes that irritate you the most?

BKP: Oh, I don't think we worry too much about any of them. I think it's the misunderstanding. I've come to the point at my great age that I'm not so concerned whether anybody agrees with me or not. I am concerned that we understand.

HW: Please explain for our audience, what is baptism for the dead and why it is so important and urgent?

BKP: We are very serious about that. We now have 122 temples operating across the world. And it simply comes back to doctrine;

everything comes back to revelation and doctrine. Christ said, “Except ye be baptized of water and the Spirit, you’ll in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.” If our ancestors are beyond the veil, they can’t experience baptism by water, so the revelation came that we could do it vicariously. And so we search through the records for the names of our kindred dead and go to the temple and perform the same ordinances that we have experienced in life. It’s a marvelous doctrine.

HW: I have spoken to numerous people about their own experience performing these ordinances in the temple and their own experiences of the veil being thin. Have you ever felt such a moment?

BKP: Oh, yes.

HW: Please describe one, just one moment.

BKP: That’s an ordinary pattern in life. That’s part of who we are and what we do. There are those that call what happens *coincidence*. But they make the connection, not by accident, not by coincidence. No, we were being guided, we were being helped. And you go to the temple and perform those ordinances. And the Spirit of the Lord is there in power, it’s a sacred place, a sanctified place, and it’s something very difficult to describe. You just know. How do you know? I’ve felt that light.

HW: I guess the counsel, you know, of the many gay Mormons who love this Church but find following some things too difficult. Would that be your counsel, then, to stay in the Church?

BKP: We don’t discipline for the thoughts and tendencies, but for the actions. In one way there’s little different than a heterosexual person

being under terrible pressure to misuse those sacred powers of procreation immorally. And the line is drawn there. That's the individual's responsibility to keep the commandments. They're free to do as they want and go their way, but that's the cost. We have a tremendous sympathy for them. That has to be displaced with something else in their minds.

HW: We spent a lot of time talking to young missionaries, and it's such an important part of this film. Talk about the proselytizing ambition of this Church. I'm hearing if they don't convert anybody, they convert themselves — but is the intention of this Church to try to reach as many people as possible?

BKP: We are commanded to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. And the missionary work is the process by which we do that. Every family has a responsibility, every individual also to share what they have. We have missionaries in about 105 countries now where missions are established. So yes, it is pretty ambitious. I said earlier that people are discovering us. We're not the funny folks from the West anymore — academically, educationally and in every way, we're just us. And we're going to stay us.

HW: There isn't a woman today who doesn't feel some tension between being at home and being at work. In the last 40 or 50 years, opportunities have opened up. It's clear you are very sympathetic to women who have to work outside the house.

BKP: Yes.

HW: I would like to know about women who *choose* to work outside the house.

BKP: One of the dividing lines is whether they have children at home. Little children need to be nurtured. The woman, the wife, the mother, the mama — she's the power there. And if you lose that, you've lost a lot. So we strongly encourage women to have children, to have a family and then to be at home during their growing years. And we always encourage that. There's a fulfillment there that comes from this. I heard a grandpa say that his grandchildren only want to go to grandma's house. Embedded in that is what we're talking about.

HW: Would you talk a little about that proclamation [on the family] and its importance to Mormonism?

BKP: There have only been five proclamations issued in the history of the Church. So the issuing of proclamations is a major thing. We could see what was happening — the spirit of prophecy. We issued the proclamation on the family. It's strong and direct and states our case. That's one of those things that says who we are, that we won't change the home and the family.

HW: Could you talk more about gender roles?

BKP: The statement "Gender was determined before mortal birth" states our position of how the roles of male and female were established.

HW: There's a hymn that you mentioned that you love when talking about the plan of salvation to somebody. Something about "hie to" — I'd like to hear that from you.

BKP: "If I could hie to Kolob in the twinkling of an eye, and then continue onward with that same speed to fly, do you think that I could

ever, through all eternity, find out the generations where Gods began to be?”

Then the other verse goes on, and you can read it: “There is no end to matter, there is no end to space; there is no end to wisdom; there is no end to race.” You’re testing an old man. That is a very profound song that you should read when you’re studying about what’s going on in the world today.

When you read that and talk and look into the eternities, you see the endlessness of it all — that’s caught up in the words of that song. President David O. McKay read that to one of the astronauts that came. There’s so many things that we don’t know, but it’s a wonderful world that we live in. There’s no end to what we can learn, but we only use about 15 percent of the room there. It’s a great, great revelation that came from William W. Phelps.

“If I could hie to Kolob” — now you have to know what Kolob is; the scriptures say it is the *center* place — “and then continue onward with that same speed to fly.”

I know a lot of hymns, and I know that one.

HW: But it does say something essential about Mormons.

BKP: It does; it shows a depth and a breadth and a power that is consistent with all that we know. All of the orbits of all the heavenly bodies follow that same thing — it’s an amazing world we live in. When you see color and life and all that life has to offer, we shouldn’t be bored.

HW: More than that. One last question. There’s a moment that comes

— instead of inheriting the faith, they inhabit it. Was there such a moment for you?

BKP: I can't look back and say, "Well that's the day, that's the moment I knew." There were a number of them — I think I grew into it and tried to teach our family in such a way they'd grow into it. Finding that "pearl of great price" is just the beginning, not the end.

Someone said to Brigham Young, "The more I know, the more I learn, the less I know." He said, "I wouldn't say that. I would say the more I learn, the more I discern an eternity of knowledge." Now that's Brigham Young.

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