

**Q&A with Lynn K. Wilder, author of
*Unveiling Grace: The True Story of How We Found Our
Way Out of the Mormon Church***

Q: Why does the Mormon Church have such a draw? Why is it so compelling to so many?

A: When we were first introduced to the Mormon Church, we were invited to dinners at their homes and to church activities, gaining status at husband Mike's work environment at the university and in the church community in one fell swoop. This join-the-family technique was the most effective of all in getting us to stay with them. Mormons understand the role relationships play in potential converts' willingness to accept new ideas and the LDS culture. Establishing relationships and loving people works. Mormons do it well. The Church had a powerful grip that sucked me in. Church relationships began to supplant biological family relationships as we dove into a life of active participation with our new religious family. They made sure we were busy and involved with church callings.

Q: The more involved you got, the busier you got. But you also say you developed a suspicion toward anything that would go against your Mormon teaching.

A: Yes. Mormonism bred in us an antenna to check for persecution. We were told Satan and others would attack us at every angle because we had the truth, and this teaching gave me a suspicion of the outside world. I was sensitive to anything that smelled like opposition to the Mormon gospel, even a joke. A Book of Mormon scripture states that contention (argument, discord) is of the Devil. So anything that seemed to belittle or contradict the Mormon gospel was deemed Satanic—a double bind that would one day tie me in knots. Mormons had taught us to expect opposition. Instead of taking the attack as a warning, we took the opposition as a sign that we were on the right track.

Q: Still, you had some positive experiences within Mormonism...

A: Absolutely. If there is anything Mormonism is known for, it is having happy families. I sang the Mormon children's song, "Happy Family," to my four precious children several times a day when they were little. We believed in the principle of eternal families—since we'd been sealed in the temple, Michael and I could be a married couple and have our children with us in the next life. Family was everything. We attended church each week and taught our children the Mormon gospel. The church was like family to us.

Q: In your book, *Unveiling Grace*, you speak powerfully about your relationship with your husband, and how you both committed to walking through all this together.

A: Yes, from the very beginning we promised that to each other. And then toward the end, Mike just knew if we bucked the Mormon Church, I'd never work again, ever. My sin of apostasy from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could be splashed across the pages of the Mormon-owned newspaper and the Mormon-owned TV station out of Salt Lake. Who knows what else they could dredge up to report? Then all those years, all that money, all those skills would go down the drain, and we still had three kids to put through college. But Mike and I were in agreement, our relationship was strong and mutually respectful, and as we had vowed long ago: whatever we decided spiritually, we would do together.

Q: You lived with a lot of pressure, especially as a woman, to conform to LDS standards.

A: Yes, I felt great pressure to have everything look great on the outside, and to do everything well. Mormon scholars have tried to refute the idea that pressure for women to be perfect impacts their emotional life. But in my church work, I met many hurting and discouraged women. One struggled to get seven small children to church on time. One fretted she didn't have time to read her scriptures. Others worried that their homes were not clean enough or their children not faithful enough, smart enough, or talented enough to stand out in the outside world. Some were anxious because they did not hold temple recommends or did not have husbands to get them to the top of the celestial kingdom or were not spreading the Mormon gospel or did not have time for their callings. Some were eager to save their dead family members through genealogy and temple work. If others were going to look to us for answers and want to join Mormonism, we needed to have it all together. There was a lot to worry about.

Q: Even though you studied the Scriptures, why were you still not able to see Christ of the Bible? What held you back?

A: For a long time a veil of Mormon legalism clouded my heart and mind. Caught up in the rules and regulations of the Mormon gospel, I was—like many religious leaders in Jesus’s time—unable to see the real Jesus. Yes, as a Mormon I read the New Testament, but always through the veil of Mormonism. Only when I earnestly sought the true Jesus while reading the New Testament was the veil taken away and I was fully able to contemplate his glory. The truth was, as a Mormon, I’d been decidedly self-centered. All day long I worried, perhaps not consciously but unconsciously, if what I was doing was the right thing. I worried whether each decision I was making throughout the day was moving me closer to being good enough to be accepted by Heavenly Father.

Q: After your son Micah’s conversion, he encouraged you to start reading the New Testament. What were some of the initial scriptures that connected with you?

A: I started reading in the book of John. John 1:1 read, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” I thought, The Word is Christ. I get it. This was what I was looking for, words from Christ himself. Everything he says is The Word, I told myself. I read the cross-reference, Revelation 19:13: “He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.” Christ and the Word of God were the same. I got it. It’s not as if I’d never read these scriptures before, but this time I was probing for answers. I focused. I read from the beginning of the book of John straight through so everything I read would be in context, giving special attention to the exact words of Christ. I wasn’t the only one reading the New Testament. When I sat up in bed at night reading, Mike was reading, too. We began to have some very stimulating conversations. To be honest, I wasn’t sure I wanted to belong to God one hundred percent of the time. I was comfortable with my compartmentalized faith where I only needed to think about Heavenly Father when I was engaged in church work.

Q: You mention that your journey out of Mormonism included “Biggie-sizing” your God.

A: Right. As I learned, this new, big, biblical God discerns one’s heart, honors meekness, creates universes out of nothing, performs miracles for individuals, loves me like a spouse, and remains God from eternity to eternity. He doesn’t change. He hasn’t worked his way to godhood. He knows everything. He has power over everything. He is all places at once. He is always working on our behalf. He answers prayer all day, every day, and every night, and he never sleeps. Therefore, he has the love, the desire, the time, the knowledge, and the capacity to be personal. His love is wide and long and high and deep. As I began to get to know this God, I couldn’t get enough. This bigger God has a message that conflicts with Mormonism, too. As I read the New International Version (and checked with the King James Version used by Mormons), I came upon blatant contradictions between teachings in the Bible and Mormon Church doctrine. Even though I’d taught the Bible in Mormon seminary, I had never paid attention to these contradictions before.

Q: After accepting Christ, it’s wasn’t simply smooth sailing from there on out...

A: No. That’s when Christ began to awaken me to my sin. God knew I was in need of some major humbling. I was about to get the truth I’d asked for. It was brutal, not the “I’m sorry,” Mormon-Jesus-niceness I was used to but cold, hard, real truth. In John 9:41 Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see ...” It’s a good thing we have a loving God because what he was about to let me grasp about myself was oh, so hard. I was uglier than I ever imagined. I was a sinner—big time. After I surrendered to him, the first thing he did was open my eyes to my sins, one by one. I could never have stood them all at once. I’d have begged to die for sure. This process took more than a year. I’d had my head in the sand, as it were, for a very long time. It took another four years of learning God’s Word until I felt more stable in my understanding of what was true and what was false. “Working out my salvation” has definitely been a process.

Q: Why are people confused about whether Mormonism is simply another form of Christianity?

A: Mormonism wraps itself in the cloak of Christianity, using and twisting Christian words. Mormon doctrine sounds terribly Christian, but it’s not. The same religious words like grace, salvation, and

atonement have different meanings for Christians and Mormons. With its official name, Mormonism declares itself a “church of Jesus Christ.” With its focus on church community, family, hard work, tithing, and missions, it presents itself as just another Christian denomination. And its clean-cut, hard-working, high-achieving members seem to proclaim its goodness and rightness. But as the Bible points out, counterfeit spirits pose to deceive, and even can cloak themselves with an aura of goodness and light. “And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). It was an angel of light who visited Joseph Smith, Mormon Church founder.

Q: As a result of your journey out of the Mormon Church you have created a ministry to specific reach out to those still in Mormonism, plus you teach Christians to avoid joining Mormonism.

A: Yes. It’s called Ex-Mormon Christians United For Jesus. It’s a ministry that works to keep Christians safe from the pernicious false christs, false apostles, and false prophets, desiring that a veritable flood of Mormons will come to proclaim the Christ of the Bible. What makes our ministry unique is that we were very active LDS and I was tenured faculty at BYU. We know church doctrines and culture inside and out. Since Michael and I had a difficult transition out, we are sensitive to individuals seeking truth who carry the burden of worrying about the reactions of their Mormon spouses, families, and friends. Hardly a week passes now that we do not hear from others he has called out of the LDS Church who are going through the wounding and the binding and healing process themselves. I’ve heard amazing stories of God’s grace in people’s lives.

Q: Do you ever feel like God wasted your years while you were trapped in Mormonism?

A: At one point, Mike and I were burdened with the thirty years we had spent teaching our children what was not true, and the time we had wasted in useless endeavors like genealogy, temple work, and studying and teaching scripture that didn’t come from God. We felt such sorrow for all the lost years. It was heaviness for me. I apologized to Micah for having immersed him in lies all of his life. His gentle answer to me was, “Mom, don’t you realize that God planned this whole journey for our family?” I find it miraculous how God has worked in the lives of each of us in my family. First the Dancer called, unveiling grace little by little, even while we took a long detour following the false god of Mormonism. Then we gave our lives to the biblical Christ. Then for several years he took us to the wilderness to prepare us for this ministry. We studied the Word, and he bound the relational hurts, healed them, and gave us grace to bear testimony of who he is and what he can do. It has all been his plan. His timing. His calling. His preparation. His work. And it will be his harvest. I tell God I could die tomorrow and be perfectly content to see his face. I thank him daily for allowing us to know the truth before we died. Our continual prayer now is for others, especially our dear Mormon people, to know the joy we know in Jesus.

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By Lynn K. Wilder

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