

Episode 4

Why I Believe

TY BENHAM

NARRATOR: The views and opinions expressed here are those of the guests and are not the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

MALE VOICE: We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

MALE VOICE: We believe the Bible to be the Word of God...

FEMALE VOICE: We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men...

MALE VOICE: We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind...

MALE VOICE: We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

FEMALE VOICE: We may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things...

(Music)

RICK STARR: The Mormon Channel now presents Why I Believe.

[END MUSIC]

RICK STARR: Welcome to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. I'm your host, Rick Starr. On Why I Believe, members of the Church share inspiring stories and experiences that have led to a miraculous change of their hearts as spoken of in the scriptures. Today we have Elder Ty Benham here with us from Idaho and he is going to share his conversion story; and his wife Nancy is here with us as well in the studio. They are currently serving as Church

missionaries at Church headquarters. We'd like to welcome you, Elder Benham. Thank you so much for being here.

TY BENHAM: Thank you. It's good to be here.

RICK STARR: You know, before we start and hear your story about your upbringing and your conversion to the Church, I'd like to hear a little bit about what you and your wife are doing on your missions right now here at Church headquarters.

TY BENHAM: We serve in the Real Estate Department of the Director for Temporal Affairs, so our assignment is to the greater Salt Lake area where we look for chapel sites; we work in helping with properties where there are issues such as boundary lines, easement problems, zoning; we also handle 23 girls camps that are assigned to the greater Salt Lake area and then we assist in the southern Utah area and have assisted in other parts of the country where there are questions about properties or a girls camp has an issue that needs to be addressed. We are not the experts but we become pretty knowledgeable about what needs to happen or what they can do and how they can work out some of the problems they face in those properties.

RICK STARR: So you have a background in real estate. So you bring that experience to the table as a missionary here at the Church.

TY BENHAM: I do.

RICK STARR: You know, I had no idea that there were 23 girls camps.

TY BENHAM: (laughing) There is actually more than that but two of them are now not active and have been sold and we have some others that have some issues that we're discussing what to do and how to handle them but we are seeing a growth in young women attending camps and there is a need for more space for them so we are trying to utilize the camps we currently have. I am not sure in the future if they are going to add more or not, we are just gonna try to expand, I think, the ones we have at the moment.

RICK STARR: That's great. I bet you have had a lot of neat experiences with girls camps.

TY BENHAM: Absolutely. They have brought us to a chapter in our life we never thought we would experience. Having the opportunity to see these young women come into a camp and actually go to the camp and hear some of the experiences of life-changing things that have occurred and then seeing and hearing their testimonies at the end of a week in girls camp and how it has affected their life probably forever. You know the saying you change a woman, you change the world. And a young woman who has this opportunity can get close to the Spirit and have the Spirit testify to her of the Savior and of the principles of the gospel. Happens very, very dramatically in the girls camps and we are so grateful to be able to serve in that capacity and learn of this great program of the Church and be a part of it.

RICK STARR: You know, I have as a father, personal experience with that because when my daughter comes home from girls camp, there is a light in the house for weeks, she is just full of

testimony and experiences and it's just a great benefit to these young women to have these girls camps.

TY BENHAM: It is. It is. And to be a part of helping that grow and to provide for them the things that they need so that the camps can be a spiritual experience for them is very gratifying.

RICK STARR: That's neat. Well, let's talk about your change of heart. Talk about your upbringing. I think you were brought up back east? Is that correct?

TY BENHAM: I was. I was raised in a Christian home. My grandparents were very active in religious beliefs and my mother was very instrumental in helping me understand that there is a God and that Jesus is important to have in our lives. Every time the church door was open, we were there. Her father was a minister and then my grandfather on my father's side of the house was what we would consider I guess a general authority of the faith that they were involved in. He handled the treasury of the church and was a very, very good scriptioner. I remember sitting in the Church pew as a small boy and listening to him speak about the Apostle Paul and about the scriptures. He prepared me to be a Mormon. He lived the gospel and didn't know it. He had memories of Salt Lake and reflected when I was a lad about visiting Salt Lake. He and grandmother—he worked for the railroad—had come to a meeting, I think it was in San Francisco or San Diego—one of the places out west—and stopped in Salt Lake and went to the Great Salt Lake, jumped in and that's when I think it was out to where that resort was at the time...

RICK STARR: And he floated.

TY BENHAM: He floated, and I think they had a picture of doing that and then he talked about the choir. He said that choir was one of the most wonderful groups of people he had ever heard sing in his life and spoke very highly of the Mormon people, and whether he knew it or not, he was preparing me.

RICK STARR: He planted the seeds.

TY BENHAM: He planted the seeds and, you know, it was kind of interesting because he did what we do. He would get up in the morning—he worked an evening shift most of the time but he would get up and they would have family prayer together and I visited their home quite frequently. I had two young sisters who were born prematurely so they had a lot of medical problems and so I got to spend time with grandma and grandpa. And in their home, they had prayer before they partook of any food and read scriptures. They would gather around once a week in the evening and we know that as family home evening ...

RICK STARR: Sure.

TY BENHAM: ... and would talk about people that were having problems in their church and the community. They would pray for them and they would discuss the family and the activities for the week. Wow, I never knew that I could be so prepared for something as he had prepared me, whether he knew it or not, to become a member of the Mormon Church.

RICK STARR: That's great. Now, as you grew up, did you carry those values with you?

TY BENHAM: You know, there comes a time in a young man's life when you try your wings. (laughing) And as a teenager, you probably do that more than you'd like to admit. However, I stayed fairly close to my religious beliefs for a while. But I found I was very constrained in that the expectation of your well-off parents can be a little overwhelming for a young man that is wanting to try his wings and I broke away from the family if you will and joined the military and with my dad's permission at a very young age became a part of like an ROTC program. Then, upon graduation the next day, I entered boot camp. But I'd already had some training, so as I did that, there was a break-away period in there, and just prior to that, I was a little rebellious. At that time, there had been some changes. My grandfather passed away and I was very sad about that, losing him. He was my best friend, and not being able to be there was a hard thing for me and not being able to attend his funeral, so I sort of didn't have the opportunity to say good-bye. And as I saw the changes coming in the religious belief, in the church there—there was a change from the long dresses and the long sleeves and the high-neck collars and the long hair, no jewelry, that was what I, very conservative, that was the way I was raised, and that changed, like overnight, and in the 60s, they were suddenly wearing bracelets and necklaces and cut their hair very short and were wearing sleeveless dresses and miniskirts and ...

RICK STARR: And it shook your faith.

TY BENHAM: It really shook my faith. And so I don't know how I did this or why I did it other than the fact that I had this (laughing) thing that I had to go do, right? And the minister at the church had a doctorate in theology, so, you know, he is very well-versed in the scriptures and a very good speaker. I made an appointment with him and I went into his office at the church and I said, "Why? Why the change? Who said it was OK to do this? All the time I've been growing up, I've been trained and taught by my parents and grandparents that to be a Christian, to be conservative, we needed to be modest in all things, and I see the jewelry, I see all the make-up, I see, you know, these very short dresses and very revealing. Why is that now OK? And it wasn't then?"

RICK STARR: How old were you?

TY BENHAM: I was about 15. (laughing)

RICK STARR: So these questions were on your mind as a 15- or 16-year-old boy.

TY BENHAM: Yeah. And he kind of sat and looked at me. He never spoke. And I went on and said, "You know, my grandfather laid the block of this building. He laid the concrete blocks, he participated in the building of this and I remember that happening. And I think he would be very sad to see what we've come to and where we are today. How is this OK? By what authority was this changed and who authorized it?"

RICK STARR: Now that is a deep question for a 15-year-old.

TY BENHAM: And I don't know why I asked that question.

RICK STARR: Did he ever explain it?

TY BENHAM: No. In fact, he just sat there with a strange look on his face and I finally said, “Well, that’s my two cents worth. I didn’t mean to offend you but that’s the way I feel in my heart.” And I was at the time serving as the leader of the youth of the church so they had appointed me to be the spokesperson for the young people at that time. And I felt as a leader I had a responsibility to the youth. That’s not what we’d been taught and that’s not what we were seeing as acceptable and yet this was going on. So I turned and left. (laughing) And he didn’t say anything. So it was the next Sunday when I went to attend services that things had changed. And apparently he had made some phone calls and the longer dresses were back and the longer sleeves were back...

RICK STARR: (laughing)

TY BENHAM: And people were combing their hair as long as they could. You know, the jewelry was gone. I’m going, hmm. (laughing)

RICK STARR: You had quite an effect there.

TY BENHAM: But he never came to me and spoke to me or said anything, and a few weeks later—this is what probably will stick with me the rest of my life—he and his wife were on their way to a church meeting. A car pulled out in their lane and they hit head-on at a fairly good rate of speed—I think it was 50, 60 miles an hour—and his wife was killed outright. I thought back on that and wondered, did the Spirit tell me I needed to go do this? Was I following, you know, the promptings of the Spirit? It wasn’t me. It wasn’t something I would have done, I don’t think. But I learned from that that when those little promptings come, to pay attention to them. Now I wish I had paid more attention because I was very despondent about all those things that were going on so I went into the military. And in going to the military, I took up with the wrong guys and started making some poor choices. And I was lonely. I was not happy about the way things were. We were in a war. We didn’t want to be in the war. We didn’t want to go. I was quite young, and as I faced the fact that I may go into a battle zone and be faced with death, what am I doing here? I prepared and trained and did everything that I was told to do. At the last minute, it was like the hand of the Lord stepped in and said, no, you are not going. Yeah, you are willing to go and you’ve been trained and you’ve been taught these things, but I need you somewhere else. At the last minute, I was accepted into a training school and went to the training school while my company went overseas and as they were transferred to Vietnam, and I was in my school training, the word came that there was a battle and my company was virtually wiped out. And I would have been there. I would have been probably right in the middle of what was going on.

RICK STARR: For those of you who are just joining us, this is Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. Today we have Elder Ty Benham who is serving a mission with his wife here at the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City, Utah.

You’ve talked a little bit about your upbringing. You were brought up with the seeds of the gospel basically planted in your soul, and you had some questions as things changed in the church and then you joined the military. And just now you were talking about how you were separated off from your company and they went overseas. What war was this? World War II?

TY BENHAM: Vietnam.

RICK STARR: In Vietnam. And your company was virtually wiped out and you had the opportunity or the blessing I guess of staying stateside in a training school. What were you training for?

TY BENHAM: Air traffic control. And working with the Air Force side of the Navy. So it was a great opportunity to be able to do that and I had some great experiences there. And still during that time, I was back and forth about what church is right. What should I be doing? And from time to time, I would attend different church meetings at different places, still trying to sort through things. I attended Catholic church, I attended Pentecostal church.

RICK STARR: Now what brought all of this to the forefront? Was it the fact that many of your friends had been killed in Vietnam ...

TY BENHAM: Absolutely.

RICK STARR: ... that really brought the questions to your mind?

TY BENHAM: Absolutely. You know. Where am I? Who am I? Where am I going?

RICK STARR: The basic questions.

TY BENHAM: The basic questions.

RICK STARR: (laughing)

TY BENHAM: And truly, I was asking those questions. I needed to know and wanted to know. But yet, in doing that, I still was being influenced by the wrong crowd. I was associating with those in the military that weren't doing all the right things that we do today, I mean, they were smoking, they were partaking of alcohol and you know, we had our rough language and that's kind of the way I continued for several years in fact, even after I got back from the military. And I think that's what prompted a lot of the mistakes I made by not having the guidance I was looking for and seeking for. But I kept looking. I didn't quit in spite of all that.

RICK STARR: Were you—at this time, were you married? Did you have a family?

TY BENHAM: You know, right after I got out of the military, I did marry. I was married for a very short time, six weeks (laughing).

RICK STARR: Oh my goodness.

TY BENHAM: And that was a very interesting experience I guess would be the word for it. Let's just leave it at interesting experience. I nearly died from that experience.

RICK STARR: How old were you at that time?

TY BENHAM: I was 18.

RICK STARR: 18. And you were just out of the military at 18. And you got married...

TY BENHAM: I was on recall...

RICK STARR: So you were young ...

TY BENHAM: I was...

RICK STARR: ... when you got married.

TY BENHAM: I was. And then I went several years before I married again and was really not very excited about marrying. The first marriage was a hard one. It was very difficult for me to understand why things could go so wrong, and I thought marriage was such a wonderful thing, but it wasn't for me. It was a hard thing.

RICK STARR: It had to be hard because you were raised in a family that had appeared to have really strong marriages, strong family and to have that disappointing experience at that young age—what happened then?

TY BENHAM: I went through several years, got into broadcasting and...

RICK STARR: That's a good field to be in.

TY BENHAM: It was. It was. And it has served me well for many years. And during that time, I met a young lady and we married, and this was my second marriage, and on my wedding night, our wedding night, she said she was in love with someone else.

RICK STARR: Oh, boy.

TY BENHAM: And it was a real hard thing for me to understand because I wasn't ready to make that transition but took the leap anyway thinking, well, maybe this time it will work. And I worked hard at it for about five years and discovered that she was with someone else and I couldn't continue that and so I ended that, even in spite of the fact that she promised she wouldn't do it again. I said, I'm sorry, I can't. You know, it's just And still, I had not found a religion that...

RICK STARR: You were still looking?

TY BENHAM: I was still looking, still seeking. And shortly after that, I married for the third time, and my wife at the time had four children. I adopted all four of them and my second wife had two, and so we had six.

RICK STARR: So you had the two children from that marriage.

TY BENHAM: Actually, they stayed with Mom.

RICK STARR: OK. Occasionally though they were with you.

TY BENHAM: Occasionally, yes. And then I adopted the four and that's when my life started changing. Go west, young man, was the (laughing) the call, and...

RICK STARR: Was that something that happened from the exterior or was that just something that happened in your heart?

TY BENHAM: You know, I think it was both. I think it was a little of both because the opportunity came for me to step up in the broadcast field and I was looking for a place, and there was a place called Twin Falls, Idaho. And I thought, is that in the United States, is that on the map? You know, I'm in the Midwest, where is this? I've never heard of it. So I got the map out and looked, OK, that looks like an interesting place, let's go.

RICK STARR: (laughing)

TY BENHAM: So we loaded up the kids and the car, got a U-Haul, put a go-cart and a color TV in it and away we went (laughing).

RICK STARR: On an adventure.

TY BENHAM: Yeah. And the shock was, when we arrived in Twin Falls, the Teton Dam collapsed. I'm going, wow. What an introduction to Idaho. (laughing)

RICK STARR: What did you see from that? What happened as you saw that catastrophe?

TY BENHAM: You know, it was interesting to me to see how a community came together so quickly. And I was impressed by the Mormons, and how quickly they responded. They were there and I was a journalist at the time so I was working in the news so I was able to be a part in that. Plus I worked an on-air shift so I was impressed. I didn't know much about the Mormons. I thought they had beards and long hair and wore black. I mean, we had Amish back in Indiana in that area. I really didn't know anything about the Mormons, so I didn't know what to expect or who they were or anything about them, so, you know, when they said, well, that's the LDS people out there doing that. Really, well, they are an interesting group. So I started paying attention to them and what was going on.

RICK STARR: Well, you were probably surrounded by them in Twin Falls.

TY BENHAM: (laughing) Yes. (laughing) As a matter of fact. I didn't know it, but I was, including my next-door neighbor. But I didn't realize they were Mormon. That never came up in the conversation. Of course, at the time I probably didn't look like the guy that (laughing) you know would be a candidate to be a convert.

RICK STARR: What kind of a life were you living at that point?

TY BENHAM: (laughing)

RICK STARR: You talked earlier about hanging out with the wrong crowd in the military.

TY BENHAM: You know,...

RICK STARR: What were you doing at this point in your life?

TY BENHAM: It wasn't that I was a bad guy but I was kind of a renegade, so to speak. I rode a motorcycle, I had long hair down to my shoulders, had a beard, moustache, I was smoking probably two to three packs of cigarettes a day. I was ...

RICK STARR: Wouldn't know it looking at you right now. You look perfectly healthy.

TY BENHAM: But I wasn't an alcoholic. Alcohol never bothered me like it did a lot of people. I could drink all night long and never get drunk, and I say that because some people become addicted to alcohol and the doctor told me one day, he says, be careful because the kind of metabolism you have will come back and bite you.

RICK STARR: Eventually though, it will catch up with you.

TY BENHAM: Yeah. I would suggest you stop. So I never got a buzz from alcohol. It was more of a social thing for me. And I was always the designated driver. (laughing) So I would take everybody home and go back and drink some more so, you know, it was one of those things where it was the hand of the Lord that protected me. I know that looking back and know that He was involved in all those things that occurred. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that. But I had long hair, a rough life, I had to guard myself on the air when I was doing news reports because in my personal life, I had a language that wasn't good for using on the air. (laughing) The profanities that I used then I am not proud of but at the time it was kind of a rough life. So the neighbor probably felt justified in telling the missionaries when they asked if they knew anybody they could teach saying the people next door, just ignore them (laughing) they were out all night. You really don't want to stop there. It would be a bad experience for you. (laughing)

RICK STARR: Just a quick note here. For any of you who are just joining us. I am sitting here with Elder Ty Benham who is a missionary at the Church headquarters with his wife Nancy. They work in administration and they work with girls camps and real estate which is a great mission for you, I assume.

TY BENHAM: It is.

RICK STARR: And you are listening to the Why I Believe show on the Mormon Channel.

And you've just been talking about you moved your family to Twin Falls and were kind of a rough-looking character...

TY BENHAM: (laughing)

RICK STARR: ...but something at that point started to change. You'd noticed...

TY BENHAM: It did.

RICK STARR: You'd noticed the Mormons. You'd noticed what they did when the Teton Dam collapsed. What happened in your life then? Something happened to your wife, right?

TY BENHAM: It did. My wife at the time had these little polyps like little tumors that began to show up in her fingers and different parts of her body and the doctor looked and said we need to remove some of those and to see if they are active and if they are going to be a problem or if they are cancerous, so we made an appointment to go to the doctor and we had started attending one of the local churches kind of on and off so I called the minister, kind of felt the need to have him there at the hospital before she goes in and he agreed to come down. We went to the hospital operating room and they were ready to wheel her in but he didn't show up and she looks up at me and she says, would you say a prayer? I hadn't

prayed in years. I had forgotten how to pray. I was about 28 at the time, so this is about 10 years since—actually probably more like 12 years since—I had really been active in church or anything and I didn't know what to say. I was at a loss and I said something—I am not sure what I said but I said something. Apparently it was OK because she nodded her head and they took her on into the operating room and I was angry.

RICK STARR: Angry. Why were you angry?

TY BENHAM: I was upset that the minister didn't show up.

RICK STARR: Oh, OK.

TY BENHAM: He told me he would be there. I was not happy. So I went to the phone and I called his house. His wife answers and says, "Well, he's gone to a meeting across town." I said, "Well, he had a meeting with me. You know, my wife is going into surgery." "Oh, she'll be fine. Don't worry about it." I'm going, wow, I see where I stand, you know, (laughing) we're not important to you, are we? (laughing) And I paced the floor and smoked a few cigarettes and kicked the wall and said a few words that were unkind and didn't like the minister at all. I had some really hard feelings toward him. She came out and was fine. The next day they were sending us home and he shows up. And looks in the door and says, "Well, I see you are OK. We'll see you at church" and left. That was it. That was the extent of his conversion. I'm going, bet me. (laughing) And it was kind of interesting because I suddenly realized, wait a minute. What's wrong with this? You know, my wife asked me to say a prayer and I couldn't say a prayer. Yet I knew that that's what I should be doing in my heart. And I knew that I needed to change and that if I was going to raise some children, I needed to teach them what I was taught. So I started thinking more about that and came home from work to see how she was doing and the house was full of people. And I said, "Who are these people?" And just then, the neighbor lady stuck her head around the wall from the kitchen and said, "Hi." I said, "Hi." (laughing) "Who are you?" (laughing) And she says, "I'm your neighbor." Oh yeah. And she said, "We're just here to help. We're from the Relief Society." I said, "Who?" And she said, "The Relief Society." I said, "We don't need any relief. What's the Relief Society?" I'd never heard of it. (laughing) And you know, my wife says, "I don't know. They were doing the dishes, they were mopping the floor, vacuuming, doing the laundry, they were cleaning the house and making beds." I'm going, "Wow." (laughing)

RICK STARR: That's quite a contrast from the other experience you had.

TY BENHAM: Yeah. So I was there just a few minutes and they had brought lunch and so I grabbed a bite of lunch and she says, "Now, don't worry about a thing, we're gonna take care of the house so you can get back to work and we'll have dinner in for you for the next few nights. We just wanna make sure that everything's going OK for you." I'm going, "Wow. Who are these people?" They never once told me they were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They never told me they were Mormon. They just said they were members of the Relief Society. So I had no idea what church they were from or anything. And yet they were there helping our family. I was very impressed, very impressed. And over the next little bit, there came a knock on our door. (laughing) Two

young elders came up and said, “We’ve got a message we’d like to share with you.” And I said, “No, not interested.”

RICK STARR: Now, before that, I’m sure you’d seen missionaries before that.

TY BENHAM: Actually, I hadn’t.

RICK STARR: Really. OK.

TY BENHAM: And I’d only been there a few weeks.

RICK STARR: Did you know they were Mormon?

TY BENHAM: No.

RICK STARR: You just knew they were of some religious faith.

TY BENHAM: I didn’t know if they were Jehovah’s Witnesses or who they were. You know, I didn’t know. (laughing) But anyway, they knocked on the door, said they had a message, “No, I’m not interested. Thanks for stopping. See you.” (laughing) Went ahead and I was kind of rough at the time, you know, and went ahead about the activities of the day. Well, they didn’t give up. For whatever reason, they came back and I know that it had to be the Spirit of the Lord telling them to go back. And...

RICK STARR: They saw something good in there.

TY BENHAM: Apparently. (laughing) Because anyway, they showed up again. But when they came back, they came back and played with the kids in the yard. They played basketball and just became friends with the kids. Never attempted to come in and talk to us or leave a message, just stopped by to play some hoops and say hi to the kids, so eventually the kids said, “You know, we need to talk to these guys.”

RICK STARR: So your wife was the one who told you that?

TY BENHAM: No, the kids.

RICK STARR: The kids told you that.

TY BENHAM: Yeah, the kids. Yeah, because my wife at the time, she said, “I was born and raised in my faith and that’s what I’m gonna die as.” You know (laughing).

RICK STARR: OK.

TY BENHAM: Anyway, they just became friends. Stopped by, visited, we invited them in and we didn’t talk about religion. Didn’t talk about discussions, didn’t even talk about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We just became friends. That evolved into the discussions, and they said, you know, would you mind if we shared something with you? At this time, we are friends. I’m not gonna say no. And so they started...

RICK STARR: Just part of the normal conversation.

TY BENHAM: Just part of the normal conversation. And they asked me, you know, had I gone to church before and where did I go and all those kinds of questions you ask. And I asked them about them. You know, where are you from and what do you do and what about your family and so, you know, we just got to be good friends. So they started sharing the discussions with me. The thing that struck a note with me was the Book of Mormon. I am a historian. I love history. I love finding out about people and places and things, and my great-great-grandmother was a daughter of the chief of the Chippewa. And you know, my grandfather was a minister, and you know, there were a lot of things that to me was out there that I couldn't find answers to and I was seeking, I really was. In my heart, you know, I was wanting to know more. But when they started talking about the Book of Mormon and Father Lehi and the Lamanites and the Nephites, I'm going, yeah, I believe that. I believe that. That sounds familiar to me. And I struggled a little bit with the Prophet Joseph. I accepted the Book of Mormon immediately. The rest of it started coming to me as I began to understand more about who he was and what he did and the Book of Mormon. But immediately, the Book of Mormon struck a note and it has been a great strength to me and understanding and turning my life around. Now I was going through some hard times...

RICK STARR: You were still living that life.

TY BENHAM: I was still living that life. And I found when the missionaries would make an appointment to come over, I was fanning the air, you know, opening the windows, trying to get the smoke out, you know, as they are knocking on the door. I'm going, wait a minute, what's wrong with this picture? Why do I feel guilty about this? What is it that's wrong? And I'm hiding the beer bottles, you know, and the things around and I'm feeling guilty. Why?

RICK STARR: Had they taught you about the Word of Wisdom or did you just know how Mormons lived at that point?

TY BENHAM: No. I didn't. No. But I was still doing that. And if I'm feeling that way, then something must be wrong with it. And then they came out and started talking about the Word of Wisdom and they had another brother who had struggled with that and was able to finally kick the habit and he came over and visited and talked and after a while, I said, well, you know, if I'm gonna do this thing, I'm gonna do it. I'm either 100% or I'm nothing. I don't go half way on anything. So we talked to our children. We had two old enough to be baptized and the wife and we decided, OK, we're gonna do this. But I have a request. Because I have this addiction to cigarettes and tobacco, and not really an addiction, but I did like the alcohol, it was OK, I could take it or leave it, but I knew these things were stumbling blocks and my language needed cleaned up, definitely, I'm going to ask that you baptize me in the Snake River.

RICK STARR: Now why was that?

TY BENHAM: Well, I looked back in the scriptures and in the Bible, the Savior set the example by being baptized in the River Jordan. Symbolizing the washing away of our sins, our imperfections, and the flowing of the waters cleanliness.

RICK STARR: So that had particular meaning to you...

TY BENHAM: Had real meaning to me.

RICK STARR: ...related to these habits that you wanted to get rid of.

TY BENHAM: That's right, and I said, I believe that if you baptize me in the Snake River, that the desire for alcohol and tobacco and the language problems I'm having will be taken care of. I believe that my body will recover and that I will have the health and strength I need if you will baptize me in the Snake River. And they said, "Well, that's not normally what we do." Well, I'd never been in a Mormon church. I'd never seen a baptismal font. I did have no idea what they were talking about.

RICK STARR: Still hadn't attended a church meeting.

TY BENHAM: No, no. I didn't know I could. And so they said, "Well, we'll find out." So it was much later after my baptism I found out that they had gone to the mission president—at that time it was in Pocatello, Idaho—and the mission president called Salt Lake and said, "We have this guy up in Twin Falls" (laughing) "that is asking to be baptized in the river" and the answer came back, "Well, baptize him." (laughing)

RICK STARR: Well, that's great. (laughing)

TY BENHAM: Well, it was April.

RICK STARR: Oh, so you were baptized in winter run-off.

TY BENHAM: Ice was floating down the Snake River, the temperature was in the 30s and 40s. My boys looked me and go "Wow, what an adventure, Dad, but it's cold."

RICK STARR: And they were baptized in the same river also.

TY BENHAM: Yes, and my wife at the time. And the missionaries looked at me and said, "Are you sure you want to do this?" So one early morning just about sunup—and the temperatures are cold this time of the day at that time—we went to Shoshone Falls, ice was floating in the river. Nobody took a picture. I wish they had because you could have seen the ice floating down the river. I looked at my boys and I felt very impressed at the time and the elders were standing there. I said, "I promise you I know this is the thing to do. I'll tell you how I feel about this. I feel that through this baptism, you will know that this is true because the water will appear warm, it will not be cold. And none of us will be sick from this experience. I know this." The elders just looked at me and said, "Oh, you just don't know how cold that is. I touched the water, it's very cold." We waded in the water, each of us, at our appointed time, and the water appeared as a summer's day. It was warm. The desire for smoke left. The desire for alcohol left. I was able to change my lifestyle completely. It was a dramatic change in my life and has continued to be ever since. It symbolized to me baptism in a new way. The Atonement we understand cleanses us. Because of the Savior's Atonement, we can get forgiveness, but the baptism is that washing away of those imperfections we have in our life and then the confirming of the Holy Spirit completes that process that takes us to the next level where we're able to deal

with all these imperfections we have. Now later, after this baptism—and it wasn't but a few days—I came home from—and that's when we had the split meetings, you know, we'd have Priesthood at one time, Sunday School another, and we'd come back for Sacrament. I had been to one of the meetings, attending church finally for the first time, and I walked in the front door and collapsed on the floor. Was unconscious. No apparent reason, just fell on the floor. And I came to on the sofa and my sons and daughter and wife were helping me on the sofa and I had a chest pain, you know, I was not feeling very good. There was a doctor in the ward and they called, and he came running over and did some checking and he says, "Well, let's get him in." He said, "Well, I don't think it's anything real serious but keep him down for today, get him in the office in the morning and we'll run some x-rays." It was the Lord's way of saying, I'm going to confirm what you did was correct. He took the x-rays and checked me out and did a physical. He said, "Well, I don't find anything wrong with you but," he says, "there is a question I have. He put the x-rays up on the x-ray screen and he says, "You see this mark right here on your lung?" He said, "You must have been really sick at one time." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, that's a mark of like some kind of serious illness, like TB or some kind of a lung disease."

RICK STARR: Like a scarring.

TY BENHAM: Scarring. And I said, No," I said, "I haven't been sick a day in my life that I can remember." He said, "Really?" He went back and looked at it again and he came back and he said, "Well, don't worry about it, it's healed."

RICK STARR: After all those years of smoking and..

TY BENHAM: Yeah. And a flood of tears rolled down my face as I realized and the Spirit testified to me at that moment that my baptism had truly cleansed me. He said my lungs were clear, he said it didn't look like a smoker. I had truly been healed.

RICK STARR: What a wonderful thing.

TY BENHAM: And so Heavenly Father wanted me to know and I knew. I knew with all the assurance that could ever be given to anyone very vividly that my joining the Church and being baptized was a new beginning for me, it was a new chapter in my life, and I had found the Church of Jesus Christ. I had found the right place to be. Now, that doesn't mean that things are rosy and peachy and everything is great from thereon out. It means that there is a lot of work to do. There are a lot of changes that need to take place, and they did.

RICK STARR: That's wonderful.

TY BENHAM: But it takes time when you make those kinds of changes.

RICK STARR: For those of you who are just joining us, you're listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel and today we have visiting with us Elder Ty Benham who is a Church missionary here in Salt Lake City with his wife Nancy at the Church Office Building.

You've been talking about your conversion story. I have a few questions I am interested in asking you related to this. First of all, you talked earlier about how your wife was sick and she asked you to pray for her and that was a turning point possibly for you.

TY BENHAM: It was, it was.

RICK STARR: I am interested to know if you could talk about your experience with prayer and the Book of Mormon, knowing the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and also I'm certainly interested to know the reaction of your family, your parents, to your baptism.

TY BENHAM: Speaking of prayer, my mother taught me the power of prayer when I was a young teenager, about 13. We were a poor family, didn't have a lot of money, and if I could elaborate on this for just a moment, ...

RICK STARR: Sure.

TY BENHAM: ... you can understand my belief in prayer. Mother came home from work one day, three of us children and Dad was working away from home. We didn't have much money. In fact, we didn't have any money. The cupboard was bare, the refrigerator was empty. Three hungry kids, walking in the door, and nothing to eat. Mother was working at a laundry and she was making about \$15 a week to help support us. She came in the door looking very, very tired, very worn out and we looked at her and said, "Mom, you didn't bring any groceries in. We don't have anything to eat." And she hugged us and dropped her head, went into her bedroom and closed her door. We sat around wondering what's going on. We know there was no food in there (laughing) and we could hear her praying and sobbing and pouring out her heart to her Heavenly Father about the need that we had as a family. A few minutes later, she came out and she told us to set the table, and she started pulling pots and pans out like she was going to cook something. So we look at one another and we go, "Mom's lost it." (laughing) I mean, there is no food, we've checked. There is nothing in the house, and almost at that moment, it was just a few moments later, there was a knock at the door. Now we didn't have a telephone, we didn't have any way to call anyone, we had no family nearby, we were living down in the southern states at the time and this minister of the church we attended knocked on the door and he said, "I went to the grocery store to get a carton of eggs and a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread. While I'm going down the aisle," he says, "I end up filling up two grocery carts full of food. I checked out, got in the car, and drove to your house. Why am I here? Can you use some food?"

RICK STARR: Nothing as strong as the prayer of a mother.

TY BENHAM: Mom's prayer, I know, touched heaven, and in turn the Spirit touched the heart of that minister, and he drove to our house as directed by the Spirit and brought food for our hungry family. Mom taught me the power of prayer. I didn't understand it at the time but began to learn in later years how powerful prayer is. So as I knelt after the missionaries had brought discussions to us and talked about the Book of Mormon, and I asked Heavenly Father, "Is this true? Is this a book of scriptures about a people that were of the house of Israel?" and very strongly, the Spirit came back and said, "Yes." It's an impression you get, a feeling you get, a warmth, like a blanket, that covers you. It says

“Yeah, it’s right, it’s true.” I got that same feeling about the Prophet Joseph. I have felt the same feeling about President Kimball. He was the prophet at the time and my prayers have been answered over and over and over again. Miracles have occurred. I can’t explain them other than it was something Heavenly Father wanted to happen, needed to happen and I was the instrument that was used. I have been richly blessed and very humbled by the experiences and I have had many over the past years or so that I’ve been a member of the Church. I’ve seen lives change, not just mine, but many others, as a result of prayer. If we remember back to a talk given not too long ago by Elder Bednar in General Conference, and he said, Meaningful prayer. We need to have meaningful prayers. Be careful about what we pray for, make sure we ask for all the right things. If you want to know, ask, but ask directly, and when we do that, answers do come. Now it may not be the answer we are looking for but it is nonetheless the answer that we need for us at that time or our children, our families. Now, my family disowned me. When they found out I had become a member of the Mormon Church, I was done. I was no longer their son; I was no longer a part of the family. I mean, they cut off all communications with me.

RICK STARR: And they were still back east.

TY BENHAM: They were still back east. It was a difficult time because I had found what I knew was the true Church.

RICK STARR: What happened after that? What happened with your family and with your parents?

TY BENHAM: With my family, we just felt so loved. We never felt so loved in all of our life as we did when we joined the Church and felt the warmth of the ward. They put their arms around us. They made us feel really good about being a part of the ward. I met my first apostle just a few weeks after baptism and we had a stake conference and Boyd K. Packer was the General Authority attending. I have a great love for Boyd K. Packer. I didn’t know who a General Authority was. I didn’t know what an apostle was. I had no idea, you know, but he felt special to me and has been special to me ever since. At some point in my life I hope I can shake his hand again and thank him for the example he has been to me and how he has helped me in my life. But my family—they virtually cut off all communications. I’d write letters to my mom when she was alive every week, or I would call her, but during that time, there was no response. She did not want to talk to me, did not want to receive letters from me, did not want to know anything about me because I had died as far as they were concerned. The thing that changed was in 1979, which was two years later. My father suddenly passed away. He had a stroke and passed away. I hadn’t seen him since 1976 and I hesitate to share this but I will share it with you anyway. I was in Ogden, Utah at the time working there and I can tell you the minute my father passed away. I was working with some people and I turned and there stood my father. And he smiled at me and then he waved at me. And then he nodded his head, yes. And I didn’t realize what was happening at the moment and I waved back and nodded, yes, and talked to these people and it struck me, that was my dad. And I walked away from these people, didn’t say another thing to them and went to looking. You know, where did he go, where is he?

RICK STARR: And how did you hear after that that he passed away?

TY BENHAM: Well, it was later in the day. It was in the evening—in fact, several hours later—that I got a phone call and the phone call said, “I’ve got some sad news to tell you.” And boy, it just hit me right then. And I said, “Yeah, I know what you’re going to tell me.” He said, “Well, how would you know?” I said, “My father passed away at 2 o’clock this afternoon.” And he said, “Yeah. He did. How did you know?” I said, “I’ll tell you about it later.” But that was the bridge that allowed me back into the lives of my family. And so I boarded an airplane and went back for my father’s funeral.

RICK STARR: How did things change after that with your mother and the rest of your family?

TY BENHAM: Well, it was interesting. The funeral went OK. There was a lot of crying, a lot of grief going on at the funeral. I didn’t feel that. I felt very calm, I felt very at peace, more than I had ever felt. I embraced my dad’s hand and gave him a kiss. But he and I had met, and I had a different feeling about things and I knew where he was. I knew what was going on, and as we concluded the funeral services and the burial at the cemetery, my sister came to me and said, “Mother is grieving so bad, she’s just not herself. She’s having great difficulty.” I said, “OK, I’ll visit with her before we leave.” So I did. I visited with her and we sat down and talked and I said, “Mother, Dad’s fine. I know where he is. I know what’s going on. I understand. Be happy. Know that he is in a better place and that things are OK. Would you allow me to give you a blessing?” And she said, “What’s that?” And I said, “Well, I’ll lay my hands on your head and give you a blessing that the Lord would help you and the Spirit would speak to you and you would gain an understanding.” She said, “Yeah, I would like that.” So I gave her a blessing of understanding and a son’s blessing that she may know of my love and our Heavenly Father’s great love for her. Now keep in mind, she hadn’t spoken to me for some years now, two years, more than two years. My sister—we went back to Idaho and my sister calls me some week or two later. This is new, too, because they hadn’t been talking to me either and says, “What did you tell Mom?” I said, “Why? Why do you ask?” She said, “She’s happy. She sings. She just goes around the house, she does a lot of things she hasn’t done before, she’s going out, she’s just happy as can be.” I said, “Why don’t you go ask her?”

RICK STARR: (laughing)

TY BENHAM: And that was the change. That was the opportunity I had to introduce them to the things I had learned and do it in such a way that was not intrusive, and over time, taking some thirty years now for my family to gain an understanding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that we are Christians. We believe in Christ. Jesus Christ is the head of our Church. He runs and leads our Church. We have a living prophet and apostles. We had several occasions to visit and talk about it and I’ve seen the change. I’ve seen not just a softening but a curiosity that’s grown.

RICK STARR: That’s wonderful.

TY BENHAM: Are they members? No. (laughing)

RICK STARR: Yeah, but the channels are open.

TY BENHAM: The channels are open. And we’ve had the opportunity to go to the temple and do work for the grandparents. What a great, great experience that has been. The temple is such a

wonderful place. I can't go often enough. And every time I go, I learn something new. It's just like a wonderful world all of its own. And the more you can go to the temple, the more you wanna go. We go at least once a week, sometimes more often if we can, so it makes a complete lifestyle change in your life and the lives of your families and your children. Now, our children aren't active like we'd like for them to be, we would love for them to be. Nancy and I have thirteen children between us. We now have 39 grandchildren. What a great experience it is to have them come visit us here at Temple Square and to see one of the grandsons running across the parking lot yelling, "Grandpa, grandpa!" I feel now I'm playing the role my grandfather played. I feel comfortable in that.

RICK STARR: Yeah. And you have the opportunity to plant the same seeds of the gospel in their lives...

TY BENHAM: Exactly.

RICK STARR: No matter what their activity level is. You're gonna have an effect long after you're gone, I'm sure, in their lives. That's what's so neat.

TY BENHAM: Well, that's what we would hope (laughing).

RICK STARR: We are almost out of time, I just want to wrap up here, but wanted to let you know that we've been listening to Elder Ty Benham who is a Church missionary here with his wife Nancy at the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City, Utah and you've been listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel.

Elder Benham, if you could just share with us, you've had quite an experience in your life coming to the gospel and we'd love to hear your testimony. Why do you believe in the gospel?

TY BENHAM: The real thing that happens in a life that really brings a piece of understanding beyond words that I could say in any language is that calm peace you feel when you realize that you are a son of God, you are one of His children, and that Jesus Christ has prepared a way for us to return to our Heavenly Father, and that preparation through the Atonement makes it possible for us to enter the waters of baptism as He symbolized in His baptism by John the Baptist. No matter how many mistakes we make in life, how wrong we feel things are, how upside-down we feel we are, that opportunity is available to all of us. I realized my life was not good, that I was making poor choices and as I entered that water of baptism, I truly believed with all my heart, with all the faith I could muster, that this baptism would truly change my life. It did. And as the Holy Spirit was conferred upon me and I received that direction by the Holy Spirit and I still do, on an hour-to-hour basis, minute-to-minute sometimes, I testify that this is His Church. He has established it back on the earth today. What a great revelation to know that you can come to the waters of baptism and receive repentance and the Atonement in your life and have a new chapter occur that would not only change you but your family, your children, your grandchildren, and all your friends. I testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet and is a prophet of the restoration. I know that Thomas S. Monson, whom I met this past December, is the Lord's mouthpiece upon this earth. What a great experience to sit with him a few moments and to feel of His love and His concern about the members of the Church and

about me and about you. He is a prophet of the Lord. The apostles are indeed apostles. I testify the Book of Mormon is the Word of God. Read it. It will give you direction, it will give you guidance, it will help you understand the things you need to do and how to do them. It is a roadmap. It is something you can trust, it is something that will guide through all the troubles and the challenges that you face. The answers are right there and the Holy Spirit will teach you if you will yet listen to its promptings, to the guidance and trust that you can become the man or woman you would like to be. Make today your first day and make a change.

RICK STARR: Thank you. Thank you so much, Elder Benham, for being with us here today.

You are listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. Thank you for being with us today. My name is Rick Starr and we hope you have a great day.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: You've been listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel.

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