

Episode 13

Why I Believe

CURTIS BROWN

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 may be saved...

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: Welcome to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. I'm Rick Starr. Today we are joined by former Brigham Young University running back Curtis Brown who converted to the Church his sophomore year at BYU. Curtis was born in Palmdale, California and came to BYU in 2002 as a freshman. He's currently living in Provo working in pharmaceutical sales. Curtis, thank you so much for joining us today.

CURTIS BROWN: Thank you for having me here.

RICK STARR: It's great to have you. Before we begin, let's set the stage with some of your background. Let's talk about how you were raised in your home in Palmdale, California. What was your religious background growing up?

CURTIS BROWN: My religious background growing up was, it was always nondenominational. My mom was raised Catholic and my dad kind of had, you know, an east-coast Baptist upbringing. But when they got married in—the church that, you know, my family was going to, was a nondenominational Christian church and it varied from place to place because growing up, you know, the first five years of my life that I lived in one city so we went to one church and then the next five years, we lived in a different city so we went to another church, and then we moved to Palmdale when I was ten. We tried out a couple different

churches and things like that and, you know, one church my dad might like but my mom was kind of iffy about and vice versa, and one thing that my parents tried to do was, you know, even if we weren't going to church on a consistent basis, was put me in a private schooling. And private schooling in California primarily has a religious background and so I was either in a Christian school or a Catholic school growing up. And, you know, every now and then they might put me in a public school just till they found the right private school but most of the time, they tried to keep me in a private school.

RICK STARR: I see. What was your concept of God growing up? And your relationship to Heavenly Father?

CURTIS BROWN: You know, when I think of my thought of what Heavenly Father was at the time, it was, He is very forgiving, He's this, you know, this great powerful Being that, just as long as we love Him and do our best on a daily basis to love Him and honor Him, that, you know, everything will work out in the end and, you know, I didn't necessarily have, well, heaven looks exactly like this, it was like, okay, when we die, you know, Heavenly Father is gonna judge us, and when we make it that kingdom of heaven, heaven's gonna be whatever we want it to be. You know, if we wanna be close to our family, we're gonna have the opportunity to be with our family; if those loved ones have been lost, we'll have an opportunity to see those loved ones again. Different things like that. But it was real; it was almost too good to be true because when I—growing up with that concept allowed me to get away with things that I shouldn't have gotten away with. It allowed me to settle for being average instead of raising the bar for myself. And I think we do that at times, we try to justify our actions and I felt that as long as I rolled over at night and prayed in the pillow, that everything would be okay and my slate would be wiped clean, and I realized that growing up at that time, there was more I could be doing. But not having a church that I was fully committed to and not having anyone I had to be accountable to, it was easy for me to justify doing the minimum. But I do remember, you know, I felt, you know, after listening, hearing the Joseph Smith story for the first time, I remember having that same experience at my grandma's house because you have in—my grandma lived in L.A. and growing up seeing all these different churches, and my grandma happened to go to a church that was on TV, you know, on Sundays, it was played everywhere because it was just that big of a church, and I always thought to myself, why do we have all these churches, none of them are alike each other and they are so different and it's almost like, how do you know which church is the right church to go to? One church is three hours, another one's one hour, you know, I'd go to a Catholic church and it's totally quiet. You don't clap when people get done singing a great song. At this church, every song people were on their feet clapping and rejoicing and I just thought to myself, it's crazy because one church says that if you don't do this, you are not gonna make it to heaven; another church has these requirements. It's like, how do you know? And so it was really confusing at the time for me just because I did have those questions. And the way I was able to settle it was honestly, you know, whatever you personally believe in, that will be your fate. If you are a person that is committed to the Catholic church and you believe that these are the standards you have to live by and if you don't, that this is your punishment, then I felt, you know, if they truly believe in that, then that's what's gonna happen. And your fate is based on the standards that you set for

yourself. And so I didn't really have any for-sure answers but I tried to come up with the answer that was most pleasing to everybody, that didn't hurt anybody's feelings.

RICK STARR: [CHUCKLING] So paralleling that, what was your introduction to football?

CURTIS BROWN: Actually, you know, when I moved to Palmdale, one of my best friends growing up played football, and I didn't even know Pop Warner football existed. And, you know, I had known this friend for a year and his—you know, I had seen pictures in his home of, you know, youth football teams, things like that, and I played football on the street with him and his brothers, and, you know, I was like, I wanna try that one time, and my first year of playing football, I mean I thought I was gonna quit; I—my dad bought me some Payless cleats that ended up being baseball cleats [LAUGHTER] and so they were more for running on dirt versus slippery grass and so I was slipping all over the place and [LAUGHTER] I was the last in conditioning and so I was like, you know, I'm never gonna play this sport again. And, you know, my coach talked me into playing one more year and I ended up excelling at it and so I played four years of Pop Warner football and then I got into high school, went to a private high school, Catholic school, and I remember my first year there; I was freshman and my parents are just, you know, I didn't wanna get, go there. You have to take an entrance exam just to qualify to go to the school and I remember I tried to fail miserably, I tried to make designs with the scantron and things like that and I was like, "I do not wanna go to this school" because my whole life I played on this Pop Warner team, I was under a high school, and I was like, "You know, I don't wanna go to this school," and my mom was like, "No, I couldn't care less about football, you're going for the education," and I ended up getting in anyways, primarily because my sister was there already and so I was kind of grandfathered in—

RICK STARR: I see.

CURTIS BROWN: Unfortunately. But it ended up working to my advantage because I went there and I had an opportunity to play varsity as a freshman and I made the most of that opportunity and so I played four years of high school football, won championship every year and it made me have good enough credentials for BYU to come look at me.

RICK STARR: Well, not only BYU looked at you but you were recruited by four colleges. I have here that you were recruited by UCLA, Washington State, Clemson and BYU. What was key in your decision about going to BYU?

CURTIS BROWN: The—what, you know, cemented the deal for me was consistency. You know, I knew that BYU cared about me from their approach. My sophomore year, I had a really good sophomore year for high school and I received a lot of letters, BYU being one of them, and I never thought to myself, I remember, 'cause I hung all my football letters on my wall, and I remember hanging that on the wall thinking, it's cool for decoration, but I'll never go there, and even though I had schools like UCLA and Clemson and, you know, a lot of schools writing me letters, the closer it came to making a commitment to me, the more they shied away; the more, you know, I wasn't getting return phone calls, and so, you know, my parents sent out a highlight tape to all 67 schools that had ever contacted me for football and BYU was one of the first to respond to the video and they said, "Hey, we just got back from our liberty bowl, you know, your running back tape was in the

stack of ten running backs, and you moved into our top three, and we wanna bring you on our recruiting trip this week” and I said, “Wow, that’s the fastest that a team’s ever moved on me, let’s take advantage of it,” and, you know, I got on that plane and when I got off the plane in Salt Lake City and made the little drive to Provo, there was a feeling that I knew that this was the place for me.

RICK STARR: When you were considering BYU, is there something about the way they played football that impressed you the most, that would give you the most opportunity?

CURTIS BROWN: You know, the one thing I looked at was Luke Staley. You know, he had left his junior year but he went on to become a Doak Walker Award winner. That award goes to the best running back in the country, regardless of what school you’re at. That’s the best, you know, award that a running back can get besides the Heisman trophy. And with him having just finished, I thought to myself—you know, as a kid, I’m young and I’m thinking big, I’m thinking, “That’s what I want, that’s who I want to be like, you know, by the time I’m a senior,” and so that was it for me. Seeing that he was part of an offense that was able to give him an opportunity to do whatever he wanted, that’s what I wanted to be a part of.

RICK STARR: That’s great. When you found out—when did you find out that BYU was affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

CURTIS BROWN: I always knew BYU was associated. Growing up in Palmdale, I had next-door neighbors and friends that were LDS.

RICK STARR: Okay.

CURTIS BROWN: And so my next-door neighbors, even though we didn’t really ever talk about BYU, I knew that they were Mormon, and I was able to learn a little bit about their faith during that time, and then when I received the letter, I obviously knew that BYU was BYU. But I never followed them much, you know, when it came to football. I think I might have seen one game on television, because in California, it’s all about UCLA and USC.

RICK STARR: Oh, yeah.

CURTIS BROWN: But I knew who they were, and at the time I didn’t even know they’d gone to a bowl game, I didn’t know the history of the school. It wasn’t until I actually—you know, the week before my recruiting trip, my mom started doing a whole bunch of research and informed me of Luke Staley and, you know, Coach Crow and then the offence, you know, and the numbers that they put up the year before, and, you know, I was able to educate myself within a week about, you know, BYU and the possibilities.

RICK STARR: You know, it sounds like your parents were very supportive of your playing football but also very supportive of you choosing BYU.

CURTIS BROWN: You know, definitely. My parents, you know, have always been my biggest fans, and they’ve always had high expectations of me and they really felt that I was doing everything I needed to do in order to earn a scholarship, in order to go to a team that would value my effort, would value my talent and value my potential, and when BYU

came along, my parents, you know, they wanted to evaluate them like they would any other school, and BYU came back with the best feedback, you know, from my parents, because just that they were truly sincere about their commitment to me and that everything happens for a reason, and seeing my path, you know, all the way from a little kid till now, there was something special about BYU, and the format fit, the program, the lifestyle, it all fit what my parents had tried their hardest to bring me up in and it's an environment about trust, compassion, love, dedication and honor, and that's the number-one thing that really sealed the deal with BYU, was getting into that atmosphere and just knowing that I was gonna be in a safe environment and one, being able to play division-one football but two, also receive a first-class education.

RICK STARR: What was your reaction as you started into BYU your first year? How did that go?

CURTIS BROWN: My first reaction was—honestly, it was all about football. I realized that the number-one thing I had to do was have respect for the school and the religious background that BYU had. And I realized that they were giving me an opportunity to play football, and in return, I would commit myself to doing everything I needed to do as far as standards were concerned, as far as my classes were concerned, and I didn't necessarily worry about, do I have to investigate the Church, it was more, I'll do these religion classes just like I've done religion classes in high school and grade school and if I learn something, great, if not, I won't be too hard on myself because I wanna play football. And, you know, I was comfortable with where I was at, and the number-one thing that I realized, too, was it's good being in an environment—even when you're not LDS—an environment like BYU because you hold yourself to a higher standard. There are a lot of other schools where you might not have a dress code, you don't have to watch what you say or how you act, there are no standards as far as tattoos or honor code or different things like that, and a lot of times when people don't have rules, you know, they can do whatever they want and take things to the extreme, and even though BYU had its rules and regulations and things like that, I looked at it as kind of an opportunity to raise the bar for myself and I realized just after my first year of going home that I was carrying myself differently and the number-one thing that stayed consistent was my compassion for others, my kindness and different things like that, and I think BYU just allowed me to be even more confident in those personality traits and it even encouraged me to be even more sincere, be even more genuine, to do things for others because so many people around me were going out of their way to do things for me and it's a characteristic that is never gonna be considered a bad one, and when I can carry myself and people are complimenting me on how nice I am and how good I am with whether it be kids or the publicity—you know, the publicity I receive—and I'm not cocky and, you know, I'm just a good all-around person, I'm just thankful that my parents one, set that foundation for me and BYU was able to continue to remind me of, you know, that standard.

RICK STARR: For any of you who are just joining us, you're listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. We're talking with former BYU running back Curtis Brown who is joining us today. He was a convert to the Church after playing football at BYU and we're talking about your first year at BYU, which you mentioned was a lot about football, but you noticed some difference, some changes in yourself where you'd carried yourself differently. You also had—that first year, you had a girlfriend back home; there was

probably a little bit of a pull there, and your roommates—one of them was a member, two of them weren't a member—so there was probably not a lot of emphasis on finding out a lot about the Church. What changed after your first year at BYU?

CURTIS BROWN: Two big changes. The girlfriend disappeared [LAUGHTER] and the roommates switched. And for me, it's interesting. I feel, and maybe it's just me speaking for myself, but in my experience, I've found that people are most open to the gospel when things aren't going the way they would like them to go, when they are at their lowest moment, when they feel that they just can't do anything right, and for me in my sophomore year, I was having some struggles, you know. Not having a girlfriend anymore, there was no real motivation to go back home, and then football—starting to think about my future; I'm red-shirting but I'm looking at our season and how it was going when I was redshirting and thinking, wow, we have all these running backs here, they're just in a huge rotation. This isn't what I signed up for, I wanted to be the guy, I wanted a chance to be the guy, and so questioning whether I was gonna stay at BYU or not. My freshman year was a good experience because I got an opportunity to play and being that young, being able to be on live television can't compare to anything because it's a one-of-a-kind feeling. I was smart though. I realized that I had three running backs that were redshirting that year that were now gonna be playing, that were gonna be competing for a starting job. I had another running back that was coming off a mission and so I thought to myself, "Hey, this is gonna be pretty interesting next year." I'd had an injury to my hand in high school that I was never able to get fixed because the time of rehab was too long for me to go without working out or doing anything, so I thought to myself, "I just won't worry about it," but it was also an injury that prevented me from carrying the football in my left hand, so I felt—I went to my coach and said, "Hey, there's no time like the present for me to get this surgery taken care of so that I can start building back that confidence to carry that ball in my left hand, and in the long run, I'm gonna be a more well-rounded running back. And so I took care of that surgery, ended up allowing me to redshirt my sophomore year, and we didn't have a great football season that year but it allowed me to get myself better, allowed me to look at football from a different perspective, allowed me to be under Coach Mendenhall's coaching because I was a scout team working on the defensive guys, and it gave me an opportunity to just open my eyes up to what hard work really is and what dedication is truly about, and I think in life we always have a definition for those words, what's dedication, you know, what's trust, what's love, what's—all these different things, and I think those definitions hold true until you have an experience that makes you expand on that definition and by going, being able to redshirt, my, you know, my second year at BYU, I was able to develop a more clear, more well-rounded definition of what these qualities were and I was able to grow that year and learn a lot. And then school wasn't going well, you know, I'd get so caught up on, "Oh, I'm living on my own, I'm paying for my own things 'cause I have a scholarship check" and things like that and I got distracted, so my grades weren't doing well and I just kind of didn't have any answers. And I had roommates and we had kind of built a relationship slowly but still they were feeling me out and I was feeling them out and even though we were teammates, I was still caught up in, "I'm from California, I'm not a member, so when I have free time, I'm gonna hang out with my guys from California that aren't members because they're, I don't have to be worried about the music I listen to or the stories I tell or the experiences I share with my friends, I can just be myself," and I just didn't know

because my first year I spent so much time just focusing on football, and I was actually playing my freshman year and I was actually going home once a month that there wasn't enough time, down time for me to think about my future and BYU and the outside, you know, the Church and things like that, and my sophomore year, I was staying in Utah more. There was a lot of downtime because I wasn't on the team, I wasn't traveling, I didn't practice as much as the other guys did that were playing and it forced me to start spending more time with my roommates and start seeing that, "Hey, wow, even though we have a different upbringing that we have a lot in common and we're sharing a lot of the same experiences" and so once I got rid of that fear of I might not be able to be myself around these guys, that's when I became more open. And I remember Matt, our quarterback, inviting me to come to church one day and, you know, I always knew Matt as this tall quarterback that a lot of girls just loved to talk to and things like that and I admit that my first interest in the Church was not the best one but I felt if I was hanging out with a guy like Matt, that maybe he could introduce me to some people that, you know, could lift my spirits [LAUGHTER]. And so he took, you know, he invited me to church and, you know, it was a good experience, it was something I'd never experienced before, you know, to see actual members of the Church getting up and sharing stories and experiences. You know, I expected to go in, hear this guy talk for an hour like I was used to and share some stories from the Bible or the Book of Mormon and we're supposed to look into the words and say, "Okay, how does that apply that to my life?" And to hear this couple give a talk and actually speak to me and say, "Hey, they're sharing every-day experiences versus with my church where, you know, he'll read two scriptures out of the Bible and then, you know, bear his testimony about" that but I thought, "Well, how does that apply to my life?" And to have these people come up in church every Sunday and talk about real-life experiences that are applicable to my life, it was a lot easier to understand and it was a lot easier to apply the messages that were being shared.

RICK STARR: Well, Curtis, how did you first decide that you were gonna go ahead and take the discussions?

CURTIS BROWN: Well, it was George, my trainer at BYU; whenever he was taping my ankles, he'd always mention to me, "Just so you know, I have missionaries that come over for something to eat and anytime you wanna learn more about the Church, you just let me know" and he talked to me a handful of times and after I went to church with Matt a couple times, I thought to myself, "Hey, there are a couple things during the times I went to church with Matt that I had some questions that I didn't quite understand" and I felt like, if I kept going to church with Matt, I'm always gonna have questions, and I didn't know how missionary discussions worked, I just thought, "Hey, if I say I'm gonna take the discussions, he'll just give me a whole history lesson on the Church and I'll be able to understand a little bit better when I go to church with Matt." And so one day I walked in the training room and totally caught George off guard and I said, "Hey, I think I'm ready to listen." [GIGGLING] And he was kind of—he didn't—he was kind of in the middle of something so he was like, "Yeah." "I think I'm ready to take the discussions." And his eyes just lit up and he had this hugest smile and he was quiet about it. He was just like, taps me on my shoulders like, "Okay," pats me on the shoulders and he says like, "Alright, I'll get it set up," [LAUGHING] and so they actually had a scout event going on the next night and he said, meet me here. So we went and they just got done with hunting

season so they had a whole bunch of meats that they were cooking, it was kind of like a potluck. And after that, the missionaries were there, we headed over to George's house and started taking discussions and, you know, I didn't know how it would play out, I just thought, "Wow, you know, here's my opportunity to learn. I've been sitting through a year and a half of religion classes and haven't learned anything because I didn't care to. Now it's my chance to listen in and find out what I need to know" and so that's how, that's how it all got started.

RICK STARR: Let's fast forward again. You just started taking the discussions. Your friend Matt was a quarterback and also roommate, right?

CURTIS BROWN: He actually, he was a roommate for a little bit, not during the baptism process, a little bit after. He was just a really good friend, a guy that I looked up to. And a guy that opened his, you know, his heart and his arms up to me and allowed me to come in and to share some, you know, intimate details of my life and how I needed to go about making sure that I made the right decision. And I look back now and I had great roommates that possibly could have done the same exact thing, it was just the fact that I had a roommate in Matt, or I had a friend in Matt that allowed me—he was somebody I looked up to and so when you look up to somebody and you have respect for that person, you're more likely to listen to the words that they share with you versus somebody that is younger, that—you know, my roommates hadn't served their missions at the time. And so I felt like, they might have a couple of answers but they're not gonna have them all. And so by being able to talk to a returned missionary person that spent two years of his life teaching the discussions answering tons of questions that I could possibly have, it was good to know that I had somebody like him to look up to and look to for advice.

RICK STARR: That's great. For any of you who are just joining us, you're listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. We are talking with Curtis Brown who was previously a running back at BYU, and it is great to be able to talk to you today. Expound on your decision to get baptized.

CURTIS BROWN: Well, the number-one thing that was going through my mind as I took the discussions was, "When am I gonna hear something that's just gonna rub me the wrong way" or "When am I gonna hear something that just kind of gives me this awkward feeling where I'm thinking, okay, nice try, Curtis, but this isn't what, you know, this isn't what's for you." And it never happened. And so every day that I'd go home—I had a pamphlet for all six discussions and there were certain scriptures that I was required to read during that time, and so I would go home, read over the pamphlet again—I obviously had some notes from each discussion, and I'd read the scriptures and I started to put myself, you know, I was like listening to these, the words of these missionaries, and I saw the passion that was in their eyes, and I also thought about everything. I mean, for me, I was blessed with an opportunity to be surrounded by an LDS community where whether I liked it or not, I was continually reminded of all the work that was being done by the Church and it was the greatest experience for me to have that environment because as I'm listening to the, you know, the discussions, I'm thinking about not only the words that they're saying, the testimonies that they are sharing, but I'm also thinking about, "Wow, I'm sitting here in Lindon, Utah, hearing these discussions, but yet there's thousands of families right now at this time hearing the same exact discussion and nowhere else in the world is any

church doing this, touching this many lives; missionaries, you know, the women sacrificing a year and a half of their life, the men sacrificing two years of their life to go out and touch people's lives like they're touching me. And so there's so many thoughts that go through your head, "Man, I'm hearing discussions right now," wow, that really hit me, too, you know, second, the missionaries are starting to tear up, all these emotions are going around and it was just the most overwhelming experience and so to be able to take that all in and then okay, I had this overwhelming experience and then go home and then reeducate myself on the things that were discussed and then after I'd get done reading the pamphlet, reading the scriptures, taking a moment to think about them and process everything that's been communicated to me, and then go and pray to my Heavenly Father and say, "Hey, I just want you to know, Heavenly Father, that I'm doing everything that I possibly can to make sure that I make a wise decision." That was comforting because I wasn't just going through the motions. And it wasn't like people in my school were saying, "Okay, Curtis, did you read your, did you go through the first discussion, what did you learn?" It was me doing it for myself because it was just me, George, Matt and the missionaries that knew I was actually taking the discussions and so it was a, truly a personal decision and no other motivation was there, and I just remember after going in the water and coming out, I was just like, "Wow, 19 years old, I'm finally doing this." You know, most of the time kids are getting baptized, you know, in these other religions get baptized right when they're born or, you know, in the LDS Church, you get baptized when you're eight, and a lot of times, kids don't even remember those experiences but for me being 19, it's an experience that I'll never forget and I'll remember so much more of it because of the education that I had beforehand. And so being baptized and being able to go on campus the next day and actually start going to my ward and being confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I finally felt at home and it's just a, it's a feeling that, it's almost like it happened yesterday, just the feeling, the emotion, the butterflies, it was just a great experience.

RICK STARR: You know, it sounds like your baptism was almost just a natural outcome of your learning process rather than a, you know, a milestone, you know, major decision. It was just kind of the natural step that you would take as you were going through the learning process, right?

CURTIS BROWN: Yeah, George is a funny guy and it's funny because, you know, here we are, five years later, or actually, yeah, it's about five years later, and I'm just getting a quote; he always used to say to me, "You're ready to be a Mormon, all we need to do is add water." [GIGGLING] And George, growing up, he had horses and things like that, so I just, I was like, "Just need to add the water," I was like "Maybe he thinks I'm a plant that you pour water [LAUGHING] and it'll grow" and it was like two months ago when it finally clicked with me and I was like, "Just add water, oh my goodness, he was saying, I just needed to go under water and get baptized," [LAUGHTER] and for so long, but it was just so funny because he always said that and it never clicked to me, and I just thought, "Okay, you add water to me and I'll grow like a plant or something like that." So it was natural and I still feel today, yeah, there are certain things that I don't even necessarily know I have changed about myself, that I think I haven't allowed myself to become tempted by, you know, lifestyle that has allowed me to stay on the strait path that had I not been LDS, I might have thought, "Okay, this is okay to do. This isn't—," you know,

and by being part of the Church, it was that reminder, that little angel on my shoulder that said, “Nope, you had a little concern about that area, just letting you know that it’s better to go this way.” So it’s good.

RICK STARR: It’s great to have that direction, isn’t it?

CURTIS BROWN: Definitely. Yes. And it was actually a quick process, quicker than I ever expected. I really wanted to keep it to myself. A lot of things I do, I don’t do for publicity. I do it for my true, you know, my personal interest, and just wanting to know and talking with my mom about—my mom would ask me, “So have you gone to church, have you found a church out there?” early on, and I was like, “Well, the only churches out here are the Mormon churches.” And my mom was like, “Well, that’s okay, you know, as long as you go and do something.” And I was like, “Okay, whatever.” But I knew that I wanted to start investigating the Church and I felt, “If I’m gonna be here, you know, a school like this took a chance on me, they’re giving me a scholarship, they’re allowing me to receive a free education, the least I can do is go to church for one week or two weeks and see what they’re talking about, because until I do, I’m just gonna be going off of the stereotypes and the words and the rumors that I’ve heard from my friends at the Catholic high school.” And for any of you LDS listeners out there, the Catholics’ version of what the LDS Church is all about is a lot different than reality, and so being able to experience it for myself; I was able to have a lot more confidence in defending the Church than I’d had before because I didn’t know. And I was able to confront people that made small, little remarks about the school that gave me the opportunity of a lifetime, and I was able to defend the Church and say, “Hey, you need to really check your information because it’s not accurate,” and so it was a good experience for me to be able to learn, and by investigating the Church, I was able to say, “Hey, wow, this is some impressive stuff.” But it was interesting because the missionaries were like, “Hey, we have a baptismal date set for this time. Do you think you can be ready for it?” And I was kind of like, “Okay, it’s coming up this day,” and I didn’t know what it was like, and I thought, “If he has a date coming up, then there’s probably like a line of people that just get baptized on this day or whatever.” I come to find out later that—

RICK STARR: It was all for you.

CURTIS BROWN: Yeah, and I was like, “Where are the other twenty people that signed up for this day as well?” and so I made a commitment and I just told myself, “I can back out at any time. At any time that I find, hey, this stuff has kind of rubbed me the wrong way, I’ll take a step back, I’ll say, ‘Okay, I need a break.’” But the one thing that was so great about my missionary experience was at the end of each discussion, the missionaries would always say, “We’d ask you to go home right now and pray tonight to yourself to know whether this is true or not.” And I told myself, “I don’t know what God they expect me to pray to, but the God I’m praying to is gonna tell me the right answer. He’s gonna confirm to me whether I’m doing the right things or I need to back off.” And every night I prayed, I just felt good. I felt good about it. I felt good about keeping that commitment. I felt good about listening to another discussion and, you know, that date came really fast. And, you know, a couple weeks prior to me getting baptized, George, my trainer at BYU, he said, “So do your parents know about this?” and I said, “No, this is a personal thing. I’m just doing it for myself, I’m not doing it for my family,” and he said, “I think it would be a

great opportunity for you to, you know, share this with them and they can share this experience with you,” and I said, “I don’t know.” And so I called my mom, you know, a couple days later and I said, “She’s not gonna be interested and so I’m just gonna make it sound like it’s not a big deal” and I said, “Mom, hey, what’s up, how’s it going?” She’s like, “Huh, nothing. What’s going on with you?” And then I started asking, just, “Hey, how’s your day going,” and this and that, and she’s like, “Okay, you never call and ask these kinds of questions. What’s up?” [GIGGLING] I said—

RICK STARR: That mother’s intuition kicked in.

CURTIS BROWN: Yeah, and so I was like, I said, “What do you think about me getting baptized?” She was like, “Okay, baptized, baptized what?” And I said, “Mormon.” And it was quiet for about 15, 20 seconds. And I said, “Hello, are you still there?” and she said, “Yeah, I’m here.” And I said, “What’s going on?” And she’s just like, “Nothing, just, how did you come to that?” And I kind of explained to her and she was quiet during this time but I could hear her sniffing and I thought, “Either she has a cold or something’s going on and she was just caught off guard.” She was a little emotional, and, you know, we conversed for about 15 minutes and the one thing she said to me was, “You know, I just felt like I let you down because I’ve tried so hard to put you in a position to hear, you know, the gospel, whether it be the Catholic Church or a nondenominational church, and you come to BYU and finally something clicked for you and I felt I didn’t have anything to do with that and I feel like I haven’t done my job as a parent.” And I told her, I said, “Mom, you did a perfect job as a parent because you allowed me to make an educated decision. You allowed me to experience some of the other religions that I could have been a part of and see the flaws that I saw in them, and by being able to come to BYU, I didn’t have to go and do any research on any other churches to know that this Church was one of a kind.” And, you know, she was comforted by that message and she told me, “I just want you to do one more thing for me.” And I said, “Okay.” She said, “I want you to call your grandma and let her know.” I said, “O geez,” ‘cause my grandma has always been religious, she has always been the one to have us come over on Sunday, say, “You guys need to go to church with me” and things like that, and I thought, “I was able to win my mom over, I don’t know if it’s gonna work for my grandma.” So I called my grandma immediately after and I said, “Grandma, what do you think about me getting baptized a Mormon?” And she said, “Child, that’d be great. Everybody needs Jesus.” [LAUGHTER] And so that was the coolest experience for me because a weight was lifted off my shoulder. As much as I realized that I—as much as I thought it was a personal decision, that it didn’t really matter to me what other people thought, I was doing it for me, the moment that I had my family’s support in getting baptized, I was as confident as I could be and I was the proudest I could ever be to be in a position to get baptized. And I just remember seeing flyers in the student athlete building with my picture on it saying, “Come join us for Curtis’ baptism.” And it was actually a great experience because at my baptism, Bishop Edgley showed up and he actually spoke at my baptism, and at the time, I didn’t know who he was. Somebody said, “Oh, a General Authority is coming to your baptism.” I thought, “So this guy served in the military? He’s a general?” [GIGGLING] I had no idea what a General Authority was, I just knew that this popular guy was coming to speak at my baptism. And he was a huge fan of my mom’s because she was a Cougar board member and she wrote some great posts defending the Church and things like that

and so he even said that when he was talking. He said, “I’m not here for you, Curtis, I’m here because of your Mom.” [GIGGLING] “I don’t know you but through your mom’s postings and things like that, I was able to learn about you and the kind of family you were brought up in.” And so it was a cool experience for me.

RICK STARR: That’s neat. Well, I would say your mother did a wonderful job. In fact, I would like to share, if you don’t mind, just something that she wrote.

CURTIS BROWN: Okay.

RICK STARR: Your mother, Cheryl Brown, said this: “My son Curtis Brown, a running back on the BYU football team, was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints last Saturday in Provo. His father, brother, sister and I are not LDS members but we are thrilled with his decision and would not have missed it for the world.” And she goes on to say, “When Curtis told us he wanted to be baptized into the LDS Church, I never once felt that I was losing a son but gaining a whole new family.” The fact has been amplified in my mind and with members of my family over and over since your baptism. You’ve had wonderful support, it sounds like, from your mother, your father, your brother, your sister, and your grandmother. What a great experience.

CURTIS BROWN: Definitely. The one thing that my parents have always done a great job is being supportive in all the decisions I make. If they know that I’m passionate about it, they know that I’m committed to it, there’s no way that they’re not gonna support me or back me. And I think that the influence of the fans that they came in contact with, the people that were in the, you know, the Provo community, that experience alone just overwhelmed them with joy, and knowing that I was gonna commit myself to be part of a group of people that held themselves to the same standards that they wanted to hold me to, and being in a community that was just so loving and giving, they’re proud of it, and the number-one thing that they wanted me to realize is that they love me for who I am. The great thing about this Church is it’s not forcing you to be a person that you’re not. And you’re not having to sacrifice anything by joining this Church, you’re actually gaining, and so knowing that they had a great experience with the community, it was just, it was a good experience for me to know that I had that backing.

RICK STARR: That is really great. What happened after that? You joined the Church in your sophomore year. Then you had a great opportunity to meet somebody who would eventually become your wife. Why don’t you talk a little bit about that?

CURTIS BROWN: Kim—she’s been amazing. I actually met her—her freshman year was the year that I redshirted and I knew who she was—she was an athlete, she played volleyball and softball. And a couple of guys on the team thought she was really cute, and at the time, I wasn’t a member. And I hadn’t even taken the discussions yet or opened myself up to hearing anything about the Church, but she came over one time to hang out and I remember being so sick that day but knowing that she was gonna come say “What’s up?” to me, I totally, I don’t know, it was, I don’t know if there’s a medicine that can cure you in 45 minutes. [GIGGLING] You know, usually when I look—

RICK STARR: But that cured you.

CURTIS BROWN: Yeah. When I looked at the medicine box, they say, you know, 6-12 hours, but the thought of her coming over cleared my sinuses and my stomach [GIGGLING] aches right up and we hung out for a little bit and I was like, “Wow, this is a cool girl.” Unfortunately, I was too poor to ask her out on an actual date and so I never really saw her that much after that and I thought, “You know what, I’m poor, you know, I don’t have a scholarship check that pays for things like that, I can’t afford it, and she’s a beautiful girl, she’s hanging out with some cool guys.” I was like, “I can’t afford to date girls right now. So if she ever wanted to hang out and watch TV or hang out with my roommates, that’s fine, but I can’t afford to take her bowling or anything of that nature right now.” And actually, she went—after her freshman year, she left and she went down to Dixie and focused primarily on volleyball and just getting better at that and when she came back for her junior year of school, we ran into each other. I randomly called her up and said hi to her at her apartment and then the first day of school, we’d parked next to each other so we walked up to campus together and I just told her, “Hey, we should hang out some time, whatever,” not thinking, I was ever gonna be interested in her. And I had a friend of mine named Drew that was going through a tough time and I thought, “Hey, he’s a cute kid, and, you know, he is, you know, he’s cool and I think that, you know, Kim coming back to BYU, maybe they could hit it off, or something,” and so he was over and I invited her over and they never quite made the connection but we did—

RICK STARR: But you did.

CURTIS BROWN: So we started hanging out and from then on it was just, we were attached at the hip, we never went a day without seeing each other, talking to each other, and it was just a great experience for me because her family was great. She had siblings that lived in the area and so I was able to hang out with them and spend time with them. I realized that we had a lot in common. You know, she’s a great athlete and her being from California, it was good because she wasn’t as judgmental and she realized that “Hey, Curtis is LDS but he has a lot of friends that aren’t” and I realized that, you know, when you’re the only LDS person in your community, it’s tough at times and you get nervous that maybe your LDS friends wouldn’t accept your non-LDS friends because of the standards that they don’t live up to. But she was real comfortable with the friends that I had back home and I didn’t feel like I had to switch any of my friends because I was now dating her and likewise for her. She had, you know—none of her closest friends are LDS. She has a couple that are LDS and I was able to get along with them just fine and they didn’t feel like they had to be awkward around me or different things like that and so we just clicked really well. And we just loved spending time with each other and so it was great.

RICK STARR: That is great. For any of you who are just joining us, you’re listening to Why I Believe on the Mormon Channel. I’m speaking today with Curtis Brown, former running back for BYU and a convert to the Church while at BYU, and in talking about your marriage, there’s something that you wrote in a previous interview I’d like to share. Maybe I could get your thoughts on this.

CURTIS BROWN: Okay.

RICK STARR: You said, “Heavenly Father is definitely involved in our relationship. He has a lot to do with the success of our marriage. She and I can’t do it alone. There are so many blessings

that have come to us just being part of the Church. I'm enjoying every second of it." And you talk there about marriage being now a team comprised of three, meaning you and your wife and Heavenly Father.

CURTIS BROWN: Yes.

RICK STARR: Talk a little bit about that, what that means to you.

CURTIS BROWN: Well, I had a, I had a great Marriage and Family teacher. That was one of the religion courses I had to take was Marriage and Family. His name is Matt, and he really just talked about the triangle, talked about Heavenly Father here, your spouse, and then you, and the connection that you have and that those connections have to be strong in order for that triangle to be solid, but knowing that if that triangle were to ever break at any point, there's still that connection, and if my relationship with my Heavenly Father had ever broken off for any short amount of time, my wife's connection with Heavenly Father would still be my link to Him and she would be my anchor getting me back on the right track. And so that's the thing that I focused on the most and I'll be honest, I'm like anybody else, there are times in marriage where you learn, you feel like, "Well, I don't see Heavenly Father every day, so it's just me and you." And you take, you take for granted the scriptures, you take for granted prayer, going to church and just going through the motions, and I did that at times where I felt, "No, I'm doing fine," but it's all about reminiscing on the blessings that came from having that triangle being as solid as possible and that's something that I was actually thinking about this morning, was in life, I can think about all the—it's easy to think about all the things that I fall short in, it's easy to think about the things that bug me in life, what I wish I could do better. But at the same time, I also need to think about how blessed my life is to this point, think about the struggles in life that I don't have to deal with, that other couples or other people have to deal with, whether it be a tough economy, whether it be bills and things like that, whether it be an unsupportive family; there are so many things that I'm blessed with that I have to personally take the opportunity to be reminded of. It's easy for the world to remind you of the things that aren't doing well in your life. That happens every day. It's easy to remind you, "Oh, just go to the mailbox and look at the bills" and you're like, "Oh, man, I wish I made more money or whatever the case may be," but it takes a dedicated person, it takes a person committed to the gospel, to reflect every single day on the blessings of their life and say, "Wow, I have been blessed."

RICK STARR: That's a really great point. You're a convert to the Church. You've been married in the temple. Talk a little bit about the temple and what that means to you and your marriage.

CURTIS BROWN: The temple for me is the greatest service that I could ever do in order to show Heavenly Father my appreciation. One of the things I thought would be so huge for me was to start paying tithing. And once I started paying tithing, I was like, "Wow, that's the hugest thing I could ever do, give Him 10 % of my income when friends my age that aren't LDS are pocketing that money and spending it on other things." I thought, "Wow, I'm doing a lot," but at the end of the day, I thought, "It's just money." Being able to go to the temple, being able to be around people that have no other reason that they are there except for the service of the Lord, they are not being paid anything to do what they do but the blessings that come with the work that's experienced at the temple is comparable to none and every

time I go into the temple, that's one thing I think about, and I just think to myself that it's a selfless act that we do in the temple, and the work that's done there comes with an extraordinary amount of blessings. We do it because Heavenly Father, you know, expects us to do His work and He expects us to represent Him in the best way possible, and that's the number-one thing, message, I gave to people. If you're trying to explain, if you're a convert and you're trying to explain to your family members or your friends why you chose the LDS Church over any other church out there, the number-one thing I say that has quieted people down is, I say, "When I look at my Church and I look at the standard it holds me to, and I go to sleep at night, I think to myself, if Heavenly Father were here today, which Church would He think is doing the best job of representing Him and everything that He stands for, and what church is holding their members accountable, what church is where are the members holding themselves accountable?" And the one thing I do think about is even if there are members that have strayed away from the Church, they know it's true, and they can make excuses all they want about why they strayed away or different things like that, but when it comes down to it, the principles that they've learned, the life that they wanna, that the Church expects them to live, it's not that. You know, they might, you might come across a few members that have been rubbed the wrong way by other members but ultimately, principles hold the same. And when I think about Heavenly Father and what He expects from us, and if you were standing in front of me right now and say, "Do you think that you're part of a religion that made you work for it?" I think I'd have no doubt saying this was definitely the religion for me that pushed me beyond any other religion and made me feel that I was, I deserved to be in the presence of you right now. And I don't think a lot of churches can say that. And I don't think a lot of members of these churches can say, "Hey, I've done everything I could possibly do to be sitting right next to Heavenly Father in heaven." They can say, "Well, this is what they said I had to do," but no other religion holds their members accountable and says, "Okay, if you've done everything you think you can do, here's a list of some more things you can do." And it's a church that just keeps on pushing.

RICK STARR: You know, I've thought about that often, the same thing. When I see the commitment level as I go out and see missionaries working so hard and like you had mentioned, people in the temple, patrons in the temple who are serving, they're serving people who have gone before them, who have passed on, people they can't see, but they're willingly serving, and the missionaries are willingly serving with all they can and it's because they know something. Their commitment level is much higher because they know something that you can only know by investigating the Church and like you did, taking that promise in the Book of Mormon, that challenge to pray and find out for yourself, which is to me the most incredible promise that any person on earth has, is that opportunity, that promise that you can know for yourself, and when you do find out and know that, your commitment level is, like you say, is up.

CURTIS BROWN: Yes.

RICK STARR: You know.

CURTIS BROWN: Yeah. And it's definitely been, it's definitely been a blessing for me, you know, having been able to be sealed to my wife in the temple, having an opportunity to do firesides,

having an opportunity to talk to people that aren't LDS that come to BYU and are interested in the school. And to hear some of the minds, the mindsets that people have, which were similar to mine when I was taking my recruiting trip to the BYU, but then also be able to look at those players a couple years down the road and say, "Wow, I knew that they'd change their mind. I knew that they would think," [GIGGLING] and, you know, and even if they haven't been converted to the Church, their appreciation and their respect for the Church has grown. And like you said, there are so many blessings that come with the selfless work that us as members we do. And I think that's the one thing that, it's only gonna help you in life. You know, the principles. Coach Mendenhall did a great job. He talks about the Church being—the Church isn't just a religion, it's a lifestyle, and when you commit yourself to the Church, you commit yourself to a lifestyle. You commit yourself to living a certain way, not just because there's rules and there's punishment and there's consequences, you live that way because it feels good, it feels right, and even though you can't write down every single solitary blessing that comes with it, you know that your life is gonna be better off than it was without the gospel. So—

RICK STARR: Well, we're just about out of time. We need to wrap up. But before we do close our discussion, Curtis, would you mind sharing your testimony with us as we close?

CURTIS BROWN: I just, I just wanna bear my testimony that I know this Church is true. I know that Heavenly Father lives and I know that President Monson is a true prophet and that the gospel principles that are found in the Book of Mormon are here for our use today so that we may find the answers that are necessary for us, to know for ourselves that this Church is true. I have a firm testimony that if we do what is required from us whether it be, you know, from the time that we're in Nursery and we're starting to learn Church songs, to the moment, you know, where we're elders, that Heavenly Father will truly bless us. And, you know, the work that is done in the temple cannot be done anywhere else. The amount of love and the joy that comes with that temple work cannot be compared to anything and it's truly one of a kind. And if we do the temple work that's required of us, if we stay committed to our scriptures, and not feeling that we always have to be perfect, but knowing that we're always gonna have an opportunity to strive for perfection if we stay committed to that, then Heavenly Father will bless us. And if we take an opportunity to look at our days and think about, if we just look at the news for five minutes and realize that there are so many blessings and so many things that were avoided by our commitment to the Church and, you know, when we, at the end of the, you know, at that judgment day, Heavenly Father is gonna welcome us with open arms and say thank you. And I leave that with you guys in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

RICK STARR: Thank you. Thank you so much for being with us today, Curtis.

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