

# Primary Questions

A talk by Lawrence Corbridge titled, “Stand Forever” was addressed to students at Brigham Young University in 2019. He emphasizes the importance of grounding oneself in revelation by using the “The Divine Method of learning” to answer what he calls, the “primary questions” of Latter-day Saint faith.

In his talk<sup>1</sup>, Lawrence state:

*There are primary questions and there are secondary questions. Answer the primary questions first. Not all questions are equal and not all truths are equal. The primary questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate. There are only a few primary questions. I will mention four of them.*

- 1. Is there a God who is our Father?*
- 2. Is Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior of the world?*
- 3. Was Joseph Smith a prophet?*
- 4. Is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the kingdom of God on the earth?*

*By contrast, the secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, polygamy, people of African descent and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, how the Book of Mormon was translated, the Pearl of Great Price, DNA and the Book of Mormon, gay marriage, the different accounts of the First Vision, and on and on.*

*If you answer the primary questions, the secondary questions get answered too, or they pale in significance and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't and things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship altogether.*

I respect this approach. If we want to determine the veracity of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we should make sure we can weigh evidence against the most important questions.

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<sup>1</sup>[Stand Forever](#)

## **We see through a glass, darkly**

Falsifiability and parsimony are two important concepts when it comes to evaluating truth claims.

### **Falsifiability**

Falsifiability, often attributed to the philosopher of science Karl Popper, refers to the ability of a theory or hypothesis to be tested and potentially proven false. In essence, for a claim to be scientifically valid or meaningful, there must be a conceivable observation or experiment that could show it to be false. If a statement or theory is unfalsifiable, it means that no possible evidence could prove it wrong, rendering it outside the realm of empirical investigation.

### **Parsimony**

Parsimony, often referred to as Occam's razor, is the principle that, when presented with competing hypotheses that explain certain sets of observations, the simplest explanation—one that makes the fewest assumptions—ought to be accepted. This doesn't necessarily mean that the simpler explanation is the most accurate, but rather that it's preferable to start with the least complicated theory before considering more complex ones without evidence. By doing so, one avoids unnecessary complications and is often better positioned to build on knowledge systematically.

### **The spiritual approach**

Corbridge states:

The divine method of learning incorporates the elements of the other methodologies but ultimately trumps everything else by tapping into the powers of heaven. Ultimately the things of God are made known by the Spirit of God, which is usually a still, small voice. The Lord said, "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost."

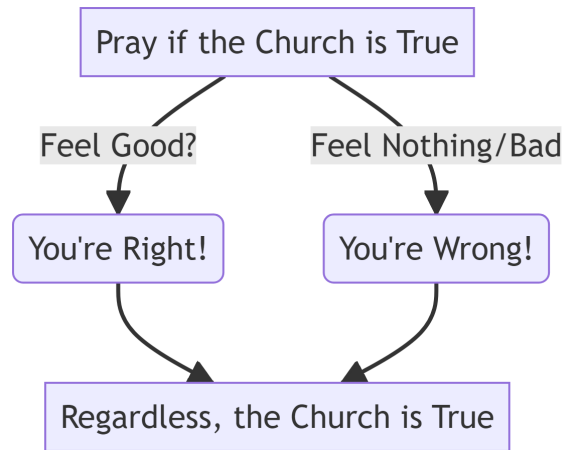
### **Falsifiability and the divine method of learning**

In terms of falsifiability, the spiritual approach is not falsifiable. According to Preach My Gospel:<sup>2</sup>

As you pray for inspiration, compare your spiritual impressions with the scriptures and the teachings of the living prophets. Impressions from the Spirit will align with these sources.

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<sup>2</sup>Preach My Gospel 2023: Chapter 4, Seek and Rely on the Spirit



Obviously, this is a very simplified flowchart, but it illustrates the point. If you pray about the Church and feel good, then the Church is true. If you don't feel good, then you're wrong. This is not falsifiable.

### **Parsimony and the divine method of learning**

In terms of parsimony, the spiritual approach is not parsimonious. It requires a lot of assumptions. For example, it assumes that there is a God who communicates with us through feelings and impressions, that these feelings and impressions are a reliable method of discerning truth, that external influences (like personal biases, emotions, cultural backgrounds, and so forth) do not interfere with this method of communication, and that everyone's experiences and interpretations of these feelings are consistent and universal for fundamental Church doctrine.

Moreover, the Divine Method seems to contradict the principle of parsimony by adding layers of complexity when simpler explanations might be available. For example, when one feels peace or discomfort after praying, it might be a result of prior beliefs, hopes, fears, or even physiological factors at play<sup>3 4</sup>, rather than direct communication from God. Occam's razor would suggest that we should first consider these simpler, natural explanations before attributing feelings to the divine.

Furthermore, this method demands an assumption that secondary questions, once the primary questions are believed to be true, become less significant or are automatically true. This is not necessarily parsimonious. Just because one believes in the overarching tenets of a belief system does not automatically render all subsidiary or secondary beliefs and practices as true or acceptable. Each question or issue, be it primary or secondary, should ideally stand on its own merit without being overshadowed or deemed insignificant by another.

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<sup>3</sup>[Wikipedia: Confirmation Bias](#)

<sup>4</sup>[Wikipedia: Elevation \(emotion\)](#)