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LDS scientist learns by study and by faith

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Courtesy of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw is cognitive scientist and an LDS bishop.

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Some say that religion and science are polar opposites. But to Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, that is not true.

Bradshaw, a senior research scientist at the Florida Institute for Human and Machine Cognition and a Mormon bishop in Pace, Fla., has found that his testimony has grown as much through service as it has through learning.

"I do believe that the process of learning, of being friends of truth and of being willing to test ideas openly, is something that's compatible with what we believe," he said. "I'm grateful for a church where truth can only help us."

One of the things about Bradshaw's LDS faith that has impressed him is that church members are taught about eternal progression — whatever light or knowledge is attained in this life will be carried into the next life.

"I hope that Latter-day Saint students will realize that science and religion not only are compatible, but also that we, more than any other people, should be very committed and excited about the opportunity we have to learn by study and by faith, and to apply that learning in ways that will bless the world."

Bradshaw received a Ph.D. in cognitive science from the University of Washington. Cognitive scientists study of the powers of the human brain and how to couple those powers with intelligent machines.

Bradshaw's job has entailed a variety of responsibilities, including helping NASA design and develop robots and vehicles — projects that will someday conduct missions to Mars.

While Bradshaw knows very few religious scientists, he said most scientists respect his beliefs, adding he has not experienced any disregard for his work due to his religious affiliation.

"People who do science accept that you have to make judgments based on the quality of the research performed. You get no special credit or discredit for your personal beliefs."

Bradshaw suspects many scientists come to negative conclusions about religion because they have had experiences with religion and religious people that disappointed them.

Through his experiences, Bradshaw has come to believe that knowledge and revelation come from the same source. He said he has felt guided in searching for the truth throughout his life.

"The kinds of intuitions that guide me in my work often feel very much like the promptings that I get in my spiritual life," he said.

"Science works by a kind of faith. Long before a new idea is proven, your senses are primed with an intuition that there is something to be learned by exploring further in a particular direction."

Bradshaw said everything he believes inspires and motivates him to learn more about God's creations.