

MISSIONARY 911

MANUAL, NOTES, and SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

to accompany the
Missionary 911
video series
www.missionary911.com

Missionary 911: Manual, Notes, and Supplementary Information

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INTRODUCTION

We at **Main Street Church of Brigham City** are motivated by a desire to see Jesus proclaimed in truth and in love among our Latter-day Saint (Mormon) neighbors. Our church and ministry are located in a predominantly Mormon community, which gives us a unique perspective (and a few years of experience) on ways to interact with our Mormon neighbors. We've learned a lot about what to do (and what *not* to do). Our hope and prayer is that some of the lessons we've learned will be helpful to you in your own interactions with these dear people.

We have a long history of producing video materials to share biblical truth with Mormons. As a result, we are often a point of contact for people wanting to know how to effectively communicate the gospel to Mormon friends and acquaintances. The "**Missionary 911**" project (and title) was inspired by the urgency of some phone calls we get from panicked Christians who find themselves facing a visit from Mormon missionaries!

Should you even invite the missionaries in? After all, 2 John 1:10 warns, *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house..."* If your intent is to receive the missionaries—and their message—as bearers of God's gospel truth, then John's warning is for you. But if your goal is to share the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ with *them*, then we encourage you to take advantage of any opportunity to do so...in your home or anywhere else.

We've discovered that many Christians' questions, fears, and misunderstandings about Mormon missionaries have many similarities. So we began to ask ourselves, *"Can we create a tool that will help people overcome their fears and gain some preparation and confidence, without burdening them with an overwhelming pile of information they have to manage?"*

Voilà...Missionary 911!

Missionary 911 will equip you to communicate with Mormons in a way that is natural, genuine, and respectful. You *don't* need to be an expert in Mormonism. But a little knowledge can go a long way, and so we have picked out a few important points to share.

Our chief goal is to help you cultivate an attitude and mindset that will enable you to have real, authentic conversations with the missionaries who show up on your doorstep. While we've tailored this series with LDS missionaries in mind, the same principles also apply to conversations with *any* Mormon you may know.

Now, if you're intimidated by the thought discussing religion with Mormon missionaries, you're not alone...but we're going to help you get over that hump! The information we share here will boost your confidence and demystify the experience. You will feel much more informed and equipped...with just a *little* bit of preparation.

And even if you're already the type of person who chases missionaries down the street so you can talk with them, we still have something valuable to offer you here—some practical ways to channel your enthusiasm to make your conversations even more productive.

So we invite you to share our sincere love and affection for these dear people, many of whom are weary and heavy-laden, carrying a burden that God never intended them to carry...and who are working to achieve righteousness that Jesus already accomplished on the Cross.

You have good news that they desperately need to hear!



1. MYTHS & MINES



Two nicely-dressed young people knock at your door. They look like they mean business. If you're like many Christians, you answer the door, and mumble something awkward like "No thanks, I'm happy with my church." Usually they'll just wish you a nice day and be on their way.

Then maybe you think, *I wish I knew how to talk with them. I feel bad turning them away like that.* But you're afraid that if you invite them in, you're just in for an uncomfortable conversation. After all, you're not interested in converting. And you're no expert in Mormonism. And maybe you don't even feel confident enough to talk about your *own* faith.

But you know what? You're more qualified than you think you are. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ who wants others to know him as well, then being willing to start a friendship with these young people could open the way for meaningful interactions with eternal consequences...all with just a *little* preparation and guidance. Getting you ready for their visit is exactly what *Missionary 911* is all about.

"Myths and Mines" is about dispelling some common misconceptions (the "myths") about Mormon missionaries that discourage many people from talking with them. And when you *do* talk with them, we point out a few hidden explosives (the "mines") that can hinder or even derail your conversations with the missionaries.

THE MYTHS



Myth #1: Mormons are Christians.

In other words, why do we need to share the gospel with someone who is already a "Christian?"

Before going any further, we generally avoid making blanket statements like "Mormons aren't Christians," because we can't presume to speak about the beliefs of any *individual Mormon*. Beliefs can vary significantly from member to member, and we'll talk more about this later. Nevertheless, we **can** confidently say that **Mormonism**, as a system of beliefs, is **not** in line with biblical Christianity. At all. The Mormon "gospel" bears no resemblance to the gospel found in the Bible. And someone who holds to the

core teachings of Mormonism is rejecting the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. The differences are staggering. For example, Mormonism teaches that:

- God was once a man, and humans can become as God is (which means there are many gods out there, including God’s siblings, parents, grandparents, etc.) Even now in his heavenly state, God the Father *still* has a physical body of flesh and bone.
- All humans are literal “spirit children” of God (or “Heavenly Father”) and an unnamed Heavenly Mother (or mothers)—conceived by a sexual union, born, and raised in Heaven prior to our birth on earth.
- Jesus is “divine” in the sense that he is born a child of Heavenly Father (just as we are) making him our literal brother. But he is not **God**. (At most, he is **a** god.) Heavenly Father and Jesus are exalted men who continue to grow and evolve.
- The Bible is corrupted and therefore unreliable, and requires the Mormon scriptures, together with the prophetic wisdom of the Mormon prophet and leaders, to be properly understood and “interpreted.” The uniquely Mormon scriptures (*The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine & Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*), however, are considered God’s unspoiled word.
- Eternal life is dependent upon our personal worthiness and obedience to certain laws and ordinances, and allegiance to the Mormon Church. (Mormons think that the Christian doctrine of “salvation by grace alone” is what the so-called “false” Christian churches use as a license to sin.)
- The Mormon Church (formally known as **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**) is the only true and living church on the face of the earth today, and the only institution authorized to perform the saving ordinances necessary for eternal life. All other churches are “apostate,” lacking proper authority to act on behalf of God.
- There was no valid church (or Christianity) on earth from the time of the twelve apostles’ deaths until the time when the prophet Joseph Smith “restored” the true gospel in the 1830s. (This 1,800 year period of time is known as “The Great Apostasy.”)
- A living prophet, as an authorized successor to the founding prophet Joseph Smith, is God’s unique mouthpiece on earth and is required to properly govern God’s true church.

Chances are, you won’t hear too much discussion about these beliefs in your conversations with Mormons, since they usually don’t parade them around in public. The teachings they *do* share have a familiar Christian “ring” about them, so many Christians come away thinking, “It sounds like they believe what I believe!”

Mormons would likely agree with the statement that “We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, the Son of God.” And isn’t that the core of the gospel? It is, but only if you understand the terminology properly. Even basic terms like *saved* and *grace* and *faith* and *Jesus* and *Son of God* will mean something different to the typical Mormon. When we understand what these terms mean to Mormons, we see that it points to a much different gospel than we find in the Bible.

Nowadays, Mormons *do* refer to themselves as *Christians*, and often take offense if that is challenged. After all, they reason, *Jesus Christ* is in the name of the church! However, there is little agreement on what the word *Christian* even means, so we won’t get anywhere debating about who is and who isn’t one. Because it is so often misunderstood, we recommend avoiding the term “Christian” altogether. We have taken to calling ourselves “followers of Jesus” in our discussions with Mormons. (For more discussion on this, see ***Christian*** in Chapter 7, ***Misunderstood Terminology***, page 100.)

Anyway, the upshot of Myth #1 is this: you can’t presume that Mormons are followers of the biblical Jesus Christ. The gospel taught in Mormonism is *worlds apart* from the gospel we find in the Bible. It does *not* lead to eternal life.



Myth #2: Missionaries are highly trained professionals, and I can’t match wits with them.

You might be surprised to learn that missionaries actually start off with very little formal training. Their course of study involves a few intensive weeks at a *Missionary Training Center*. Here they learn how to present a highly-scripted curriculum to *investigators* (the people who agree to receive the lessons). They typically begin their two-year mission just out of high school, so most missionaries are between 18 and 22 years of age. And many start their mission with a lot of insecurities.

F.Y.I...



The Name “Mormon”

*In recent years, the term “Mormon” (in reference to **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** or its members) has fallen out of favor. Even abbreviations such as “LDS” or even “Latter-day Saint” are frowned upon of late.*

*The **Missionary 911** video series was created before this trend was in effect; therefore, we typically refer to members as “Mormons.” Nevertheless, in light of this new trend, you would do well to avoid the term “Mormon” when speaking with members of the LDS Church.*

Missionaries are *taught* how to look and act confident and in-charge, and their business-formal dress code completes the imposing picture. But scratch a little beneath the surface, and you'll find a couple of ordinary young people who are putting themselves out there, often with shaky knees and cold feet, to have spiritual discussions with people. This is what makes your missionary encounters such a great opportunity! They're not scary. In all likelihood, you'll find them pleasant and agreeable. And many of them are curious about what *you* believe, so this provides a natural opening to have meaningful conversations. If you have ever lamented having a lack of "natural" opportunities to share about your faith, then look no further than your local Mormon missionaries.



Myth #3: All missionaries are strongly committed to their faith.

There are many reasons why a young Mormon man or woman will serve a mission. Many serve *not* because they are firm in their faith, but because they want to *become* firm in their faith. It is an important rite of passage in Mormonism, especially for the young men. All "worthy males" are expected to serve a mission as young adults. At any given time there are roughly 70,000 Mormon missionaries in active service around the world. An increasing number of young women are also serving on missions, though for them it is not an expectation the way it is for the young men.

While some embark on this spiritual adventure with religious zeal, others go more out of a sense of duty or obligation, because of family and peer pressure, or the promise of increased status when they return. Completing a mission is considered a high honor for both the missionary and for his or her family. And the flip-side is true, too—the *failure* to serve (or complete) a mission can be a source of shame.

The missionary life is not easy. They work long hours. Their days are heavily regimented, and the authority structure is a tight-run ship. While some enjoy their mission experience, others find it a difficult test of endurance. It's often the first time they've been away from their families for an extended time, and contact with folks back home is limited (they are allowed two phone calls per year to their family.)

They frequently experience discouragement and rejection when "tracting" (knocking on doors or soliciting appointments). If they happen to have interpersonal issues with fellow missionaries (not uncommon) or aren't properly cared for by mission leaders (also not uncommon), it compounds their sense of loneliness, isolation, and

discouragement. This is especially true for those who are called to serve in a different country, culture, and language.

And then there are missionaries who set out on a mission wrestling with doubts about whether the Mormon Church is even true, and so they struggle with teaching something that they're not certain of.

Mormon missionary service is often a “make or break” proposition. Missionaries who have had a successful mission, who have had positive experiences, logged many converts and baptisms, and grew in their commitment to the LDS Church will become the pride and joy of their families and congregations when they return home. To be a “returned missionary” is a badge of honor (and the young men in particular are considered very eligible bachelors when they get home!)

Others, however, have a different experience. Maybe they're not as successful in gaining converts. They may battle with doubts, depression, health, or their own sin issues. They may come away feeling beat up and used. For some of them, it gets so bad that they will leave their mission service before it is completed. But the prospect of shame and dishonor for returning early keeps many unhappy missionaries pushing forward in spite of the struggles. Because the pressure to succeed and prove oneself “worthy” is overwhelming, the rate of crippling emotional problems, depression, and even suicide among missionaries—during or following their mission service—is alarming.

Granted, no two missionaries' experiences will be identical, and for most, it's a mixed bag. But we want you to understand that many of these missionaries are in desperate need of compassion and understanding...not a slammed door or harsh words. So keep that in mind when you interact with them. It may be your kindness, your compassion, your genuine interest in them, or something as simple as a bottle of cold water on a hot day...that will remain with them more than any words you might say.



Myth #4: I don't know enough about Mormonism to hold my own in a discussion with them.

Good news! You don't need to be an expert in Mormonism. Believe it or not, your *lack* of understanding might even be to your advantage. After all, they see you as an *investigator*, not an expert.

The goal of **Missionary 911** is less about giving you exhaustive information about Mormonism, and more about cultivating the right attitudes and perspectives. The

information we provide on Mormonism will be helpful, but the attitude you develop—the humility, the curiosity, the genuine interest in the missionaries and concern for their eternal well-being—these are *essential*. In fact, if you take nothing away from this series except a greater love and compassion for the missionaries, and a desire to share truth with them in humility and grace...then as far as we’re concerned, that’s mission accomplished.

Okay, so now we’ve finished the common myths...on to the *landmines*.



THE MINES

Landmines are hidden bombs, usually buried just beneath the surface. They are set off when you accidentally step in the wrong place. The landmines are tripped mostly by things inside of *you*—attitudes, mindsets, expectations. But armed with a little foreknowledge, you can avoid many of these hidden triggers and have successful conversations with the missionaries.



Mine #1: The Silver Bullet.

The number one question we get from Christians who face discussions with Mormons is, “What is the one question/issue/challenge/Bible verse/etc. that will make the biggest impact?” We call this the “silver bullet” question.

We can’t emphasize this enough:



👉 There Are No Silver Bullets! 👈



Mormonism is more than a collection of beliefs that can be “fixed” with better information. Mormonism is an identity, a mindset, a culture, and a way of life. Mormon doctrines and truth claims are only a piece of the puzzle...and for many, not even the most important piece. And besides, Mormonism has developed some effective defense mechanisms to fend off challenges to their beliefs when they come.

One of those defense mechanisms is the deep investment in the Mormon community. Many Mormons' families, friends, social life, and in many cases even careers, are all bound up in the Mormon network. So people who leave Mormonism are not just abandoning a set of beliefs, which is painful enough on its own; many risk losing *everything*—family and friends, spouses, parents, children, jobs and careers. Shunning is common. So the incentive to remain a Mormon—and the cost of leaving Mormonism—is tremendous, and can't be overestimated. Because of this, many Mormons will not even want to *hear about* ideas that could lead them to question their faith. And even those who secretly harbor doubts about Mormonism will often keep their concerns to themselves, and just go through the motions for the sake of keeping the peace with their families and faith community.

While there may be many secret doubters, there are also many who remain firmly committed and fully convinced that everything Mormonism teaches is true. For these true believing Mormons, the *source* of the information is every bit as important as the information itself. (More on this below.) So you need to understand that you, as an outsider, or “gentile,” will *not* be considered a reliable source of information about Mormonism—even if your facts are indisputable. Whatever you say that challenges the Church's authenticity will likely be dismissed as coming from an either an uninformed source, or worse, a *malicious* one.

So is there *any* place for presenting challenges? Yes, there is; but some ways of doing this are more effective than others, and we'll cover this in more depth in subsequent modules. But the bottom line is, troubling issues within Mormonism are most effective when they emerge from a Mormon's own questions and willingness to investigate. Our goal is to gently encourage them to ask questions, not to dump a truckload of logical problems on top of them.

One final thought on this. For those who *do* leave Mormonism, the journey is rarely a quick one. The time between their first nagging doubts, and the straw that finally breaks the camel's back, is usually measured in *years*. So your job is to be the patient, gentle planter of seeds. Results are up to God. And if God grants you the opportunity to walk alongside a Mormon as they discover a new, authentic relationship with Jesus Christ, it is likely because seeds were planted and watered, over the course of previous years, in ways you may never know. So think in terms of little seeds, not silver bullets.



Mine #2: The Source of Truth.

We mentioned before that for a Mormon, the *source* of information is as important as the information itself, and information from untrusted sources (like *you*, for

example) will not gain much traction. Of course, this isn't unique to Mormonism. We *all* judge information based on how we view the reliability of the source. Biblically-minded Christians consider the Bible to be the final authority for matters of the Christian life, faith, and doctrine. After all, we believe God's unchanging truths are found there. So whenever a doctrinal question comes up, we Christians will typically appeal to the Bible first to answer questions and settle disputes.

But appealing to scripture—even the Mormon scriptures— is not usually how Mormons deal with challenges to their beliefs.

Mormonism teaches something called “progressive revelation.” This is the idea that truth is revealed progressively throughout time and history, and that newer revelation trumps older revelation. The idea of a changing and growing God and evolving revelation may be foreign (and appalling!) to traditional Christians, but not to most Mormons.

Since the LDS Church itself claims to be *the* singular conduit of pure truth, then by definition, whatever it says is *true*. Period. “*When the leaders have spoken, the thinking has been done.*” Even if it contradicts what was written in the Bible two thousand years ago...or, for that matter, what the LDS Church said ten years ago. Even if it contradicts facts, logic and reason itself. Since the *source* of the information is as important as the information itself, nothing is more reliable for a Mormon than *the Brethren*, that is, the Living Prophet and LDS Church leaders, whose responsibility it is to be the guardians of truth and God's unique mouthpiece on Earth.

Now, there *are* Mormons who do struggle when they encounter inconsistencies. In fact, the shifting teachings and changing practices of Mormonism have prompted many members to begin asking those “dangerous” questions that eventually lead them out of Mormonism. But for the majority of true believing Mormons, accepting progressive revelation and tolerating the inconsistencies that come with it, is second nature.

So...does this mean we abandon our appeal to the Bible when reasoning with Mormons? Not at all. It is still God's word, and therefore it is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12) and promises to “not return void” (Isaiah 55:11). All we're saying is don't expect a Mormon to snap to attention and immediately submit to your reasoning when you quote from the Bible.

However, the attitude you adopt when bringing the Bible into the discussion is important. Mormons are sensitive to what they call “Bible bashing,” the practice of taking Bible verses and pelting them like stones at Mormons in order to make a point or defend a principle.

Instead, adopt a stance of humility. Instead of “Well, that is complete nonsense, and here’s the Bible verse to prove it!” you could say, “My understanding about this comes from what I read in the Bible. Here, let me show you an example of what I’m talking about...” This way, you are bringing biblical truth into the discussion, but doing so with humility.



Mine #3: Contentiousness.

In the Book of Mormon there is a passage in which Jesus, during his supposed visit to the Americas, is quoted as saying, *“He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me [Jesus], but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another....but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”*¹

Contention, anger, argumentativeness, and conflict in general are seen by Mormons as coming from the devil. This is why in the Mormon culture, great value is placed on agreeability, friendliness, civility, and conflict avoidance. These aren’t bad qualities in and of themselves, but when they are taken to an extreme, even legitimate and respectful differences are branded as “contention,” which fuels a Mormon’s sense that they are being attacked and persecuted.

So how do you have a meaningful discussion in this environment of heightened sensitivity? The number one rule is to pay close attention to the “emotional climate” of your discussions, and maintain, so far as it depends on you, an atmosphere of respect, humility, and civility.

This is very important because *emotions* are another way that a Mormon tests the truthfulness of something. “Follow your heart” and “Trust your feelings” are sentiments that resonate strongly with Mormons. Now, you may understand that our emotions aren’t a reliable test of what is true or false, but Mormons rely *heavily* on them: good feelings come from God, and bad feelings come from the devil. So if you make them feel *bad*, then guess who they’ll associate you with? So here are a few tips for avoiding “contention” (or the appearance of it) in your discussions.

¹ Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 11:29-30. This verse is *not* derived from any biblical source. On the contrary, Jude 3 admonishes us to *contend for the faith*.

- ***Don't presume to tell them what they believe.*** Really, nobody likes that. Instead, ask open-ended questions about their beliefs. Don't corner them with things like "So you think you can become a god with lots of wives?" Forcing them to defend their beliefs is counter-productive. Your objective here is to *understand* them, not to identify targets to shoot at. They probably already know that their beliefs are under scrutiny, so they will be extra-sensitive to prodding or leading questions.
- ***When you do bring up a question or challenge,*** remember to couch it as *your* problem, not theirs. Instead of throwing down the gauntlet with "Oh yeah? Well, the *Bible* says..." use gentler "me" statements, like: "I am having a hard time reconciling this with what I read in the Bible, so how do you resolve this?"
- ***Be aware of the non-verbal ways you communicate.*** If you are naturally a direct person with a more forceful personality, be mindful of the tone of your voice and even body language. Practice patience, tact, and gentleness. This doesn't mean that you have to be "fake" with them; just be aware that gentleness and politeness will take you much further than brashness and sarcasm. Keep Proverbs 15:1 in mind: "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*"

While politeness is a worthwhile goal in your discussions, it's not just for the sake of being nice. It's about extending your conversations and opening up greater opportunities to talk about what really matters. The moment their "contention detectors" get set off, you lose credibility. You'll be labeled an "anti-Mormon," the conversation will shut down, and anything you say from that point forward will be considered lies from the devil.

One final thought.

Allow the missionaries to say their piece. This is not debate club, this is not a competition, and your job is not to win an argument or get the last word in. You don't need to control every aspect of the discussion, or to respond to every single point they make with a rebuttal. Choose your "battles" carefully, and give more weight to core gospel issues—who Jesus is, and how we can have eternal life. And if they don't have a good answer to a question you raise, don't press the issue just to make them squirm. It is enough to raise a question for them to examine on their own, and that's what this exercise is designed to do. Give them the freedom to say "We'll look into that and we can talk about it later."

Remember, these missionaries are young people who are, by and large, agreeable, friendly, and want to talk about God. So...talk about God with them! You never know the kind of impact this may have on them...or for that matter, on you.

So pray for wisdom for your tongue, and for courage to take that first step. Then wait and see what God will do!



2. “FROM HERE TO ETERNITY!”

The central teaching of practically any religious system is *what we have to do here and now, in order to achieve the best that life, and the afterlife, has to offer*. What rules we have to follow. What hoops we have to jump through. How to get on the good side of God...or Karma, or whoever or whatever we think decides our destiny.

The details differ from religion to religion, but it's basically the same formula. And Mormonism isn't any different in that regard. Mormons have their own “brand,” and it's called *the plan of salvation* or sometimes the *plan of happiness*. Sometimes it's referred to as *eternal progression*. It involves a complex pathway from...well... here to eternity!

But before we get into that, though, let's remind ourselves of the biblical “plan of salvation.” Most Mormons see it as a fool's errand. *It's too simple*, they reason. *It's too easy*. And true enough, when you think about it, the Bible's plan of salvation is remarkably simple.

Our existence begins on the earth. While on earth, our lives either come to reflect a real relationship with God and a desire for his ways...or they don't. At judgment, those who have embraced God and his purposes will enjoy the rest of forever with him; those who reject him and his ways will be forever separated from his goodness. But enjoying life with God is not a matter of personal worthiness, or works, or rituals, or self-perfection; it rests upon our surrender to him, and being in authentic relationship with him. This is earth-shaking in its simplicity. It is so diametrically opposed to the pattern of *any* other world religion that many argue that Christianity, in its purest sense, isn't even a “religion” at all.

It's the mystery of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, extending his grace and mercy to us (unworthy wretches!) motivated by love...and our response to him. For two thousand years, biblical theology has been unpacking this simple, powerful truth, and we haven't gotten to the bottom of the wonder and beauty of it yet. And yet, a small child can embrace it.

But the Mormon picture of the “plan of salvation” is radically different. It is convoluted, often confusing, and some of the finer details of it are disputed among

Mormons. What we present here is a simplified version. (And check out the handy diagram on page 27.)



We begin our individual existence (usually called “pre-existence” or “First Estate”) as the literal offspring of Heavenly Father and a Heavenly mother; we were conceived, born, and lived lives in Heaven, in essentially the same way as we have on earth. But while in our pre-mortal life, our goal was to eventually inhabit a mortal body on earth, which is a necessary step in our eternal progression. But this is not automatic; we had to choose and *qualify* for the right to be born on earth. Our worthiness in the pre-existence gave us the opportunity to enter the next important phase of our existence: Life on earth (sometimes called *Mortality* or the *Second Estate*).



While on earth, our minds have forgotten our pre-existent life. Our mission here is to experience this life, and learn to make good choices, thereby proving our worthiness to return to be with our Heavenly Father. We do this through accepting the Mormon gospel and obeying its laws and ordinances. Some of us do, but a lot of us do not.



So when we die, our spirit leaves our body and goes to ***the Spirit World***. The spirits of those who lived the Mormon gospel go to a temporary pleasant *Paradise*, while those who rejected it, or never heard about it, go to a temporary unpleasant *Spirit Prison*. Those who go to Spirit Prison have the opportunity to make up for failures while on earth; and if they repent and believe the Mormon gospel (and if people still living back on earth perform the proper temple rituals on their behalf), they still have the opportunity to work their way upward and enjoy the benefits of the Mormon gospel.



Then comes judgment. At the final judgment, everyone will be assigned one of four final, everlasting destinies: *Outer Darkness*; the *Telestial Kingdom*; the *Terrestrial Kingdom*; or the *Celestial Kingdom*. Once that judgment is made, the die is cast and there is no room for advancement. There is a little variation in the opinions about who goes where, but the general idea is as follows:



The worst case scenario is *Outer Darkness*, where the devil and the demons are cast. This isn't a big player, though, in most Mormons' minds. Not many people will go there. Only those who had received the fullness of the Mormon gospel, and then utterly rejected it (these are called

“apostates” or “sons of perdition”). So if you convert, and go through the temple rituals, and receive all that Mormonism offers, *and then* you reject it...well, *then* you are in danger of Outer Darkness; but otherwise, probably not.



Next up is the *Telestial Kingdom*. This is where all the “bad people” go...the rebellious, the reprobates, the unrepentant, those who didn’t take advantage of the opportunity to follow the Mormon gospel, neither in this world nor in the spirit world. But...even so, it’s supposed to be a pleasant existence, much better than earth-life. But here they have no access to Heavenly Father or Jesus Christ.



Then comes the *Terrestrial Kingdom*. This is a much greater place than the Telestial Kingdom; it’s a place of great beauty and surpassing joy. This is the destiny of all the good and decent people who rejected, or were blinded to, the Mormon gospel. (Underachieving Mormons who failed to live up to the standards of Mormonism could wind up here as well.) So the Terrestrial Kingdom is basically populated with the nice, God-fearing, law-abiding folks...it’s a nice neighborhood. Jesus can *visit* here, but there is no access to Heavenly Father.



And then there is the *Celestial Kingdom*, the highest kingdom there is, and where Heavenly Father dwells with Jesus Christ. This is where all good and worthy Mormons go—including those who accepted the Mormon gospel in Spirit Prison, *and* had the necessary temple work done on their behalf, *and* diligently worked their way up through the ranks to qualify for it.

But even in the Celestial Kingdom, all is not equal. Your standing there is determined by which rituals you have performed (or have had done on your behalf). If you’ve only done the bare minimum, you’ll wind up as servants to those who have completed the whole package. The highest and most important temple ritual is *Celestial Marriage* or *Temple Marriage*.



If you have undergone Celestial Marriage AND you have remained faithful to the laws and teachings of Mormonism, then you qualify for “Eternal Life” (also called Exaltation) which is the right to become gods and goddesses over a whole new realm. And that completes the loop—the new god and his goddess wife (or wives) then create a new world and procreate the children in a new “pre-existence” and the whole cycle of eternal progression starts all over again.



One additional big part of the Mormon plan of salvation is the importance of *eternal families*. “Families are Forever” is a well-known phrase in Mormonism. It’s stenciled on bedroom walls, cross-stitched pillow covers, and carved on gravestones. It’s not just a sentimental saying; it is *doctrine*. One of the key attractions of the Mormon afterlife is the idea of families being together for eternity—parents, spouses, children, siblings. Couples who are married in the Mormon temple are automatically “sealed” for eternity. Any children that come from this union are automatically sealed to them. Families who convert to Mormonism (or Mormons who were not married in the temple) can also undergo a special temple ritual in which husbands are sealed to their wives, and children to their parents, and this “sealing” enables the family to be together in eternity.

This adds another layer of complication for those who would leave Mormonism—they know that in the minds of their Mormon family, they aren’t just leaving a religion, they are breaking apart their “forever family.”

By the way, if you’re wondering (as many Mormons have wondered), how becoming a God of your own world meshes with the idea of being together with your “forever” family across many generations (who presumably are also off running worlds of their own)...well, the short answer they’ll hear is, “It’s just one of the mysteries of the gospel, that will all get worked out in eternity.”

But logical inconsistencies aside, the Mormon “plan of salvation” poses some serious problems from a biblical perspective.



1. “We Are All God’s Children.” Mormonism teaches that everyone born on earth is a literal child of God in the pre-existence. Not a *creation* of God, but actual, physiological offspring—the result of sex, conception, pregnancy, and birth in Heaven. However, the Bible says that we become children of God through faith in Christ. It’s not automatic. It’s not a birthright. Not everyone who walks the earth is a child of God. Jesus made this clear in John 8. The apostle Paul often uses the language of *adoption* to describe our entering into a familial relationship with God (e.g., Romans 8:15, Romans 8:23; Romans 9:4, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5).

In contrast, Mormonism teaches that we are all *by nature* the literal children of God, procreated in Heaven and essentially the same *species* as God—gods in embryo, if you will. And we aren’t just children, but his *most favored* children, since not all of Heavenly Father’s children qualify to be born on Earth. The fact that we are born here *at all* presumes that we were worthy children in the pre-existence, and therefore are already in pretty good standing with God. And how could a loving father even *think* of sending his beloved children to hell?

This doctrine creates a sense of entitlement, and that's why they don't dwell much on the threat of eternal punishment. It tells us that we're basically good people, and it blinds us to the real danger of hell, and our desperate need for a Savior.



2. Jesus is our Elder Brother.

Mormonism teaches that in the pre-existence, Jesus was the first child born of Heavenly Father. Everyone else, including you and me and even Satan (Lucifer) himself, are all younger siblings to Jesus. The one thing that separates Jesus from the rest of us, according to Mormon teaching, is that Heavenly Father is not only the father of Jesus in the pre-existence, but also his *physical* father in this physical world. Jesus is called the "only begotten of the flesh." According to the teaching, Heavenly Father visited the virgin Mary, had sexual relations with her (his spirit daughter, mind you!), and through this she conceived Jesus.

While this teaching is well-documented, it has not been taught much to younger generations. Your missionaries may never have even heard of this teaching, or at least not thought through its implications. If you bring it up, they might assume that you are repeating anti-Mormon lies.

The real problem with this "elder brother" teaching is that it reduces Jesus to someone who is essentially like us. Jesus is not worshiped and glorified as God; he is merely honored and appreciated as our "elder brother" who went before us and accomplished some good things on our behalf.



3. Many Gods. The Mormon plan of salvation suggests that there are many, many Gods. The one we worship as "God" presumably had parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins, aunts and uncles, many of

F.Y.I...



Early Mormonism taught that our skin color was an indication of our worthiness in the pre-existence. Light-skinned people were seen as more worthy, or more "valiant," and dark-skinned people were less worthy. This racist teaching has fallen out of favor with the modern LDS Church, due to societal pressure. But sadly, this mindset still trickles down through the Mormon culture, especially in the minds of many older-generation Mormons. It was because of this, and other racist teachings, that people of black African heritage were not allowed to receive the Mormon priesthood prior to 1978.

Warning: *This may be something that your young missionary friends know very little about it, and putting them on the spot about it is a shortcut to unnecessary offense.*

whom must be gods in other realms unknown to us. And we, as his children, have the potential to become gods ourselves, and our children after us. Sometimes Mormons will quote 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, “...indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God...” to suggest that while other gods exist, the God of our world is the only one we need to be concerned with. Paul, of course, is distinguishing idol worship from the worship of the true God...not talking about a multiplicity of gods.

There are explicit statements throughout the Bible that God *alone* is God. (Check out Isaiah chapters 40-44 for an abundant selection!) There is no other god. There was none before him; there will be none after him. So if the Mormon doctrine is true, then God is either ignorant, or he is being untruthful when he says that he alone is God and that there are no other gods beside him, before him, or after him.



4. Second Chances after Death. Mormonism teaches that there will be an opportunity after our death (when we go to the Spirit World) to get things right, and attain at least some improved outcome in the afterlife. So Mormons don't feel the same urgency to get things right in this life, nor do they understand a Christian's sense of urgency in sharing the biblical gospel.

The Bible provides us with no reason to expect second chances after death. Quite the opposite. Hebrews 9:27 teaches us that judgment follows death. Likewise, Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus (in Luke 16) seems to rule out second chances.

So if Mormons believe in these “second chances,” then what is the point of their missionary work at all? Why send out tens of thousands of young people to preach a message that eventually everyone will get a chance to hear, if not in this world, then the next?

Well, it's twofold. On a personal level, if you *do* listen to the missionaries in this life, and convert, then they believe that this will benefit you by giving you a shortcut to exaltation and bypass the hassles and hardships in the spirit world, to say nothing of the “benefits” of church membership in this life. The missionaries really do believe they are doing this for your benefit. But many would argue that from the Church's perspective, the primary motivation for missionary service is to “build up God's kingdom on earth.” That is, to build up the Mormon organization, to increase its membership, its influence, its power, its prestige, and, at the risk of sounding cynical, its income. Keep in mind, the missionaries aren't paid by the church. On the contrary, they and their family often save for years to pay for the privilege of serving.

However, the motivation for evangelism for Christians is (or should be) radically different. It has nothing to do with building up an organization. It is to glorify God and make him known—pointing souls toward eternal life with him, and away from eternal condemnation in hell. So the stakes are much, much higher, and the consequences for ignoring the warnings are far more catastrophic.



5. Shelving Issues. There is a common metaphor that Mormons use: *putting things on the shelf*. When they encounter some inconsistency or troubling issue in Mormonism, they are told to “put it on the shelf.” In other words, don’t dwell on it or worry about it, and wait patiently for a day when it will be properly explained. Granted, this doesn’t work well for everyone. There are Mormons whose critical thinking is not easily suppressed. They find that their “shelf” is becoming too heavy with questions, and are frustrated that no one is providing them with satisfactory answers. Eventually the weight of those issues becomes more than the shelf can withstand, and they are faced with a difficult choice—pursue truth and leave Mormonism and face the consequences; or stay, keep their mouth shut, and live a lie.

So for many, there is little motivation to resolve those questions. In fact, there’s a *fear* of it. If their doubts and questions lead them to “lose their testimony” (stop believing in Mormonism), they may become apostates and sons of perdition, and *then* the threat of Outer Darkness looms large. So many Mormons develop a high tolerance for *cognitive dissonance*—the internal struggle we experience when we encounter facts that collide with our beliefs. Mormons can be excellent doctors, lawyers, engineers and business professionals—careers that rely heavily on empirical facts and critical thinking—but they are taught to build a mental “firewall” that keeps critical thinking safely out of the realm of their religious beliefs.

The Bible, on the other hand, encourages us to study, test, wrestle, and understand. Are there things we will never fully grasp? Sure. But the Bible places a high value on the rigorous pursuit of knowledge (see Proverbs 3:13, Psalm 32:8-9, Isaiah 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Questions and doubts shouldn’t ever be stifled and avoided. If something is true, then it shouldn’t fear an honest investigation. And if something *isn’t* true, then it should be exposed for the lie that it is.



6. “As Man Is, God Once Was...” Lorenzo Snow, who would become the fifth president of the LDS Church, is credited with coining one of the most well-known (and criticized) axioms of Mormonism. He said:

“the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon me—the eyes of my understanding were opened, and I saw as clear as the sun at noonday, with wonder and astonishment, the pathway of God and man. I formed the following couplet which expresses the

revelation, as it was shown me. ‘As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be.’”²

This same idea was taught by the prophet Joseph Smith in 1844:

“I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. ... It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God and to know...that he was once a man like us...”³

“As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become” has become a common summary statement of Mormon theology. But critics call it *blasphemy*—and rightly so. Your missionaries will probably not speak of it openly, and may resist discussing it if you bring it up. In recent years, LDS prophets have downplayed this teaching as “speculative” or “theoretical” in the national media, and have even flatly denied that the church teaches it. But internal Mormon communications and conferences show the doctrine is still alive and well.

Some final thoughts.

We’ll discuss this in more depth later on, but we’ll add one final tip: avoid using “religious words” in your discussions. Even words that you might think are plain language—like *gospel*, or *salvation*, or *grace*, *faith*, even the word *Christian* itself, have different meanings for Mormons than they do for biblically-minded Christians.

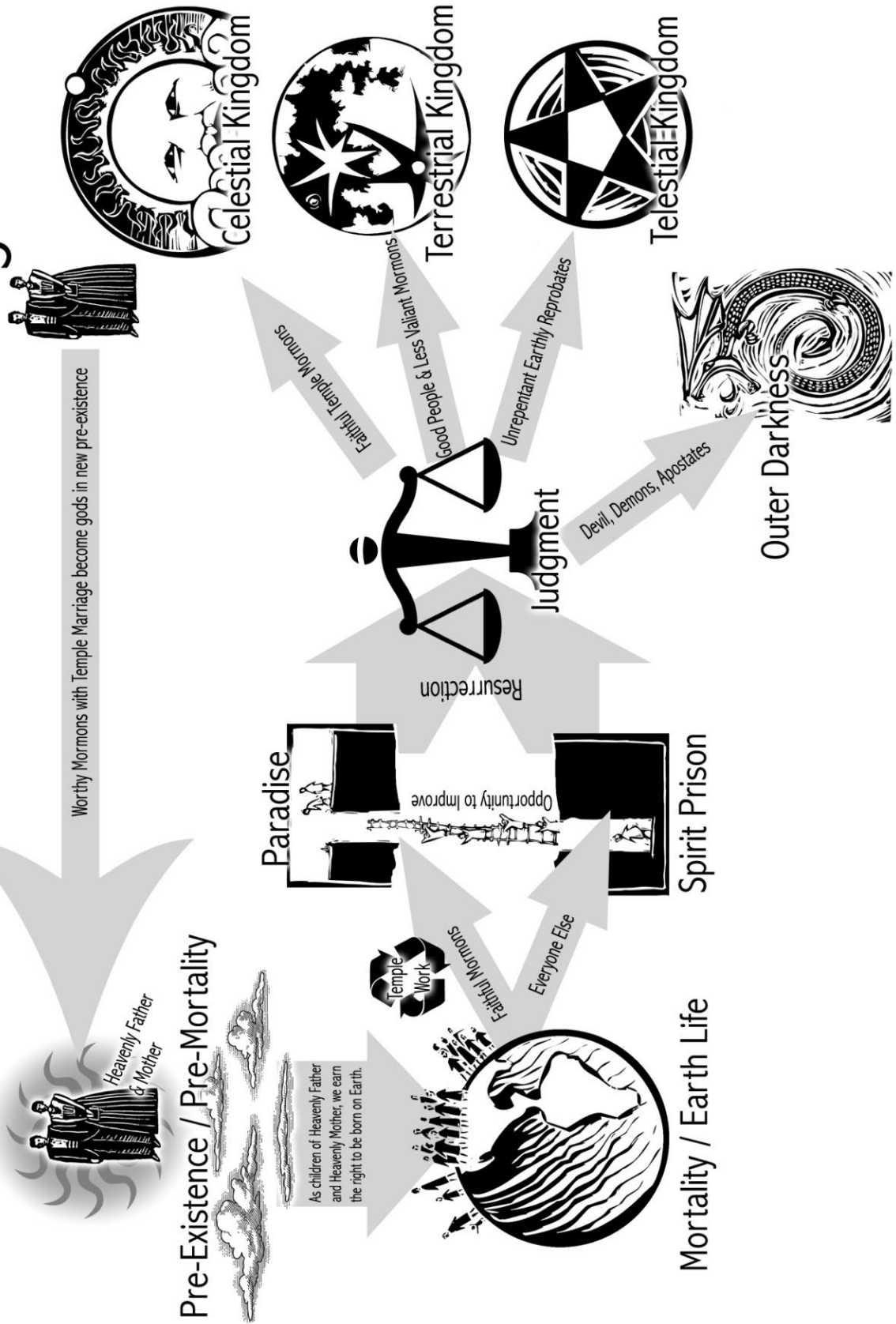
So look for workarounds that use simple, everyday language. Check out Chapter 7, ***Misunderstood Terminology*** (starting on page 95) in this manual for a list of frequently misunderstood words. Each entry provides the traditional Mormon definition or understanding, followed by the traditional *biblical* definition, and then some discussion on how to talk about those concepts with Mormons.

Remember—your missionaries *will* use a lot of these religious words. When they do, you can ask for clarification. But remember—they’re not trying to deliberately deceive you with word trickery. They may be unaware of the differences as well. So avoid any tone of accusation or suspicion when you ask them, “what do you *mean* by such-and-such?” Make it your objective to *understand* what they actually mean, not to get into battles over words. The best way to do this is to use plain language and adopt a humble attitude.

² Eliza R. Snow Smith, Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, 1884.

³ “King Follett Discourse,” Journal of Discourses 6:3-4.

The Mormon Plan of Salvation at a glance



3. DON'T SELL THE CAR...



Sales representatives in auto dealerships have a philosophy: “Don’t sell the car...sell what the car can *do*.” The same could be said of the missionaries; their job is not so much to “sell” the LDS Church, but to convince you of how the Church will benefit *you*.

The lessons that the missionaries will teach you come from a missionary training manual called *Preach My Gospel*.⁴ While the missionaries are given some flexibility in their teaching strategies, they are generally discouraged from going too far off-script, so what we share here is likely a good view of what you’ll receive if you take their lessons.

You will probably get *at most* three of the five lessons. (Generally they will only teach one lesson per visit, so this could be over three different appointments.) The fourth lesson is usually reserved for people who have already committed to be baptized, and the fifth lesson is intended only for *after* baptism. So we will focus on the first three lessons, although we’ll touch briefly on the contents of four and five.

The Missionary Lessons

For each lesson, we’ll summarize the missionaries’ teaching points, and then we’ll respond to each one with some clarifying information and biblical insight. These aren’t intended as blow-by-blow rebuttals to everything that comes out of their mouths, but when they ask you to respond to something they’ve said, you can draw on these insights to help formulate your own responses and ask thoughtful questions—carefully, humbly, and respectfully.

⁴ As of this printing, anyway. If you want to explore this further, the entire *Preach My Gospel* manual is available for free viewing or download on the LDS.org website. The link (again, as of this printing) is: www.lds.org/manual/preach-my-gospel-a-guide-to-missionary-service



Lesson 1: The Restoration

The first missionary lesson is called “The Restoration”. The restoration of *what*, you may ask? The restoration of the *gospel*. The message is designed to pique the interest of people who already have some familiarity with Christianity. It’s the “appeal” of the sales pitch. They will introduce the idea that the gospel that you may have grown up with is—at best—incomplete. And if that’s the case, wouldn’t you want to know how to complete it? So here are their main points.



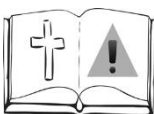
A. God is our loving Heavenly Father. We are his children in the most literal sense of the word. He has a body of flesh and bone, and wants us to be happy, which can happen through obedience to his commandments. If we live obedient lives, we can return to be with him after we die. But we also need the forgiveness of our sins, which Jesus Christ provided for us through the atonement. *(See further discussion of the **Atonement** in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology**, page 96.)*



*Setting aside for a moment the blasphemy of saying God the Father is a man, we acknowledge that God loves all people, but we are not born as “children” of Heavenly Father. The underlying message here is that we are God’s children by nature, and our life on earth is a birthright because of our worthiness in the pre-existence. The belief is that we are basically good people, who just need a little help in tidying ourselves up. In reality, even the “best” of us are completely, utterly broken, unworthy, depraved sinners, in desperate need of a Savior. To say otherwise cheapens the holiness of God and the magnitude of the forgiveness we receive through the atonement of Christ—which in Mormonism is conditional, and just one of many necessary steps back to God. Are we born as children of God? No; we can be **adopted** as his children, through faith in Christ; but it’s not automatic. (See more discussion of this in Module 2, “We Are All God’s Children” on page 22.)*



B. The Gospel blesses families. The family unit is not intended to be only for this time on earth, but for eternity as well. Living the Mormon gospel will bring peace and happiness to families on earth today, and enable those relationships to continue through eternity.



*Following Godly principles does bring blessing to our lives; that much is true. But in Mormonism, eternal life is about securing our eternal family relationships, rather than our relationship with Jesus Christ. In contrast, Jesus is the goal of the biblically-minded Christian...to dwell in and enjoy the glorious presence of Christ, together with **all** of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. That is (or at least should be) the central focus of our hope and our longing! Not so in Mormonism. While Mormonism gives a nod to “returning to Heavenly Father,” the chief goal is about becoming gods ourselves, creating worlds together with our forever family.*



C. Heavenly Father Reveals His Gospel in Every Dispensation.

Throughout history, God has led his people through prophets, who have the priesthood authority to “act in God’s name for the salvation of his children.”⁵ Specially-appointed prophets receive the gospel through revelation, and they in turn bring it to the people. This was the pattern that God began with Adam and continued through men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Over time, people would reject the gospel, and fall into apostasy, and then God would need to appoint another prophet to bring the people back to himself.



Mormonism teaches that the Mormon gospel, and some version of the Mormon church, existed from the very beginning—even from the days of Adam and Eve. But a Mormon’s view of history is one of a continuous cycle of revelation, spreading the “gospel,” apostasy, and then back to revelation, and so on. Now, it’s true that God has used people through history to draw people to himself, but Mormonism takes this idea and invents a historical framework that has no support in any other historical or biblical account. This “history” implies that God is actually incapable of acting apart from these special “authorized” human agents; and without these human agents, there is no salvation on the earth. It makes the Father out as some heavenly CEO, and reduces Jesus to middle management. But the God of the Bible is not like this. He speaks reality into existence. He raises up and tears down; he moves and acts when and how he sees fit. His plans aren’t thwarted by human affairs and failures, and he isn’t subject to a system of priesthood hierarchy to accomplish his purposes.

*Mormonism also labels Adam, Noah, and other ancients as “prophets” even though the Bible never identified them as such. In fact, the word “prophet” only appears once in all of Genesis, in reference to Abraham. Besides, if you compare the prophets God raised in the Bible with the “prophets” of Mormonism, there are stark differences. For one, the Old Testament prophets were almost always lone voices calling people to repentance, and **not** leaders of religious organizations. And they typically were not part of the priesthood class. They were usually thorns in the flesh of the government and religious leaders of their day. (See “**Prophet**” in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology**.) Note also that the Mormon use of the word “gospel” is equivalent to “the laws and ordinances of Mormonism.” (See “**Gospel**” in Chapter 7.)*



D. The Savior’s Earthly Ministry.

Heavenly Father sent his son Jesus to establish his church on the earth, and to atone for the sins of all people. If we have faith in him, repent, get baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end, we will receive forgiveness of our sins and be granted the opportunity to achieve eternal life. While on earth, Jesus gave his apostles the priesthood authority to preach his gospel.

⁵ *Preach my Gospel*, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2004, p. 32.



Jesus did come to earth to save us from our sins, but the underlying message that the missionaries bring is that Jesus came mainly to set up an institution on this earth. In the Bible, however, Jesus was clear that his kingdom was “not of this world” (John 8:36). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that we become a part of his kingdom through faith in him, not through the works we do (Ephesians 2:8-9). Nevertheless, Mormonism adds a list of religious requirements to be part of his kingdom. We will unpack those requirements in greater detail later in this section, but the upshot is that forgiveness is conditional upon our obedience to the Mormon gospel.



E. The Great Apostasy. After Jesus’ death and the death of all the apostles at the hands of wicked men, the priesthood authority perished entirely from the earth. Over time, the pure doctrines they had taught became corrupted, and many falsehoods were introduced, because there was no prophetic leadership to guide people in truth. Many false churches emerged out of this spiritual darkness, including the Roman Catholic Church and then later the Protestant churches.



*Mormonism teaches that there was a universal apostasy—the complete and total disappearance of authentic Christianity from the face of earth, which lasted for 18 centuries until Joseph Smith’s “restoration.” First of all, there is absolutely no historical...or biblical...basis for this claim. But what is troubling about this teaching is the idea that only the power of the priesthood can hold apostasy at bay and preserve doctrinal integrity. This makes God out to be incompetent and Jesus as ineffective, especially in light of Jesus’ promise that his words would never pass away (Matthew 24:35), and the gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matthew 16:18). We will take a closer look at this and other problems with the supposed universal apostasy in Module 4. (Also see “**Apostasy**” in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology.**)*

F.Y.I...



The Garden or the Cross?

*In your discussions about the atonement, you may sometimes hear more emphasis on Jesus’ suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane than on the cross. The Mormon down-playing of the cross is interesting, in light of 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (No mention of the garden!) The message of the cross is central to the authentic gospel, so perhaps it is not surprising that a counterfeit gospel will want to replace it with something else. Mormonism does not recognize the cross as a valid symbol of Christianity, and even finds it offensive. You won’t see it in their meeting houses or worn around their necks. (See “Cross” in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology.**)*



F. The Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Joseph

Smith. After this long period of universal, total apostasy, Heavenly Father called a young man named Joseph Smith to restore his one true church on the earth. According to the account, Joseph Smith was troubled by the apparent conflicts between different denominations, and went into a grove of trees to pray to know which one he should join. He was visited then by two separate personages—Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, who told him to join none of them, and that they were “all wrong” and their “creeds were an abomination.”⁶ At a later time, Smith would go on to receive other visitations from other biblical figures (like Peter, James, and John) who gave Smith the priesthood authority that had long since been missing on the earth, granting him the authority to begin the restored church.



*Since Mormonism teaches that “apostasy” is the result of the loss of the priesthood “keys” (that is, the authority to act on God’s behalf), the restoration was all about the **re-institution of the priesthood**, that is, the re-establishing of the one true institution that is authorized to grant salvation.*

*Mormonism is about the **institution** of God. But biblical Christianity is about the believer’s **relationship** with God in a kingdom not of this world. So as Christians, we can (and should) acknowledge and denounce the failures of earthly Christian institutions—and there are plenty of examples throughout history—but those failures have no bearing on a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, nor are they an obstacle for God in his work among his people, because the institution is **not** what saves.*

*But in Mormon thinking, the **institution** is the gatekeeper of salvation and truth—not Jesus. God can **only** save through the structure of an authorized institution, and the only authorized institution on earth today is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Therefore the LDS Church cannot be subject to corruption—or criticism. In fact, this is one reason there is such a heightened sensitivity among Mormons to criticism of the LDS Church—to challenge it, or their leaders, is blasphemy.*

The story of Smith’s quest to find the “right” denomination is what frames Mormons’ belief that there is no unity among Christian churches and denominations. What most Mormons fail to understand is that while there are differences among churches, biblically-based Christianity is united by the fundamental doctrines of salvation. This is why members of Baptist and Lutheran congregations, for example, can call one another “brothers and sisters in Christ” even though there are traditions and secondary theological matters on which they differ. Mormonism exaggerates the importance of the differences, however, and presumes that all the different denominations and churches out there are competing with one another for the title of “One True Church” to

⁶ This is the “official version” of the so-called *First Vision* of Joseph Smith that the LDS Church teaches. The story of the First Vision has changed radically since it was first told by Joseph Smith. There are no fewer than *nine* different versions—many of them contradictory—that have been published at some point in Mormonism’s history. The story seems to have conveniently evolved to coincide with Joseph Smith’s shifting theology and doctrine.

*the exclusion of all the others. (And if any church or denomination **does** claim to be the “one and only true church” then that’s a church to avoid!) The only “true” church is the worldwide collection of all who follow Jesus in spirit and truth, regardless of organizational affiliation, or lack thereof. It’s not defined or constrained by any human authority or institution, but by Jesus himself through the Holy Spirit.*



G. The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. Joseph

Smith was directed to discover a set of golden plates, upon which a collection of writings of ancient prophets in the Americas had been written. God enabled him to translate these plates into what is today the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is the evidence of the authenticity of Joseph Smith, and reading it is important for gaining the conviction that he was a true prophet and that he was called to restore the true church on the earth. “The honest seeker of truth will soon come to **feel** that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.”⁷



The Book of Mormon is indeed an excellent test of Joseph Smith’s authenticity. But not in the way that Mormons presume it is. In Module 4, we will discuss in greater depth how the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith fail the test of authenticity. But more on that later.

*As the missionaries talk about the Book of Mormon, pay attention to how often they use the word “feel” instead of “think” or “believe.” Remember our discussion about testing truth with feelings in Module 1? They expect that the honest, willing reader will experience a positive **emotional reaction** to the Book of Mormon, which will confirm its supernatural origins.*

*Some people do experience a positive emotional response to the Book of Mormon. Where does it come from? Sometimes it’s just that—an emotional response—no different from the emotional responses to stories, songs or movies, or even a strong desire for something to be true. But also keep in mind that we **do** live in a realm where “unclean” spiritual forces are at work, and deception is a primary tactic of Satan. If a Mormon believes that good feelings could never come from Satan, the Bible says otherwise: “And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14). It is not so far-fetched that some of those powerful positive feelings that some people experience could be generated by ungodly spirits in order to deceive.*



H. Pray to Know the Truth through the Holy Ghost. The way we can know that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and that

⁷ *Preach my Gospel*, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2004, p. 38, emphasis added.

he restored the true Church, is through prayer. “No one can know of spiritual truths without prayer. In answer to our prayers, the Holy Ghost will teach us truth through our **feelings** and thoughts.”⁸



*This is perhaps one of the more dangerous deceptions. We know God’s truth by God’s Word, not by our feelings in prayer. To presume that any random thought or feeling that rises up inside us is actually God talking to us can lead to disastrous results—and history is full of such examples. Nevertheless, a Mormon will be absolutely convinced these “stirrings in their spirit” is God telling them **personally** that it is true—end of discussion. So when facts and reason challenge their belief, they fall back on what they are convinced was a personal revelation from God. And God could never lie!*

*But for a biblical Christian, God’s truth is revealed in his Word, so that must take precedence over our thoughts and feelings. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (Proverbs 14:12). What **seems** true, what **feels** true, is not always true. We are commanded to test all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and this includes our own thoughts and feelings.*



Lesson 2: The Plan of Salvation

This is the the mechanics of how it all works. Even though we covered the “Plan of Salvation” in the previous module, you need to know what the *missionaries* will share with you about the Plan of Salvation (and more to the point, what they probably *won’t* share with you). Their outline will go as follows.



A. Pre-Earth Life: God’s Purpose and Plan for Us. We are the literal children of Heavenly Father before we are born on earth. His purposes for us are to become like him. In order for this to happen, we have to experience mortality with a physical body. While we lived in Heaven, we accepted this plan before coming to Earth. God gave us the gift of “agency” or the ability to choose. How we use this gift determines how far we will progress. If we choose obedience in this life, we can enjoy his presence after this life, and become like him.



Numerous passages in the Bible indicate that our existence began on earth, not prior (e.g., Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:45-47.) There are references to God “knowing” us before our birth; Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 139:16 are usually the verses they bring up. But God is not bound by time as we are; so he knows all things from beginning to end. Remember also that the Mormon doctrine of pre-

⁸ *Preach my Gospel*, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2004, p. 39, emphasis added.

existence comes packaged with the assumption that we are, by nature, favored children of God, which brings a false sense of entitlement. This contradicts the biblical teaching that all of mankind is born bent toward rebellion and sin and deserving of God's wrath. So it is only by God's undeserved grace, and not our works or worthiness, that we may live in his presence when we die.



B. The Creation, and the Fall of Adam and Eve. Under Heavenly

Father's guidance, Jesus Christ organized the earth for us to live. Adam and Eve were the first of God's children to inhabit physical bodies. They were given a commandment to not eat the forbidden fruit. If they had obeyed that command, they could have remained happily in God's presence, but could not have experienced eternal progression through mortality. Nor would they have had the ability to have children. Even though Satan successfully tempted them to eat the fruit, this was all part of God's plan. Only in this way could they progress and become like God.



*In Mormonism, the Fall is considered a good and necessary thing. They teach that God gave a commandment to Adam and Eve that he actually **intended** for them to disobey, and that Adam and Eve wouldn't have been able to progress eternally or have children **unless** they disobeyed! And without children, there would be no means to provide mortal bodies for the waiting spirit children of Heavenly Father. But according to the Bible, the ability to have children was never tied to the fall. In fact, God's declaration that Eve's pain in childbirth would increase as a result of her disobedience (Genesis 3:16) suggests that bearing children was indeed possible before the fall. But the bigger problem with this teaching is that it makes God out to be dishonest and manipulative, saying what he doesn't mean. He says "don't do it" but he means "do it." The idea that God takes his own commandments so lightly, or that he would have to resort to deception to accomplish his purposes, or that he would ever consider disobedience to his word a "good" thing, is an assault on his character, and downplays the deadly consequences of sin. It is, in fact, an endorsement of the serpent's lie that Adam and Eve would become "as God" in Genesis 3.*



C. Our Life on Earth. When we come to earth, we are unable to remember

our pre-existent life. The goal of our life on earth is to experience life with imperfect, mortal bodies. We will experience joy, but will also be subjected to temptation, suffering, sin, and ultimately physical death. In the process, we hope to grow and learn to make right choices. This is a necessary step in order for us to inhabit perfect, immortal bodies like Heavenly Father's.



*Mormonism rejects the idea of **original sin**, or the biblical teaching that sin is something that infects us as a direct result of the Fall (see Romans 5:12). Throughout the Bible, sin is associated with death, and death with sin. We all will die because we all are sinners. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). However, in Mormonism, our life of mortality (and death) is a necessary rite of passage*

for our exaltation, instead of a tragic reality that required Jesus' death to fix. It takes the focus off the real nature of our fundamental problem (sin) and in so doing, de-emphasizes the solution (Jesus).



D. The Atonement. Jesus Christ was chosen to be our Savior and Redeemer.

He came to earth as the literal son of God in the flesh. Because of his sacrifice, our lives will not end with our physical death. If it had not been for the atonement of Jesus Christ, our lives would end forever upon our mortal death. However, because of the atonement, we will be resurrected—that is, our spirits will be reunited with our bodies. And if we accept him through faith, repentance, baptism by immersion by an authorized priesthood holder, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and faithfully keeping his commandments to the end, then we can earn forgiveness for our sins and become worthy to return to God's presence.



*A few things to note. **First**, when they teach that Jesus is the “literal son of God in the flesh” they mean just that. God (a man of flesh) was the **biological** father of Jesus, who was conceived of Mary in the same natural way any other baby is conceived. **Second**, Mormonism teaches that Jesus' atonement was what gave us the right to be resurrected. Now, the Bible does say that everyone will be resurrected—some to eternal life, and some to eternal condemnation (John 5:29), but this is not the result of of Jesus' atonement. Rather, everyone will be resurrected in order to face judgment...and God's justice. However, Jesus' **true** atonement—that is, his covering of righteousness—is applied freely to those who will receive him. And **third**, according to Mormon teaching, the forgiveness of sins is conditional upon our fulfilling the requirements of the Mormon gospel (we'll look at this more closely in Missionary Lesson 3). But the Bible teaches that forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus, not through Mormon (or any other) works.*



E. The Spirit World. Upon our death, the spirits of all people go to the

Spirit World. Our condition in the Spirit World is dependent upon our life in our earthly existence. Those who obeyed the gospel will live in peace and joy; those who were disobedient will live in unhappiness. Even so, the gospel will be preached to all who were disobedient (or who didn't have a chance to hear). We will remain in the spirit world until the resurrection, when our spirits and our bodies will be reunited.



This “holding cell” for our spirits between death and resurrection is a place of rest and happiness for faithful Mormons, and a place of torment for everyone else. In Mormon circles, these are referred to as “Paradise” and “Spirit Prison” (or sometimes “hell”) respectively, though these terms may be avoided by your missionaries. It is taught that those Mormons in Paradise will actually serve as “missionaries” to those in Spirit Prison, to give all souls an opportunity to hear and receive the Mormon gospel. The Spirit World is our “second chance” to get things right before a final, permanent eternal destiny is assigned to us. This teaching provides a

false hope, and does away with the urgency to be reconciled with God in this life. It also contradicts Hebrews 9:27, "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." Mormons will often appeal to a couple verses in 1 Peter to support the idea of a Spirit World, but these verses don't really support the doctrine. (See page 136 for more discussion on these verses.)



F. Resurrection, Judgment, and Immortality. When our spirits and bodies are reunited at resurrection, we will be judged in God's presence. All people will become immortal at this point, righteous and wicked alike. But Eternal Life (exaltation) is only given to those who have obeyed the gospel. Eternal life is "living with God forever in eternal families. It is to know God and Jesus Christ and to experience the life they enjoy."⁹



*According to the Bible, yes, we all **will** face judgment, the righteous and wicked alike. And strictly speaking, eternal life **will** be granted to those who "obey the gospel". But in the Bible, "obey the gospel" means "trust in Jesus" (see John 6:27-29). The Mormon idea of "obey the gospel," however, is "faithfully keep all the laws and ordinances of Mormonism." (See "**Gospel**" in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology**). The definition of "eternal life" is also problematic (see "**Eternal Life**"). The Bible defines eternal life in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." There is no mention of "eternal families" or becoming as god. Eternal life, as the Bible teaches it, is being in God's presence. He is the complete fulfillment of our deepest longings and desires. Mormon teachings pay lip service to "returning to Heavenly Father," but the real goal of the Mormon afterlife is to be **like** God, living in eternal families, and presiding as gods over new worlds. On the surface, this might seem more grandiose than the thought of "merely" being in God's presence (as if this were something dull and boring!) The Mormon idea of eternal life completely misses the unfathomable awe and majesty, and endless joy and beauty and satisfaction of truly dwelling in God's presence and worshiping him! And if that is not enough, then they don't know who God is.*



G. Kingdoms of Glory. God will reward us according to our works and our desires. Those who repented, received the ordinances, and obeyed the gospel will go to the *celestial* kingdom, and become like God, and receive the fullness of joy. Honorable people who did not live the gospel will live in the *terrestrial* kingdom. Unrepentant people who persisted in sin will receive the lowest, or *telestial* kingdom.



We'll discuss the absence of "Outer Darkness" from the list of possible afterlife destinations a little later. But note that the three "kingdoms of glory" (sometimes referred to as "degrees of glory") have no basis in the Bible. If you

⁹ *Preach my Gospel*, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2004, p. 53.

ask a missionary to identify where in the Bible it talks about these three degrees, you might hear one of the following references. One is in 2 Corinthians 12:1-3, where Paul refers to a vision of being caught up into the “third heaven.” The other passage is 1 Corinthians 15:41, where Paul talks about “one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars...” which Mormons falsely interpret to mean the differing glories of the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms. (In chapter 8, Mormon Misuse of the Bible, we discuss the use of these verses in greater depth. See also “Heaven” in Chapter 7, Misunderstood Terminology.)

*But the deeper problem is the Mormon teaching that we will be judged according to our “works and desires,” and that our final destiny is based on them. While the Bible does teach us that that our works will be judged (e.g., 1 Peter 1:17), our works will not earn us eternal life—not even a little bit. Only the work of Jesus Christ can save us. Therefore, our final judgment is based entirely upon our standing with Jesus—do we stand on **our** works, or on **his**? Those who place their faith in Jesus—relying on Jesus’ righteousness—receive eternal life (John 3:16). Those who reject Jesus—relying on their own works—are condemned (John 3:18), because none of our works are sufficient (Isaiah 64:6).*

*Being judged based on our “works and desires” presents another problem as well: how many and how good must our works be, and how strong must our desires be? What is the “bar” we have to achieve in order to be counted worthy? The Mormon life is spent “doing your best and hoping for the best” with little assurance that their best is good enough to qualify for eternal life. Contrast this with biblical Christianity, in which our eternal destiny is based entirely on what **Jesus** has perfectly done, not what **we** have imperfectly done. And that is the only way we can really have assurance of eternal life.*

This teaching also undercuts the real motivation to pursue holiness. Since Mormons think that the assurance of salvation that Christians proclaim is really just a license to sin, they think that good behavior is all about gaining rewards and avoiding punishment. After all, what motivation is there to “be good” if we’re sure that we’re saved anyway? And so Mormons who think this way are forfeiting the true essence of salvation—a relationship with Jesus Christ, based upon his transforming love, which molds and shapes our behavior and desires.

What is Missing from the Missionary Lesson on the Plan of Salvation

The “Bad Places”

Spirit Prison and Outer Darkness probably won’t be mentioned in your lessons. This is less about avoiding uncomfortable topics, and more about keeping you focused on what really matters. Since Mormonism teaches that almost everyone is going to receive some

degree of heaven, Outer Darkness just isn't a big threat. It is reserved only for those who at one time enjoyed the full benefits of living the Mormon gospel, who participated in the temple rituals, but who turned away and became apostates.

This does raise some natural questions, though. Jesus was explicit in his statements concerning hell (or outer darkness). *He* certainly seemed to believe it was a real danger. So why is there so little emphasis on it in Mormonism? Jesus spoke of the sheep and the goats at judgment (Matthew 25:31-46); he spoke of a narrow gate to life and a highway to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14); even in the often-quoted verses John 3:16-18, Jesus speaks of "perishing" and "condemnation"...what does that mean?

A Mormon might say that these refer only to the temporary spirit prison; but this doesn't line up with Jesus' story in Luke 16 about the Rich Man and Lazarus. In that story, the two men died, and the rich man went to a place of suffering, while Lazarus went to Abraham's side. The suffering rich man called out and pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus over to give him aid, or to return him to life so he could warn his family. But Abraham said that there was a fixed chasm that can't be crossed. This contradicts the idea that someone in paradise could cross over to help those in spirit prison. And it doesn't offer any hope of it being a temporary circumstance.

Hell and judgment are uncomfortable topics...we get that. But Jesus doesn't shy away from talking about it. So if your discussion goes in this direction, gently ask the missionaries what they think about Jesus' words concerning hell.

The Origin of Heavenly Father

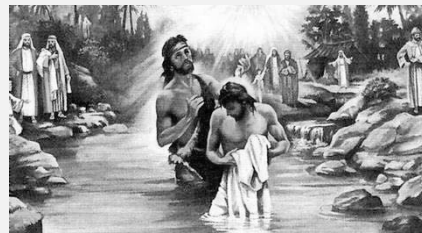
The teaching that "As man is God once was..." will probably not come up in your missionary discussions. They realize that this is an offensive teaching for biblically-minded Christians.

But instead of pouncing on them about the blasphemous Lorenzo Snow couplet, it would be better to ask some open-ended questions about where Heavenly Father came from. Has he always been God? What did he do to become God?

Temples

Even though the temples are an essential part of exaltation and eternal life, they are not usually

F.Y.I...



*Baptism of children and new converts into the LDS church is NOT performed in the temple, since temples are reserved only for temple-worthy Mormons. Instead, children and new converts are baptized elsewhere—in baptismal fonts, pools, or anywhere that complete immersion is possible. The ritual must be administered by a worthy holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood. (For more information, see "Priesthood" in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology.**)*

discussed in the missionary lessons, at least not at first. This is because the temples, and what goes on in them, are considered sacred.¹⁰ Mormons take vows to not discuss what goes on in the Temple with *anyone*—not even with fellow “Temple Mormons,” and especially not with outsiders.

Not all Mormons are “temple Mormons.” The Mormon Church doesn’t publish statistics about how many of their 15 million or so members on record are actually “temple-worthy” but it is presumed to be a minority. Your missionaries, however, are Temple Mormons; they have gone through the temple for their “endowments.” This is a requirement for missionary service. New converts to Mormonism are usually eligible for a “temple recommend” (permission to enter the Temple) once they have been a member in good standing for at least a year, have been paying a full tithe, and have otherwise proven faithful to the laws and requirements of Mormonism. (See more information on the Temple Recommend at the end of this chapter.)

Because the temple rituals are considered sacred, we strongly urge you *not* to pursue a line of discussion about the details of what goes on in the temple. Instead, your questions should focus on the general purpose of the temples. You might ask, “What do the temples accomplish for Mormons? Why are they important?” You might also ask about how Mormon temples compare to the Jewish temple described in the Old Testament. Or for that matter, what the Book of Mormon has to say about temples (which is not much). For more discussion of this, see **Temple** in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology**.

F.Y.I...



Some people might be tempted to lead the missionaries on by pretending to be interested in joining the LDS Church. Don't do this. Your relationship with the missionaries needs to be based on honesty and integrity. To mislead them would go against the purpose of this series—to introduce the missionaries to the real good news of Jesus Christ. You can tell them up front that you're interested in learning what they teach, but aren't looking to convert. This will not put off most missionaries. (They might even take this as a challenge to rise up to!)

¹⁰ Knowing the details of what goes on in the temple is not necessary for your discussions with Mormons. This information is considered *sacred* to Mormons. If you demonstrate “insider knowledge,” it will be considered *offensive* to believing Mormons that you speak with. So really, don’t press for information, or even flaunt the little bit we share here. If you are really determined to educate yourself on the Mormon temple rituals, do so with discretion. One reliable source of information is found in the “Mormons In Transition” portion of the website of the Institute for Religious Research:

<http://mit.irr.org/mormon-temple-endowment-ceremony>.

Or visit **www.missionary911.com/resources** for this and other links referenced in this manual.



Lesson 3: The Gospel of Jesus Christ

This third lesson is what we call the “seal”... this is usually the last of the lessons you’ll receive, unless you agree to get baptized and join the church (see note in the “FYI” box on the previous page).

At first glance, if you’re squinting hard enough, the Mormon “gospel of Jesus Christ” that the missionaries present to you might resemble the biblical gospel. And this is deliberate. It’s designed to sound palatable to Christian ears, though *discerning* Christian ears should recognize the flaws pretty quickly. And so we want to help you sharpen your discernment.

The Mormon gospel looks a lot like a sales contract. If you think of these Mormon gospel principles as clauses in a sales contract, you’ll see that there are six of them—one which outlines what Jesus (through the Mormon Church) will do for you; but this clause is contingent on the other five, which are what you are expected to do for Jesus (in theory) or the LDS Church (in reality).



Part 1: Through Christ We Can Be Cleansed from Sin. Since we all have sinned, and no imperfection can be in God’s presence, this sin must be taken care of so that we can return to Heavenly Father. Jesus, through his Atonement and Resurrection, grants all people resurrection (reuniting body and spirit) to stand in judgment before Heavenly Father. At this point, Jesus has satisfied God’s need for justice, so Heavenly Father can choose to grant mercy, withhold punishment, and allow us back into his presence. But this is not unconditional. He did not eliminate our responsibility.



*Much of this sounds so close to “right” that it trips up many Christians. After all, Jesus did pay the penalty for our sin, and in so doing, removed the obstacle which blocks our entrance into God’s presence, and satisfied the demands of justice through his substitutionary sacrifice. And as followers of Christ, we acknowledge our call to lives of obedience. However, when you tease apart this teaching, what it really states is that Jesus’ sacrifice gets us before the judge, but no further. Whether or not we receive **forgiveness** that leads to eternal life depends on how well we have lived in obedience to God’s commandments (that is, the Mormon gospel)—whether we have obeyed to Heavenly Father’s satisfaction. So in Mormonism, Jesus’ forgiveness only works in our favor once we have adequately demonstrated our worthiness of it. (For more discussion of this, see “**Salvation**” in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology.**)*



Part 2: Faith in Jesus Christ. We must believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and Savior and Redeemer of the world. Through his grace and mercy, we can return to live with Heavenly Father. We also must strive to obey his commandments. We work hard as we can to be more like him. Even though we will make mistakes, we are constantly striving to obey him, praying for strength to avoid temptation and sin. He blesses us when we obey God.



*Again, this sounds **almost** right. The problem with this Mormon teaching, however, is that the emphasis is on **our striving and obedience** and not on **his grace through the completed work on the cross**. It's as if Jesus made a down payment for your sins, but you're still responsible for mortgage payments.*

So again, it raises the questions: How big is our part of the "mortgage"? How much striving is "enough?" How many mistakes, or "missed payments" are we allowed before we are deemed unworthy of his forgiveness? How strong must our obedience, striving, and desire be in order to satisfy Heavenly Father, and how is that measured? These are questions that Mormonism doesn't answer adequately. It would be a cruel trick to dangle the promise of eternal life before us, but then be unclear about whether we can expect to attain it. Therefore many Mormons are left with nothing better than "Try your hardest and hope for the best."

*This is why the biblical gospel is so critical. Jesus' completed work on the cross is the covering for **all** our sin and shortcomings. He didn't "refinance" our debt; **he paid it entirely**. Remember, Mormons think a Christian's confidence in grace alone is a license to sin, or to be lazy about good works. But we know this isn't the case. Grace transforms us. And when we do fail, it grieves us because we know it grieves him. But even in the midst of our failures, we can remain confident in his promise to never forsake us, because we know that we are judged not by our worthiness (for we are **all** unworthy), but by whether we have put our hope and trust in Jesus to forgive us. The Mormon gospel doesn't provide any of this hope or confidence.*



Part 3: Repentance. Repentance means to change our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to be in line with God's will. We return to Heavenly Father only through Christ's mercy, and we receive Christ's mercy only through repentance. We recognize our sin, confess it to God, are remorseful about it, and change our behavior, and do all we can to make restitution for damages caused by our past sin. We also confess any "very serious" sins to God's authorized Church leaders. Genuine, perfect repentance is the permanent putting away of sin. Even though we may continue to sin, we must strive to correct our transgression and develop Christ-like qualities.



Repentance is indeed the change of heart and mind to acknowledge that God's ways are right, and our ways are wrong, and it does bring a change

in our attitude and behavior to conform to that which pleases God. However, in the Bible, repentance is referred to as a gift from God (e.g. Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25) and not a product of willpower and striving. The power to overcome sin rests in Jesus Christ, not our own strength. While the missionaries' lesson is softened with some "wobble room" for imperfection, this is not entirely faithful to hard-line Mormon teaching. Real Mormon "repentance" is a more difficult matter. In a well-known book published by the LDS Church, one previous Mormon prophet writes:

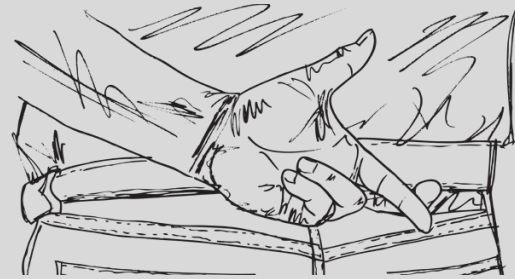
Your Heavenly Father has promised forgiveness upon **total repentance** and meeting **all** the requirements, but that forgiveness is not granted merely for the asking. There must be works—many works—and an all-out, total surrender, with a great humility and 'a broken heart and a contrite spirit.' **It depends upon you** whether or not you are forgiven, and when.¹¹

*In other words, there is no forgiveness apart from **complete cessation of all sin and perfect obedience to the requirements of Mormonism**. Anything less than this may disqualify you from Jesus' forgiveness. This teaching, and many others like it, have been the source of untold secret despair among many Mormons who are honestly striving to please God—because deep down, they know they can't measure up perfectly. So is it any wonder that the biblical gospel, if they will receive it, really is tremendously good news?*



Part 4. Baptism, Our First Covenant. Baptism is a sacred ordinance, or covenant, between the believer and God. It must be performed by total immersion, and by someone who holds the proper priesthood authority. It is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and our own putting away of the old life and taking on the new life. Once this covenant with God is made, it puts us

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A note about confession: Confessing "very serious sins" to an authorized Church leader (usually the bishop of their congregation) is supposedly to receive help in overcoming a sin problem. However, bishops are unpaid volunteers, and have little or no training in counseling or "pastoring." Yet bishops' decisions and judgments are believed to be God-inspired, and so they are rarely challenged. They are allowed broad discretion in dealing with confessed sin, and there is frequently a lot of inequity in how members are treated. Many serious offenses are covered up to avoid embarrassing the Church or a respected member; and on the flip-side, many well-meaning, repentant people are treated harshly for comparatively minor offenses. While there may be compassionate and thoughtful bishops who desire to serve with integrity, it is not a job requirement. There is no expectation that confessions will be met with grace, respect, or even confidentiality.

¹¹ Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 324, emphasis added.

under a strong obligation to obey his commands. It is a saving ordinance, meaning that no one can enter the kingdom of God without this water baptism. It is a prerequisite to becoming a member of the LDS Church. God promises to be with us as we keep his commandments. After baptism, we remember our covenants through taking the weekly sacrament, which is also a commandment. The sacrament “helps us remain worthy to have the Spirit with us always.”¹² Generally, children are not baptized until they are eight years old, which is considered the “age of accountability.”



*Water baptism is a meaningful expression of our identification with Jesus, but nowhere does the Bible call it a “covenant” that we make with God, nor does the water ritual contribute to our eternal salvation. (Check out “**Baptism**” in Chapter 7, **Misunderstood Terminology**, for more discussion on this.)*

*The statement that God will be with us **as we keep his commandments** is very troubling, because the flip-side is that God’s spirit will **depart from us** when we fail. Many Mormons continually live under the dread that the Spirit will depart from them whenever they commit a sin.*

*The Mormon “sacrament” is considered a weekly **renewal** of the covenants we made at our baptism. In form, it vaguely resembles a Christian communion, except it consists of bread and water, not wine or grape juice.¹³ Its meaning is also different. Sacramental communion in historic Christianity is **not** a renewal of covenants or something that “helps us remain worthy,” but rather, a solemn remembrance and celebration of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. It is recognizing that we **aren’t** worthy!*



Part 5: The Gift of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water must be followed

by receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost. After baptism, one or more members of the priesthood will lay their hands on the person’s head and confirm them a member of the Church, and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. If we remain worthy, the Holy Ghost will remain with us to continually guide and teach us, help us grow and feel God’s presence, give us comfort and joy and warn us of danger. The authority to confer the Holy Ghost was lost for centuries due to apostasy, but restored through the prophet Joseph Smith. Therefore, the LDS Church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.”¹⁴



Perhaps one of the most troubling aspects of this teaching is that the priesthood authority is the “gatekeeper” of the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit). But according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit dwells in ALL true believers in Jesus

¹² *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, p. 64.

¹³ Since the wine is a metaphor for Jesus’ blood in the New Covenant, it is curious that this symbol was removed from the Mormon sacrament. (The irony is that while Jesus turned water into wine, Mormons have turned it back into water!)

¹⁴ Doctrine & Covenants Section 1, verse 30.

Christ (e.g., John 7:39, Romans 8:9). While the book of Acts does record instances where the Holy Spirit fills a person upon the laying on of hands, this was not a formula or ritual. God has the prerogative to place his Holy Spirit in whomever he chooses (see the account of Peter and Cornelius, in Acts 10).

And here again we encounter the belief that our personal worthiness is what keeps the Holy Ghost inside of us. While the Bible teaches that our sin does grieve the Holy Spirit, we have also been promised that the Lord will never leave or forsake those who belong to him.



Part 6: Endure to the End. Once we have professed faith in Christ, repented, been baptized and received the Holy Ghost, we must “exert every effort” to remain obedient to all his commands throughout our life, and strive to remain free of sin every day of the rest of our lives, and only by doing this will we qualify for eternal life.



The Bible does talk about endurance (e.g., Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13, Hebrews 12:1). However, this is about remaining in Christ, from whom comes our power to live holy lives. He is the one that keeps us (Jude 1:24) and who began, and promises to complete, the work in us (Philippians 1:6). Furthermore, no one can remove us from Christ (John 10:28-29). We obey, yes, but the power to do so comes from Jesus himself.

But in Mormonism, the responsibility for endurance in obedience lies squarely on our shoulders. So how do we know if we measure up? Do we really “exert every effort” all the time? Do we really do “all that we can do” as it states we must do in 2 Nephi 25:23? If we’re honest...no, we don’t. We may desire and strive to be free from sin, and we may even be able to modify our behavior to a certain extent. But the ugly core of our sinful nature is a condition that only Jesus can fix. We are wholly dependent upon him for our ability to endure. This is not the “endurance” of Mormonism. Mormon endurance is the unrelenting pursuit of self-perfection, which will either result in prideful self-deception—fooling ourselves into thinking that we have conquered sin—or result in deep frustration and despair because we realize we cannot. Either way, this struggle always ends in failure.



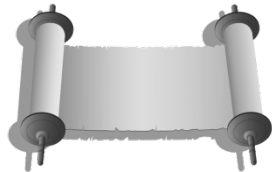
The Last Two Lessons

We won’t go into much detail about these lessons, because you probably won’t receive them, at least not in full.

Lesson four is called “The Commandments” and is intended to be given once the investigator has made a commitment to be baptized and join the church. It consists of

the moral standards and behaviors that Mormonism teaches are necessary for remaining a member in good standing.

Lesson five is called “Laws and Ordinances,” and is to be taught only *after* baptism, and it touches on some (but not all) of the deeper doctrines of Mormonism, as well as some administrative instructions.



Lesson 4: The Commandments

1. Pray Often. Mormonism teaches that there are certain correct formulas for prayers, including the use of what they call “reverent language,” (using *thee*, *thou*, and *thy*, etc. when addressing God). Prayers are to be directed to Heavenly Father, and end with the closing words, “In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.” The common position of prayer is kneeling, or with the arms folded in front of you.

2. Study the Scriptures. Mormonism’s “scriptures” or “standard works” are The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible (King James). The Bible is given less importance and credibility than the three unique Mormon scriptures. Few Mormons actually study the Bible seriously; they are encouraged to devote more time to the uniquely Mormon scriptures.

3. Keep the Sabbath Day Holy. In Mormonism, Sunday is the Sabbath day. Mormons keep the Sabbath holy by attending church, refraining from work, from commerce (no shopping or eating out), or worldly recreation on Sundays.

4. Follow the Prophet. Since Mormons acknowledge that God speaks through the living prophet, they must obey what he says. They are assured that the prophet will never lead them astray.

5. Follow the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:3-17).

6. Live the Law of Chastity. Chastity is strict abstinence from any sexual activity outside of marriage between one man and one woman, and complete fidelity to one’s spouse in marriage.

7. Obey the Word of Wisdom. This refers to the Mormon dietary restrictions. Since our bodies are sacred, they should be treated with respect. Therefore, Mormons

are to seek out healthy foods, and not use “harmful” substances, such as tea, and coffee, alcohol, tobacco or any illegal drugs in any form.

8. Keep the Law of Tithing. Tithing refers to giving ten percent of your income to the LDS Church. The funds from tithing are used for the building and sustaining of Church facilities and activities. While local leaders are unpaid volunteers, those in the highest positions are generously compensated.

9. Observe the Law of the Fast. This refers to the practice of foregoing two consecutive meals, once a month (usually around the first Sunday of each month. A “fast offering” (the amount of money you would normally spend on the food you didn’t consume) is to be given specifically for the Church’s programs for caring for the poor.



Lesson 5: Laws and Ordinances

1. Priesthood and Auxiliaries. The priesthood (Aaronic and Melchizedek) is conferred on all worthy (male) members. Various weekday programs for youth and adults (men and women) are also an expected part of the ongoing life of Mormon membership.

2. Missionary Work. All members are expected to do all they can to support missionary work, praying for them, praying for non-members, etc. All worthy males from age 18 are expected to serve two-year missions. Unmarried young women 19 and older are also encouraged, but not required to serve on missions. There are also mission opportunities for retired couples.

3. Eternal Marriage. Eternal marriage is an important part of the plan of salvation, and in sustaining the most basic unit of the church, the family. Marriage is only “eternal” when it is sealed by an authorized priesthood holder in the temple. Eternal Marriage is necessary for exaltation.

4. Temples and Family History. Mormons do genealogy in order to identify deceased family members (and others) who never had the opportunity to be baptized into Mormonism. The temple, then, becomes the means for these dead family members to be baptized by proxy (baptism for the dead). The endowment ceremonies and eternal marriage sealings can also be done on behalf of the dead in the temple.

5. Service. All members are expected to perform some type of volunteer service in the Mormon Church. These services are called “callings”. Usually the bishop or other higher ecclesiastical leader will appoint a person to perform a particular duty. These duties include housekeeping, “home teaching” (visiting members of the ward regularly), teaching Sunday School, administrative tasks, leadership positions in various auxiliaries, and positions of ecclesiastical authority and others. These tasks are considered “voluntary...but not really.”

The Temple Recommend

More instruction on Mormon doctrine occurs during a member’s first visit to the temple. Once members have been a Mormon in good standing for at least one year, they are eligible to go before the bishop and stake president (another ecclesiastical leader in Mormonism) to see if they qualify for a “Temple Recommend.” The Temple Recommend comes with a physical form of identification that is required for entry into the temple. The Temple Recommend is generally good for two years, after which time they must re-qualify.

The qualification involves an interview in which the ecclesiastical leaders will ask each member if they uphold the tenets of Mormonism (Faith in Christ, the LDS Church as the only true church, Joseph Smith as the prophet of the restoration, and the current living prophet, and so on). They will also ask if they are following the commandments of Mormonism. Members will also be questioned about other areas of conduct, and whether they affiliate any person or group whose teachings are contrary to the LDS Church. If these questions are answered to the satisfaction of the bishop and stake president, they are given a Temple Recommend, at which point they can enter the temple and begin the process of learning about the temple ceremonies, the covenants they must make there, and their meanings.

F.Y.I...



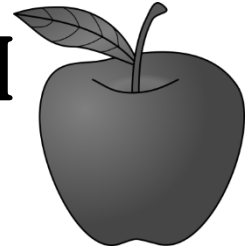
Wards, stakes, and branches

A **ward** is a geographical designation that the LDS Church uses to assign members to a congregation. In areas of high Mormon concentration, a ward could be as small as a few city blocks. All members in a particular ward are part of the same congregation; members don’t get to choose which congregation they join. Each ward is overseen by a bishop and his two counselors, collectively known as a “bishopric.” A **branch** is roughly the equivalent of a ward, but usually in a region with a very low Mormon population, meaning that people may travel quite some distance to attend church.

A **stake** is a collection of several wards or branches in a particular area, sometimes served by a single meeting house. (Meeting times may be staggered to accommodate multiple wards or congregations.) Some wards, though, have their own meeting house. A stake is overseen by a stake president.



4. THE PROBLEM WITH PIES



This module is the one that people are often most interested in, because it's where we talk about some of the "juicy" problems of Mormon truth claims. ***So it's also here that we need to offer the strongest caution!*** Many well-meaning people *begin* their discussions with Mormons here. And unfortunately, those discussions often end here—abruptly and painfully—as a result.

One thing that sets Mormonism apart from most other false religions is that a lot of its truth claims can be easily tested against evidence that's readily available. Many other religions make spiritual claims that science and history can neither prove nor disprove. But Mormonism is different. Not only does it make truth claims that can be tested, but they were also scrupulous record-keepers, so we have a very good understanding of the development of the religion, including many historical embarrassments and areas of conflict between earlier and later teachings.

Many past LDS leaders have affirmed that the truthfulness of the LDS Church stands or falls on the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; for example:

"The Book of Mormon is the keystone of testimony. Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon....if it can be discredited, the Prophet Joseph Smith goes with it. So does our claim to priesthood keys, and revelation, and the restored Church." (President Ezra Taft Benson)¹⁵

A truer word was never spoken by a Mormon prophet!

The Book of Mormon makes many historical claims that were largely untestable when it was first published, but today can be easily tested. It is, as many have put it, a "target-rich environment."

But you absolutely *must* get out of the "target" mentality. This attitude will ***not*** serve you well in your discussions with Mormons. However, there is a way to bring issues to light for your missionaries to investigate. So with that in mind, we have carefully

¹⁵ Quote by LDS Prophet & President Ezra Taft Benson in conference talk, "The Book of Mormon – Keystone of Our Religion," recorded in *Ensign Magazine*, Nov. 1986, p. 6.

selected a few “issues,” in two categories— 1) Book of Mormon issues; and 2) Joseph Smith issues. Each issue is chosen based on the following criteria:

1. It must appeal to common sense. That is, you don’t need to run to heavy-duty academic, scientific, theological, or historical sources in order to back up your point. (All that would do is pit your sources against theirs.) Instead, these are intended to engage basic critical thinking.

2. It must be verifiable from within “Mormon-safe” sources. If you have to appeal to any source material, it has to be considered reliable and safe by Mormons.

3. It must focus on the core issues. We steer away from sensational (and sensitive) issues like “magic underwear,” satanic symbols, Freemasonry, God’s home planet near Kolob, etc. While these may be real issues, they usually don’t lead to fruitful discussions, and will only make Mormons defensive.

4. It must lend itself to further investigation. The purpose of these issues is not to put missionaries on the spot and force them to defend themselves, but rather to raise questions that get them thinking and investigating on their own. Remember, what you are doing is *planting seeds*. **Don’t expect to bring these issues to a conclusion in your discussions.** However, when they do their *own* investigations, *then* those issues gain much more traction. So posing questions that prompt their own search is much more important—and effective—than blasting them with answers.

To make things more portable, we came up with a memory hook in the form of an acrostic: **“APPLE PIES.”** Each letter stands for one issue you can bring up in your conversations. The order is not important; each of these issues can stand on its own. In fact, you probably won’t have an opportunity to present more than a couple of them in your discussions, anyway. So use them sparingly. Just have them in your hip pocket, and bring them out, if and when appropriate, depending on where your discussion goes.

The word **“APPLE”** will represent some **Book of Mormon** problems, and with **“PIES”** we will look at some **Joseph Smith** problems.

APPLE:



A is for Apostasy.

By now you should be familiar with the so-called “great apostasy,” the idea that after the apostles died, the priesthood authority disappeared from the earth and everything fell apart, spiritually speaking. As a result (or so it is claimed), key doctrines were changed and removed, churches fell into corruption, and the power to act on God’s behalf disappeared completely...until Joseph Smith was called by God to restore everything, some 18 centuries later.

With their first visit, the missionaries will probably give you a copy of the Book of Mormon. So before your next visit, you should read the first 14 chapters of the first book, called *First Nephi* (rhymes with “knee high”). Don’t worry, that’s not as much reading as it sounds like!

The Book of Mormon consists of 15 “books.” The Book of *First Nephi* tells the story of a family of Israelites who, led by a vision from God, left Jerusalem around 600 BC, and sailed for the Americas. They settled there and eventually grew into a great nation, and the remnants of this nation exist today as Native Americans. The first 14 chapters of *First Nephi* tell about part of the journey; but more importantly, they contain visions and prophecies that the main character, Nephi, supposedly received from the Lord. These included visions of the “apostasy” and “a great and abominable church” and “the church of the devil”, which Mormons believe refers to any church besides the LDS Church.

Make no mistake—the so-called Great Apostasy is *not* historical. Fortunately, you don’t have to have a degree in history to talk about it. You can challenge the notion of the Great Apostasy on its face, by identifying its fatal flaws.

F.Y.I...



*The Book of Mormon is arranged in a similar fashion to the Bible—it is a collection of “books” of varying lengths, each of which is broken down into chapters and verses. The Book of Mormon contains a lot of so-called “prophecies” about certain things like the events of Jesus’ life, and even the colonization of the Americas by Europeans. Now, these “prophecies” would be remarkable if the Book of Mormon really **did** pre-date those events. But if the Book of Mormon is a product of the 19th century, as the evidence suggests, then these prophecies are not really prophetic, since they were written down after the fact. Many people find the Book of Mormon wordy and tedious; it is written in an awkward imitation of King James style English. However, you will impress your missionary friends if you read it!*

Here's the main idea: **The Great Apostasy means that Jesus' apostles, who had been given authority by Jesus to proclaim his Kingdom to the ends of the earth, completely failed in their mission.**

They died without ever raising up a new generation of apostles to carry on their "priesthood authority." Remember, in the Mormon mindset, no salvation can exist apart from the priesthood authority, and the priesthood authority is passed from one worthy man to another. So this is a big deal. This is a massive failure. The means of *eternal life* was completely taken from the earth. And the failure isn't just the apostles'. It would also implicate Jesus himself. Jesus either failed to properly equip his apostles while on Earth, or he chose the wrong people for the job, or he was powerless to guide, sustain and protect them in the work they were doing—despite his promise to be with them until the very end (Matthew 18:20).

Historic Christianity has always maintained that God supernaturally preserves his people through the ages (Ephesians 1:13-14, Philippians 1:6, and Matthew 16:18). Not through organizations, or priesthood authority, but through the Holy Spirit, who resides in every true follower of Jesus. The rise and fall of empires and organizations, and the twists and turns of history and human events are not an obstacle for God. To accept the Mormon teaching of the Great Apostasy is to accept that God is somehow limited by the human structure of the priesthood, and his plans and purposes can be thwarted by human choices and failures and the events of history. And it makes Jesus out to be a very ineffective Savior.

So the "Great Apostasy" begs a number of questions. Why did Jesus stand by and watch his church fall into ruin? Was he unable to help them? Or unwilling? What does that say about his power or his character? Why did he break his promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matthew 16:18)? Or that the disciples' fruit would remain (John 15:16)? And why would Jesus send the apostles out to make disciples with his authority (Matthew 28:18-20) and promise them the power of the Holy Spirit to witness to the whole earth (Acts 1:8)? And then...why would God allow *his beloved children* to languish in unbelief, cut off from eternal life, for *almost two thousand years*, before putting things back in order through Joseph Smith? The Great Apostasy is not just a story of human failure; it is a story of *God's* failure. If we accept the Great Apostasy, then we also have to accept a God who is imperfect and is limited in power.

The Great Apostasy is not just a story of human failure; it is a story of God's failure.

Now, we present these issues bluntly for *you*, but you need to handle them gently and with respect for your "teachers." Here's a sample bit of dialog that uses a lot of the

“me” language that we mentioned earlier. You are putting the problem on *yourself*, not dumping it on *them*. All you’re doing is asking for some help in resolving your dilemma.

You: Okay, I think I understand what you’re saying about the apostasy, how everything kind of fell apart after the apostles died, right?

Missionary: That’s right.

You: There’s something I don’t get, though.

Missionary: What’s that?

You: Well, my understanding about Jesus is that as the Son of God, he knows all things and can do all things. He created the earth, he atoned for our sins, and made a way for us to be with Heavenly Father, right? Well, it doesn’t make sense to me that if he can do all that, that he would allow the apostasy to happen in the first place, that he wouldn’t have acted to prevent this catastrophe and help the apostles and protect his gospel. If he wanted his church to remain intact, and the priesthood authority is the only way to do that, wouldn’t he guide the apostles to pass on their authority to new people so that the church could continue, instead of lie in ruins for 1800 years. That’s a difficult thing for me to understand. What are your thoughts on that?

You might get some response about men having “free agency” to choose wrong paths that lead to failure. But still, this doesn’t let God off the hook, unless he is so easily tripped up by men’s mistakes. Why did it take God 1800 years to restore salvation to humanity? If he really loves all his children, why did he ignore the millions and millions of them who were born and who died during that period of great apostasy?

But remember, your objective is not to put them on the spot. However they respond, receive their answers, and respond graciously. Your goal is to gently raise the question, not force them to a conclusion. It’s possible that they have never even considered this before. So gently drop the idea in their minds, and pray that God would make those seeds grow into an earnest search for truth.



P-P is for Plain and Precious.

The phrase may sound strange, but it is well-known to Mormons. In First Nephi 13:26 and 28, it reads:

*²⁶And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are **plain and most precious**; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away....²⁸Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many **plain and precious things** taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.*

To paraphrase the passage, those who were sent out from the twelve apostles ended up establishing a corrupted church, and so many teachings and doctrines, these “plain and precious” things were changed or removed from the “book of the Lamb of God” which is a reference to the Bible.

Now, there are solid, historical reasons why we can be confident that the Bible we have today is a reliable copy of the original biblical texts. The science of textual criticism has established this with remarkable certainty. (If you want to delve more deeply into that, there are some excellent resources; check out our **Suggested Reading & Online Resources** section.) But that’s not what we’re going to talk about here.

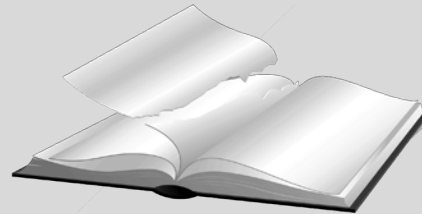
Here’s the question that we want to set before the missionaries: **If the Book of Mormon is the restoration of the gospel, then what exactly was *missing* that got restored through it?**

Now, it’s generally assumed that these “plain and precious” things are those things that Mormonism teaches that the traditional (church-of-the-devil) Christians do not—things like eternal progression, celestial marriage, baptism for the dead, the pre-existence, families are forever, the nature of the priesthood, etc.

The problem is, the doctrines that make Mormonism the unique “one true church” are absent from the Book of Mormon. Yet the introduction page to the Book of Mormon says that it contains the “*fulness [sic] of the everlasting gospel,*” and quotes Joseph Smith as saying, “*...the book of Mormon is the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.*” Yet many of those things that Mormonism now teaches are necessary to “get nearer to God” are not found there. So ironically, the Book of Mormon appears to have the same problem that Mormons claim that the Bible has!

So to summarize, the questions that the “plain and precious” dilemma raise are: What are these things that got restored? Where can they be found in Mormon scriptures? Why don’t you find them in the Book of Mormon, which is supposed to contain the fullness of the gospel?

F.Y.I...



So why the absence of key Mormon doctrine from the Book of Mormon? *The simple answer is that Joseph Smith’s theology evolved over the years. The Book of Mormon was written in the early years, before Smith founded the Mormon Church, when he was influenced mainly by Protestantism. So it reflects (for the most part) his somewhat juvenile understanding of Protestant theology. His declarations that God was once a man, that man can become as God, eternal progression, celestial marriage, etc., all emerged years later in Smith’s teachings. Mormons may excuse this as progressive revelation; but it’s not just “progressive,” it is **contradictory.***

These are common-sense questions that a critically-thinking investigator should be asking. But remember, approach the questions as if these are *your* problems, not theirs. All you're doing is asking for their help in resolving these issues. If they begin to look for satisfactory answers, then they might just discover that it has become *their* problem, too.



L is for Lands.

That is, the *Book of Mormon* lands. The Book of Mormon's main narrative spans about a thousand years, beginning with a small Israelite group led by a man named Lehi, who journeyed from Jerusalem to the "Promised Land" in the Americas around 600 BC. Two different nations grew from this small party, the Nephites and the Lamanites (one descended from Lehi's righteous son Nephi, and the other from his wicked son, Laman). The Nephites grew into a civilized, sophisticated, white-skinned race; but the Lamanites were primitive, hostile, and wicked, and so were cursed by God with a dark skin.¹⁶ The two nations were constantly at war for centuries, until the resurrected Jesus made an appearance among them and ushered in a time of peace. The peace lasted for few

F.Y.I...



During Joseph Smith's day, the belief that the Native Americans were descended from the "lost tribes" of Israel, or that there was a white race that was obliterated by a darker race, were not new ideas. These folk tales and speculations were already in circulation among the settlers during the early 19th century. Joseph Smith likely drew from these ideas and theories when formulating his own "history."

centuries, but eventually the wicked Lamanites utterly destroyed the Nephites, leaving the Lamanites to become the ancestors of the Native Americans of today.

So where does the "Lands" issue come into play? There is an "internal geography" in the Book of Mormon; it talks about seas and rivers and mountains and cities, and gives some relative geographic positions for them. The problem is, there is not a single geographical point mentioned in the Book

¹⁶ The teaching that dark skin is a curse from God has fueled much of the racism in the LDS Church. Even though the modern church has tried to distance itself from overtly racist attitudes, they have yet to repudiate these teachings. In Mormonism, it was taught that the so-called "Curse of Cain" (a reference to the mark that God put on Cain after he killed Abel in Genesis 4) was black skin. The Bible, however, doesn't identify what the mark was, or even that it was a physical mark on his body. And it was for Cain's protection, not a curse or punishment.

of Mormon¹⁷ that the LDS Church officially identifies with any geographical point in the Americas today. It is actually the *official position* of the LDS Church that they do not know where the Book of Mormon lands are! The reason for this is that there's no place where you can make the Book of Mormon's "internal geography" match the *actual* geography of the Americas.

The traditional view of the Book of Mormon is that the Lamanites expanded across the entire breadth of the largely unpopulated American continent, North and South. So everyone from the Inuit of the far north to the Mayan people of Mesoamerica, to the indigenous tribes of South America (and even the Polynesians), are said to be descendants of the Lamanites.

The traditional view has come under scrutiny, though, among Mormon scholars today. DNA studies show no relation between the indigenous peoples of the Americas and any people group in the Near East, where Lehi's party were supposed to have come from. So many LDS scholars have adopted a "modified" view of the Book of Mormon, in which Lehi and his family arrived on a continent already populated with other peoples, and so their genes would have been diluted and absorbed by the existing population, and therefore would be difficult to isolate and identify.

However, this is NOT consistent with the storyline of the Book of Mormon. There is no mention of other populations co-existing with the descendants of Nephi and Laman, and it suggests the land was essentially empty of people when Lehi's party arrived.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the DNA problem has become such an issue that the LDS Church recently modified one of the opening statements in the title page of the Book of Mormon. In years past, it said that the Lamanites were the "principal ancestors" of the American Indians. Now it says they are "among the ancestors" of the American Indians.

The most common theory among Mormons (though not officially endorsed by the Church) is that the Book of Mormon story took place primarily in Mesoamerica—from southern Mexico through Central America.

¹⁷ With one exception. The so-called "Hill Cumorah" near Palmyra, New York, is the only site mentioned in the Book of Mormon that has had any official backing of the Church. It is said to be the place where Joseph Smith found the golden plates. The Book of Mormon says it is the site of the final battle between the Lamanites and the Nephites, in which the Nephites were entirely defeated, in about 400 A.D.

¹⁸ Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 1:8. The Book of Mormon story does mention other peoples from the Middle East occupying the Americas in different periods of time; the "Jaredites" are said to have inhabited the continent previously, but according to the story, they nearly all died out by the time Lehi arrived.



From *Jesus Teaching in the Western Hemisphere (Jesus Christ Visits the Americas)*, by John Scott. Notice the Mayan pyramid in the background.

It is implied, but not stated outright, that the sophisticated Mayan ruins were the work of the civilized Nephite culture. This idea has such broad acceptance among Mormons that a lot of church-sponsored artwork depicting Nephite scenes has a distinctively Mayan look to it. People can even go on “Book of Mormon Tours” to visit these popular Mayan archaeological sites. (One problem with this theory is that the Book of Mormon suggests that the Nephite civilization peaked around the 5th Century A.D., which *pre-dates* the Mayan ruins by several centuries.)

Another less popular theory is that the Book of Mormon took place in the area around the North American Great Lakes. This is an attractive speculation to some, since Joseph Smith was from this area, and it’s where he claimed to find the golden plates on which the Book of Mormon was written. And critics are quick to point out that if Joseph Smith were making up the story, then he would likely make the story’s setting somewhere that was familiar to him.

Chances are, you won’t get into any discussion about this. The only reason we bring any of this up at all is just to show that there is no consistent theory in Mormonism about the geography of the Book of Mormon! Some traditionalists still hold to the whole continental idea; some will hold to the Mesoamerican theory; some to the Great Lakes theory, and there are a few others floating around. And still others will say, “We don’t know and it’s not important anyway.”

But even so, a lot of folk tales, urban legends, and “faith-promoting stories” have sprung up over the decades that make claims of archaeological finds that support the Book of Mormon story. Dozens of web pages by self-appointed Mormon apologists recycle a handful of dubious claims about Book of Mormon “evidence.” None that we’ve encountered, however, has ever been traced to reliable sources, or lends any support to the Book of

F.Y.I...



While the Bible has an abundance of archaeological evidence supporting it, be aware that there are bogus stories out there, as well, especially in this era of Internet “fake news.” These include tantalizing (and unsubstantiated) tales of discovering the Ark of the Covenant, and Egyptian chariot wheels in the Red Sea. Many well-meaning Christians hear these stories and repeat them in the same way that Mormons repeat bogus finds supporting the Book of Mormon. These false “biblical” finds end up harming the cause of legitimate biblical archaeology. So exercise caution when bringing archaeology into your discussions. If you do, make sure you refer to reputable, verifiable archaeological work, not sensational Internet stories.

Mormon's historicity. Unless you happen to be well-versed in the archaeology of the Americas, however, it's going to be hard to have a meaningful discussion about these claims. If your missionaries bring up this sort of "evidence," ask for examples, and maybe some references, but leave it alone after that.

That's why geography, or "Lands" is a much more accessible challenge to the Book of Mormon's authenticity. Instead of looking at small shards of pottery, you're looking at whole continents.

So how do you bring this up with the missionaries? Perhaps the best place is to start is to look at the geographical evidence for the Bible. We know precisely where Jerusalem is, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Eilat, Tyre, Caesarea, Bethlehem, Damascus, Samaria, and dozens of other cities mentioned in the Bible. In many cases, we can even pinpoint with great confidence the exact location of buildings and even structures as small as *wells* mentioned in the Bible. We know where the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, the Jordan River, Mount Hermon, and many other geographical features are. And Paul's missionary journeys trace a very accurate picture of the Mediterranean region. And all this is backed up by the huge scope of archaeology, history, and linguistics, etc. When you look at the broader picture of world history, you see that the Bible also describes Israel's relationship to the civilizations of Persia, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, which are also well-established from sources outside the Bible. So the Bible fits the geography it claims to come from. There is no dispute about the "big picture" of where the Bible lands are.

If you, or someone you know, has traveled in Israel, this is a great place to open this discussion. Have on hand a Bible with maps in the back. Most study Bibles have maps of Israel and the Near East, the Mediterranean, even maps of the ancient city of Jerusalem. A lot of the cities mentioned in the Bible have been continuously inhabited from ancient times until today and in many cases have *retained the biblical place names to this very day*. There is no doubt about the location of many places in the Bible.

If you have your Book of Mormon with you, you can go to the back where you'd expect the maps to be. You'll find maps of New York and other places related to 19th century Mormon history. But you won't find any maps depicting the Book of Mormon geography. It's legitimate for you to ask if such maps exist...and if not, why don't they?

Sometimes we'll hear things like, "Well, we believe these things on faith, not because of maps. After all, do you believe the Bible just because you know where Jerusalem is?"

Our typical response is to say something like, "It's important to me that my faith is grounded in real-world facts. If I had no reason to believe the Bible was a true history, I wouldn't be a follower of Jesus today." This may be a foreign idea to your missionaries, who have been taught that the realm of "facts" and "faith" don't need to be connected.

In fact, for a Mormon, believing something without the facts (or even despite the facts) is somehow more noble. It proves how strong and “real” their faith is.

Another common challenge we hear goes something like, “You believe in Jesus’ miracles, don’t you? Where is the archaeological evidence for those?” It’s true, we have no physical evidence of Jesus turning the water into wine, nor would we expect to. That’s kind of like asking for physical evidence of George Washington crossing the Delaware. Yet no one disputes *that* historical account. But it *would* be disputable if no one had any idea where or what the Delaware River was, or whether there was a real person named George Washington. *That* is the scope that we’re looking at.

While our faith in the Bible isn’t based exclusively on physical evidence, this evidence *does* make faith in the Bible *rational*. It is something we’d expect to find, if it is a true history. And the complete *lack* of evidence would be a serious problem. If the Bible had the same problems that the Book of Mormon has, then we wouldn’t have any idea where Jerusalem or the Sea of Galilee or the Jordan River is. We wouldn’t know if the Bible’s account took place in Israel, or Northern Europe, or Southeast Asia. We wouldn’t know who the “Jews” really were, or if they ever existed. We wouldn’t have any other knowledge of places, empires, and cultures like “Rome” or “Egypt” or “Greece.” We wouldn’t know of any language called “Hebrew” or “Aramaic” or “Greek.” If the Bible had problems on *that* level, would you be a Bible-believer today?

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-19, Paul argues that the historical reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection is absolutely essential to our faith. If it didn’t happen, then our faith is in vain. But he says it *did* happen, and to prove it, he did not appeal to blind faith, emotional experiences, fairy tale thinking, or even a personal revelation. Instead, he appealed to something that would satisfy any historian or court of law—*multiple, independent eye-witness accounts of the resurrected Christ, from people who were alive at the time he wrote his letter.*

F.Y.I...



At some point the missionaries may appeal to their personal, spiritual “witness” of the truthfulness of Mormonism. They say it’s true because God told them it was true...and how can you argue with that? This is what they call “bearing their testimony” and it usually signals the end of discussion on a topic. Don’t be discouraged by their unwillingness to engage further.

If they do “bear their testimony,” though, ask them more about this Mormon experience: “In what ways does the Holy Ghost make it known to you?” or “What is it that convinces you that it’s the Holy Ghost telling you this?” Tread carefully here, though. You want to communicate your sincere desire to understand their experience, not force them to defend its authenticity.



E is for Evidence.

That is, *evidence* that Jesus ever visited the Americas. Mormons frequently cite John 10:16, where Jesus says, “*I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*” They believe the “other sheep” refer specifically to the ancient people of the Americas. But Jesus said he came to bring the gospel to all nations (Mark 13:10, Luke 24:47), so the simplest understanding is that these “other sheep” refer to the Gentiles—that is, *all* the nations beyond Israel. Nevertheless, Mormons are confident that this is a biblical prediction of Jesus’ visit to the New World. (See more discussion of this in Chapter 8, ***Mormon Misuse of the Bible.***)

In the Book of *Third Nephi*, we read about Jesus coming to America shortly after his resurrection. During his visit, which lasted an unspecified amount of time, he taught the people and organized the church by appointing apostles among the people. Many of Jesus’ teachings in the Book of Mormon are a patchwork of Jesus’ sayings and sermons from the New Testament, though he does say some “original” things as well.

For example, Jesus supposedly clarifies that baptism is necessary for salvation; that baptism must be by full immersion; and goes on to command that there be no “disputations” among them about it (3 Nephi 11). It’s an interesting coincidence that many of the doctrinal “clarifications” that Jesus makes in the Book of Mormon line up precisely with the “disputations” that were raging among the Protestant churches in Joseph Smith’s area, which troubled him as a youth. So this looks more like Joseph Smith’s naïve attempt at settling 19th-century arguments, rather than recording the true words of Jesus Christ.

Anyway, as the story goes, after Jesus departed the Americas, there was peace between the Nephites and Lamanites for a couple hundred years. Then corruptions creep into the churches, strife and wars begin, and after about three hundred years, the Nephites are completely annihilated by the Lamanites. (Sounds reminiscent of the Great Apostasy, doesn’t it?)

So here is the issue we want to raise. According to the Book of Mormon, Jesus had established a thriving church in the Americas, taught his doctrine, and his teachings brought peace for two hundred years, during which time his church flourished. So where is the evidence that Jesus ever visited, or that his church ever existed, in pre-Columbian America? Even if it fell into apostasy, we would still expect to see *some* remnant or vestige of something so great.

Keep in mind that within a *single generation* after Jesus’ death and resurrection in Judea, his name had “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). It was carried across

the known world, all throughout Europe, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and even as far away as India and Ethiopia. In one generation! Even despite severe persecution, it thrived, and it found its way into art, literature, and architecture, and strong traditions that have endured throughout the centuries to this day. The visible historical imprint of early Christianity upon the Old World is obvious and unmistakable.

Yet when we compare this with the Americas, we see *none* of this. Jesus supposedly came, taught, was warmly received, and established a church that flourished for *two hundred years*, and yet today, not a shred of evidence has been identified of either his visit, or the church he established.

There are plenty of archaeological remains of ancient civilizations in the Americas...impressive structures, rich art and literature, and cultural and oral traditions among the indigenous tribes that endure to this day. Yet among them is no mention of Jesus or his church. Things like that don't just vanish without a trace.

Some Mormon apologists, when faced with this, have little choice but to grasp at straws by appealing to indigenous myths like Quetzalcoatl (a Mesoamerican serpent god...?) and suggest that these might be the remnants of the story of Jesus' visit.

Fortunately, we don't need to delve into the nitty-gritties of the anthropology and archaeology in order to talk about this issue. What we need to look at is Jesus' **success rate**, even by the Book of Mormon's own account. In the Old World, according to Mormonism, Jesus' church fell apart after a single generation, leaving only a corrupt shell of a church with no authority.

Similarly, in the New World, his church fell apart after a couple centuries. A minor improvement, maybe, but still, the end result was apostasy. In both the Old World and the New World, Jesus failed to establish, guide and sustain an enduring priesthood and church that would carry itself into the future. And in the Americas, his church was *so insignificant* that it didn't leave *any* obvious marks on the ancient American landscape or indigenous cultures. So it's not painting a very good picture of Jesus' effectiveness.

We might address the gently with something like, "I'm having a difficult time with the idea of a church in ancient America. It seems to me that if Jesus came to the Americas, and established a church...even if it fell into apostasy after a couple hundred years, I would still expect there to be some kind of remnant left behind to show that it had ever existed, but I'm not aware of anything like that. If you go to the Old World, you see the evidence of ancient Christianity all over the place. Do you know if we have anything like that in the Americas?"

It's unlikely that they will have a satisfactory answer for you. But that's not the point. Remember, you're *raising the question* for them, not demanding an answer. Don't use this as a battering ram.

So there you have it: The "Apple" of "Apple Pies": Keep in mind the consistent theme of *failure* to meet an honest investigator's expectations:

Apostasy: Was there a total failure of Jesus' church as the Book of Mormon claims?

Plain &

Precious: Were lost things properly restored by the Book of Mormon?

Lands: Does the Book of Mormon story match the geography of the Americas?

Evidence: Is there any that Jesus came to the Americas, as the Book of Mormon claims?

Okay, now we turn our attention away from the Book of Mormon and turn toward the man *behind* the Book of Mormon, the founder and first prophet of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith. These issues will be our "PIES".

PIES:



P is for Prophecies.

Specifically, the *failed* prophecies of Joseph Smith. We need to look at Joseph Smith's track record as a prophet. Did his prophecies come true? While this *does* require a little bit of investigation into Mormon scriptures and writings, it's an important point, because Joseph Smith, and his prophetic authority, are the linchpin of Mormonism. If Joseph Smith is not a true prophet, then the restoration that he claims to bring is fraudulent.

Deuteronomy 18 gives us a way to test a prophet, and it's pretty straightforward. If anything a prophet says in God's name does not come true, then he is not a prophet sent by God, and should not be heeded. Even if 99% of his so-called prophecies come true, it only takes one failed prophecy to disqualify a "prophet."

In Matthew 7:15, Jesus warns that false prophets and teachers would come and deceive many. So the idea of false prophets is not something that should take us by surprise. And false prophets would not be effective unless they had at least some appearance of legitimacy.

Joseph Smith made a lot of bold prophetic declarations in his lifetime.¹⁹ There were some that appeared to come true, but these can usually be attributed to self-fulfilling prophecies (things he made happen by his own will or influence); or by making vague, generalized prophecies that were practically guaranteed to find some kind of fulfillment; or by making predictions based on evidence at hand. For example, he prophesied that South Carolina would be where the American Civil War started. He did get that right, but this had been speculated in the newspapers for years before Smith gave this “prophecy.” So even his successful “prophecies” aren’t that compelling to a critically-thinking investigator.

But more to the point, he also made a number of prophecies that failed to come true. When confronted with these failures, Mormon apologists often say that the prophecies were not really prophecies, or were meant to be understood metaphorically, or that they depended upon conditions that weren’t met.

This is typical of many “doomsday” prophets who have made predictions about the return of Jesus Christ. When Jesus fails to return on the target date, the stock response is, “Well, the people weren’t faithful, so it got postponed.” And despite these failures, people still would follow these prophets! Joseph Smith was also among those who made a prediction about Jesus’ return. According to that prophecy, Jesus should have returned no later than 1891.²⁰

Perhaps one of the most tangible examples of a failed prophecy is his declaration that a temple would be built on a specific plot of ground in Independence, Missouri before “this generation” had passed away. The prophecy is recorded in the Doctrine & Covenants, section 84, verses 1-5. The generation came and went, and no temple was built. It’s especially awkward because this plot of land is conspicuously *vacant* in an area filled with religious centers dedicated to various competing sects of Mormonism. The so-called “Temple Lot” is owned by one of the earliest and smallest breakaway sects of Mormonism (aptly named, “Church of Christ, Temple Lot”), who have never had the funds to build the temple, and despite offers, have refused to sell the property to any of the other Mormon sects, whom they consider “apostate.”

Some sources list the number of Joseph Smith’s failed prophecies into the dozens. Here are a few of the most commonly-cited ones.

¹⁹ There is a fairly comprehensive list of Joseph Smith’s prophecies on Wikipedia, along with discussion: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_prophecies_of_Joseph_Smith (Or visit www.missionary911.com/resources to access the links referred to in this manual.)

²⁰ *History of the Church*, Vol. 2, page 182.

- Joseph Smith prophesied in April of 1838 that a man named David Patten would go on a mission the following spring. Mr. Patten died in October of 1838. (Doctrine & Covenants 114:1)
- Joseph Smith prophesied in May of 1843 that there would be an imminent catastrophic collapse of the United States government if they failed to redress the wrongs inflicted upon the Mormon people while they were in Missouri. The United States never redressed any of the wrongs. The government didn't collapse. (See *History of the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 394.) He issued a similar "prophetic threat" concerning the U.S. Congress if they failed to grant Mormons the protection they sought. It, too, did not come to pass. (See *History of the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 116.)
- Joseph Smith prophesied an apocalyptic catastrophe to fall on the United States—pestilence, famine, earthquake, etc. to destroy the wicked of that generation. (See *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 315-16.)

F.Y.I...

If you are really into researching Mormon Church history, the seven volumes of History of the Church are available as a PDF reproduction of the 1902 publication:

<https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheChurchhcVolumes1-7original1902EditionPdf>

You can also access all of the LDS "Standard Works" (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants; Pearl of Great Price; and the King James Bible) online in a searchable format:

<http://scriptures.lds.org>

You may also go to **missionary911.com/resources** to access links in this manual.

Okay, so now that we've gotten a little bogged down in arcane references to LDS Church history, the real question is...how do we even address this with the missionaries? If we come out with a bullet list of failed prophecies, that's a quick way of shutting down the conversation. At best, you'll be admonished to avoid those "anti" materials that you've obviously been looking at!

You might start off by saying something like: "You know, my background as a believer in the Bible makes me wary of anyone who claims to be a prophet. Jesus warned us about false prophets, and we're taught to put their claims to the test. And in the Old Testament, it says that even one wrong prophetic word would disqualify someone as a prophet, so could you help me by sharing with me some of Joseph Smith's prophecies, and how they came to pass?"

If the missionaries are well-informed and prepared, they might give a few examples of prophecies they believe are fulfilled, or they might offer to come back later with some examples. And if they do, ask them for references. This gives you a legitimate reason to look more closely at the prophetic claims of Joseph Smith. You are just doing your due diligence in seeking out the truth.

But if you do bring up failed prophecies, remember that the idea is to ask them for *help to resolve your own problems and concerns*. The LDS Church has had about 170 years to deal with these problems, and so there is an impressive repertoire of excuses for these failures. These excuses might satisfy the average member who wants to believe in Joseph Smith, but they probably won't satisfy the thinking investigator. So encourage the missionaries to consider it from your perspective as an open-minded skeptic. It may prompt them to ask questions they may not have thought to ask before. But we'll say it again...there is a fine line between gently bringing up questions, and throwing down the gauntlet in a challenge. So exercise caution. If they start to become defensive, that's your cue to back off, and let the seeds you planted do their work.



I is for the Inspired Version.

That is, the *Inspired Version* of the Bible. It's also commonly called the *Joseph Smith Translation* or "JST" for short. This was a "translation" or revision of the Bible that Smith created. Smith claimed, and Mormons continue to believe, that the Bible has been tampered with, corrupted, and mistranslated. If that's true, then *of course* a man with a special gift from God should assume the all-important task of returning the Bible to its original, untainted glory! And this is what Joseph Smith set out to do. And according to Church records, this work was completed in 1833.²¹

So what did he change? Just about every book of the Bible had some significant addition or subtraction. Many of the changes are quite shocking. For example:

- He inserted a transparently self-serving prophecy about himself at the end of Genesis.
- He modified many portions of the Gospel of Matthew.
- He radically changed the first chapter of the gospel of John to strip Jesus of his oneness with God.

²¹ July 2, 1833. *History of the Church*, Vol. 1:368.

F.Y.I...




*Many people wonder if the King James Version that is published by the LDS Church has been altered in any way. The text itself has **not** been changed, but the Church editors have added chapter headings and footnotes that put a distinctly Mormon "spin" on many of the passages.*

- He made changes to the book of Revelation—despite the sober warning to not add or take away from that book (Revelation 22:18-19).

A quick web search will reveal a number of sources where you can examine in detail the changes that Joseph Smith made.²² Fortunately, though, you don't need a working knowledge of these issues, because we're going to look at a more basic problem: the LDS Church does not use the Inspired Version much at all. It shows up in bits and pieces as footnotes and excerpts here and there, but it's not used to a significant degree.

F.Y.I...



*Many are surprised to learn that there are more than 100 different sects of Mormonism besides the LDS Church, which is what most people think of when they hear the word "Mormon." Many sects still exist today, and they all trace their heritage back to the church Joseph Smith started. The **Community of Christ** is one of them. It was originally known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or RLDS, and they are active across the country to this day. Their headquarters is in Independence, Missouri. They began as an anti-polygamy schism of Mormonism that rejected the authority of Brigham Young after Smith's death, and refused to follow him to Utah. Emma Smith, Joseph Smith's widow (and his first and only legal wife) remained with the RLDS sect. She detested her husband's polygamy, and even denied it in later years.*

The official Bible of the LDS Church is still the King James Version, even though they maintain that it is corrupted. So why doesn't the LDS Church use the "Inspired Version" as their primary Bible, the one that their founding prophet labored so long to complete and "correct"?

The most common excuse we hear is that "it was never completed." But records show that Joseph Smith himself declared that it was completed. And not only that, it is actively published by a different Mormon sect called the "Community of Christ." (See "FYI" box on the left.) This church holds the copyright, so they can (and do) publish it, and anyone can get a copy of it.

But even if Joseph Smith *hadn't* completed it, then why didn't his successors finish the job? After all, they supposedly inherited the same priesthood authority and prophetic "keys."

Many speculate that the main reason the LDS Church has not made more widespread use of the Inspired Version is that it is an embarrassment. Joseph Smith was unschooled in biblical scholarship, and many of his "corrections" to the Bible demonstrate that. Mormon apologists today know that his Inspired Version would not withstand the scrutiny of legitimate Bible scholarship, and it would become a laughingstock.

²² A side-by-side comparison of the text of the Inspired Version and the King James Version can be found at: http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv2kjb/_iv2kjb01.htm (or go to missionary911.com/resources)

But the LDS Church has never repudiated The Inspired Version. To do so would be to repudiate Joseph Smith himself. On the contrary, Bruce R. McConkie, who was one of the Twelve Apostles and a long-time champion of Mormon orthodoxy, said: “The Joseph Smith Translation, or Inspired Version, is a thousand times over the best Bible now existing on earth.”²³ That’s a curious endorsement for a Bible that they don’t use very much.

When you bring this up with the missionaries, you can do so by saying something like, “In doing some research, I learned about the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible, and I find that interesting. Can you tell me what you know about it?”

As you discuss this, you can introduce other questions, like “How is it used in the Mormon Church today?” and “Why does the Mormon Church use the King James Bible instead of the JST as their primary Bible?” “If it *wasn’t* completed, then why haven’t subsequent prophets completed it?” The question we want to linger in the missionaries’ minds is, ***why would something as weighty as a Bible, supposedly fixed and revised by their founding prophet, not be the primary Bible the church uses?***



E is for the Everlasting Covenant.

If this is not a familiar term to you, you may remember it by its other name: *Celestial Marriage*. Doctrine and Covenants section 132 contains a revelation of Joseph Smith that he called the “New and Everlasting Covenant.” This is an extremely important doctrine. Celestial marriage is central to the “Plan of Salvation” and the only way that man can be exalted in the Celestial Kingdom. So...it’s a pretty big deal.

The history of the so-called “New and Everlasting Covenant” is tricky, though. It involves a convoluted timeline, so we’ll try to make it as clear as possible. (And we’ll say up front...this is *definitely* an issue to handle with extreme care, if at all!)

Okay, pay attention, the story gets a little complicated. According to the chapter heading of Doctrine & Covenants, Section 132, Smith is believed to have received the revelation around 1831. (Remember that date, because we’ll come back to it.) Now, the revelation was not actually written down, nor is there any indication that was it even *told* to anyone, until 1843—nearly twelve years later. And even then it was only revealed to a handful of Joseph Smith’s most trusted companions, not to the church at large. When Smith was killed the following year, in 1844, this revelation was *still unknown* to most of the Mormon faithful.

²³ Bruce R. McConkie, Supplement, A Symposium on the New Testament, 1984

Keep in mind, *this revelation was the key to exaltation* and yet it was *hidden from the faithful*. Why would a prophet of God withhold key information that would be for their *eternal salvation*? In fact, it would be another *eight years* before the LDS Church finally made it known publicly to the church, and that happened in 1852. So if you're keeping count, we now stand at more than *twenty years* after Joseph Smith supposedly received the revelation. And then it was still another 24 years before it would get published as part of their scriptures, which finally happened in 1876. So it took nearly *half a century* for a key doctrine of *salvation* to make its way into their scriptures!

Now why is this such a big deal? Well, ask yourself: what could possibly motivate Joseph Smith to withhold such important information—matters of eternal life—from his followers? Well here's a clue. Do you remember what Celestial Marriage used to entail? That's right: *polygamy*. Celestial Marriage was originally *plural* marriage. Doctrine & Covenants Section 132 lays out Joseph Smith's "revelation" about not only the permission to take plural wives, but the eternal *necessity* of taking plural wives. Polygamy was the *only way* to the Celestial Kingdom, according to Smith's revelation.

During Joseph Smith's lifetime, the idea of polygamy would have been an outrage to the sensibilities of most of the Mormon faithful. Yet when Smith died in 1844, he had more than 30 wives, and only a handful of his closest friends knew about it. Few of his plural wives were even aware of the extent of his polygamy. Some of these wives Joseph had married when they were teens—at least two as young as 14 years old. Some of these wives were women who had living husbands—meaning he co-opted the wives of other men. Clearly Joseph Smith knew that this would not sit well with his followers if it ever came to light. It certainly did *not* sit well with his legal first wife, Emma! In fact, part of D&C 132 contains a threatening admonition to Emma to accept the wives Joseph had already taken, or she would be "destroyed."

So...back to the real question: Why would Joseph Smith (and other leaders after his death) hide an all-important doctrine of salvation from his church? There are two possible answers.

One possibility is that the revelation really *was* of God, and he was just too cowardly to reveal this difficult doctrine to the church, knowing how they would react. But still...it was called "new and everlasting," so that would suggest that it was intended to be for all time. In verse 4, God is quoted as saying "if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory."²⁴

²⁴ D&C 132:4. And just in case you're rusty on your Shakespeare-era grammar, the English word "ye" is plural, as in, "you all." So the revelation could not have been intended solely for Joseph Smith, but for everyone.

So if this was a real revelation, then Joseph Smith was jeopardizing the eternal welfare of his followers by keeping it under wraps!

The other possibility, of course, is that there never was any revelation, and the whole thing was just an embarrassingly transparent cover-up for Joseph Smith's prolific marital infidelity and sexual appetite.

Remember a little earlier where we mentioned that chapter heading about Smith supposedly receiving the revelation as early as 1831? That's important. Section 132's chapter heading says vaguely that "evidence indicates" that Joseph Smith knew about this revelation as early as 1831. So what is this "evidence"?

Well, something *did* happen in 1831. Joseph's wife, Emma, caught him in the barn having sex with Fanny Alger, a 19-year-old girl who was living with the family at the time. As you can imagine, Emma was furious, and it caused quite a scandal among his followers at the time. So in retrospect, modern Mormon leaders (and the editors of the scriptural chapter headings) knew that the only way that there could have been *any* legitimacy to this affair is if, somehow, Joseph Smith had received the revelation prior to his fling with Fanny, thus invoking God's endorsement of the relationship. This is of course entirely speculative, even by Mormon historical standards. There is no evidence, or even mention of this so-called "revelation" any earlier than 1843—some twelve years later.

As disturbing as this story is, the objective here isn't to berate Joseph Smith because of his infidelity or polygamy. We want to try a different approach: we want to ask why he would receive an important revelation about eternal progression, but hide it from the faithful for the rest of his life. Regardless of what that revelation contained, that's a serious charge against a true prophet of God.

Over the past few decades, Smith's polygamy has been downplayed or flatly denied. Several generations of Mormons grew up not knowing anything about it, or believing that it was only "spiritual" (that is, that there was no sex involved). Or they just assumed that these stories of polygamy were just anti-Mormon propaganda designed to make Smith look bad.

But the advent of the Internet began making it difficult to hide the troubling aspects of Mormonism's past. So with increased pressure for transparency, the LDS Church has released a number of online essays that deal with some of the thornier aspects of LDS Church history, including Joseph Smith's polygamy.²⁵ The result is that today, many more people know about this awkward part Joseph Smith's life. And this, perhaps more

²⁵ Check out www.mormonessays.com, or visit missionary911.com/resources for links to these essays.

than any other historical problem, has sent many people on journeys out of the Mormon Church.

“Aha!” you might be thinking. “So you really *can* get people out of Mormonism by bringing up problems!” Ah...but hold on. Remember back in Module 1, where we said that the *source* of the information is as important as the information itself? If this information had come from you, a mere “gentile” investigator, the information would have been rejected. The reason it has had any impact is because it comes from sources they consider trustworthy—in this case, the official LDS website.



You cannot underestimate how sensitive most Mormons are to what they perceive as attacks against Joseph Smith. And polygamy really is the “nuclear option” of Joseph Smith problems. Furthermore, the issue of the “Everlasting Covenant” is one that casual investigators would not likely stumble upon on their own, unless they were actively looking at Mormon-critical sources. If you bring this up, you will likely be accused of looking at malicious anti-Mormon materials. So handle this with care, tact, and respect...and ideally only once you’ve established a good rapport with your missionaries. Don’t ever lose sight of your goal—to point Mormons to the liberating truth of Jesus Christ. And this may mean using restraint when talking about Mormonism’s problems.



S is for the **Successors**.

That is, the successors to Joseph Smith. As of this writing, there have been 16 successors to Joseph Smith, for a total of 17 presidents throughout its history.

The president of the LDS Church is called a “prophet, seer, and revelator.” The prophetic “keys” (that is, the priesthood authority) were supposedly given to Joseph Smith, and those keys were then to be passed on to his successors, one after another, so there would be an unbroken chain of prophetic guidance and priesthood authority in the church.

If you recall in the first missionary lesson, the missionaries spoke about a “Living Prophet.” The Living Prophet is unique in all the earth. He is the only man who is authorized to speak for God, to lead and guide the One True Church. No one else has this authority at any given time. He is the authorized successor to Joseph Smith, and has access to the same authority and powers that Joseph Smith had. The Living Prophet has two appointed counselors (and the three men together are called “the Presidency”), and

below them are twelve senior-ranking men known as the “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.” Below them are several larger bodies who serve as regional authorities across the nation and around the world. All of these highest-ranking bodies are collectively known as “General Authorities,” but that authority comes directly from the Living Prophet, with whom the buck officially stops.

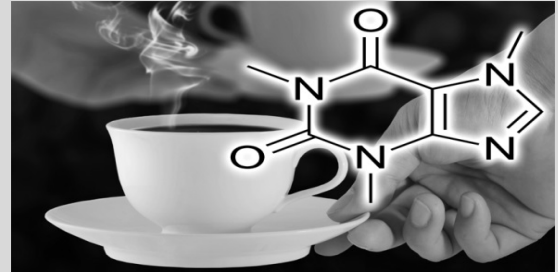
It’s hard to over-emphasize just how big a deal the Prophet is in Mormonism. To outside observers, the reverence Mormons hold for the man borders on worship. They sing songs of praise to him...songs like “We Thank Thee O God For a Prophet” and “Follow the Prophet” and “Praise to the Man”. Mormons would deny that they “worship” the Prophet, but he receives a degree of honor and reverence that doesn’t have a much better term to describe it.

Because Mormonism keeps very good records, we can examine what Mormonism’s living prophets have said throughout history until today. If the Living Prophet is indeed the successor to Joseph Smith, then we would expect the same kind of prophetic charisma and “sizzle” that Joseph Smith had.

So what about today’s living prophet? What are his prophecies and predictions? What has this seer seen? What revelations has this revelator shared with the people? What are the teachings that this all-important mouthpiece of God has given in order to keep the One True Church on the path of faithfulness and away from apostasy?

You might ask the missionaries to show you a video clip of the Prophet giving an address, or watch a conference address

F.Y.I...



*Much fuss is made over Mormonism’s prohibition of caffeine. Turns out the story is more complicated. There is no mention of **caffeine** in the Word of Wisdom (the dietary regulations of Mormonism) since the chemical was unknown at the time. What it **did** mention was “hot drinks,” and the only relevant hot drinks at the time were coffee and tea. When caffeine was discovered as the active ingredient, many presumed that it was the offending chemical. So for fear of provoking God’s wrath, many Mormons wouldn’t drink **any** caffeinated drink. There was also lots of discussion about whether non-caffeinated hot drinks were prohibited, or whether iced decaf tea or coffee was permitted (since they were neither hot, nor had caffeine). Perhaps to put an end to all the annoying ambiguity, the leadership recently clarified that the issue was neither caffeine nor temperature, but rather **coffee and tea**. So hot or cold, caffeinated or decaf, coffee and tea remain squarely on the forbidden list today. And caffeinated soft drinks are permitted. (This is ironic, since the Word of Wisdom was originally just a health advisory, and soft drinks aren’t exactly high on the list of healthful drinks.) And it wasn’t until several decades later that the original advisory was turned into an iron-clad prohibition that could jeopardize your eternal soul!*

online.²⁶ And as you watch these talks, ask yourself the question: what makes this man so special? What is he saying that is so powerful and prophetic?

Chances are, you will not see much that inspires. Most “outsiders” find the talks from the Living Prophet and other authorities tedious...sentimental stories, self-righteous admonitions to be faithful, gentle assurances, delivered in a lilting tone of quiet reverence. You won’t hear the fiery shock-and-awe that characterized the sermons of Mormonism’s earliest leaders. They know that in today’s media-saturated society that their talks come under scrutiny from outsiders and critics, so they are carefully designed with this in mind. Nowadays, anything that might be considered a “revelation” sounds more like nit-picking, like commentaries on how many piercings a woman should have (one per ear),²⁷ or clarifying which caffeinated drinks are prohibited (coffee and tea; soft drinks are okay.)²⁸ You’ll probably catch subtle (and often not-so-subtle) themes about works-based righteousness.

But remember, your missionaries probably have genuinely warm, loving feelings toward the Prophet, so this is *not* the time to say bluntly, “I don’t get it, it’s just some boring old codger droning on about a bunch of self-righteous claptrap.” Instead, the idea is to get them to help you understand why they find the prophets to be so compelling; and then to help them understand why they may not meet your expectations of someone who is supposed to be a mouthpiece of the Lord.

So after you have listened to a short talk or two, ask them about their own reaction to what was said. What did they learn? What did they feel? What did they get out of it? Then you can also share your own thoughts. Perhaps you didn’t catch anything particularly “prophetic” or even remarkable in what was said. Maybe they could help you discern what was so special? Or perhaps they could find for you an example of a ‘real’ prophetic message? Remember, the Living Prophet is the guardian of the Mormon faith, and without this prophetic guidance, the church would lapse into apostasy. Do you see compelling evidence of this wise, guiding hand in the Living Prophet?

The point is not to rub their faces in the lack of “sizzle” their prophets demonstrate. All we want is to encourage them to ask, “how would a non-Mormon investigator view this?”

²⁶ The LDS Church has a church-wide conference twice a year, in April and October, which fills the 21,000 seats in the Salt Lake City LDS Conference Center. Members tune in live, by the millions, all over the world. The conference talks, when published in *Ensign*, the church magazine, carry the functional weight of scripture—it serves as teaching text for church meetings. All of the talks of past conferences are available at: www.lds.org/general-conference, or follow the links at missionary911.com/resources.

²⁷ *True to the Faith*, 2004, p. 27

²⁸ *New Era*, April 2008, p. 41

So to review:

Prophecies: Does Joseph Smith pass the test of a prophet?

Inspired Version: Why doesn't the Mormon Church use it instead of the King James?

Everlasting Covenant: Why did Smith hide an important revelation about eternal life?

Successors: Do modern prophets exhibit any discernible prophetic gift?

One final thought. When a Mormon does finally come to the point where they can no longer avoid troubling dilemmas in their belief system, it is almost always a painful, and even *terrifying* experience. It is earth-shaking for them. These issues are to be handled soberly and with compassion. This is why your attitude is so critical, if and when you bring these things up. If you do not enter into these conversations with genuine humility, love, and gentleness, then don't enter into these conversations at all.

And even when you broach some of these topics with the right attitude and in the right context, you may still encounter flashes of anger and defensiveness from them. Don't take it personally. Their defense mechanisms are well-honed. But that is your signal to tread with caution—you are nearing a landmine that could demolish any further productive conversation.

This is not about being "soft" on the truth. It's about *prioritizing*. The truth about Jesus Christ and his gospel must always take priority over everything else. It's also about extending the relationship, and fostering trust, so that when you talk about the *most* important things, they will be more likely to hear what you have to say.



5. STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

It's *your* turn to be the missionary! Now we are looking for opportunities to share our own experience of finding and following Jesus Christ, and to invite the missionaries to be the “investigators” of what that really means. We'll help you do this in a way that will be natural, but with a little “tweaking” to increase clarity and reduce misunderstandings.

If you have stuck with us this far, you're probably getting a sense that Mormonism, despite the frequent references to Jesus, isn't really *centered* on him. Their meetings, their published journals, and their conference talks mention him here and there, and they tag his name at the end of their prayers, but you don't get a sense of passionate and intimate love for him, or a single-minded desire to follow him and glorify him.

Mormons frequently tell us that they “talk about Jesus all the time!” They may even believe this, but just don't have any concept of what being Jesus-centered is really all about. In fact, it's not unusual for a staunch Mormon who visits a “Jesus-centered” church to come away thinking that we have an “unhealthy obsession” with Jesus and the Cross.

Now, having said this, you may run into Mormons who *do* exhibit a real interest and fascination with the person of Jesus Christ, and this sets them apart from most of their fellow Mormons. These are the Mormons who sometimes complain that they don't hear enough about Jesus in their religious services. So our prayer for the missionaries is that God would *awaken* an interest in Jesus that can grow into an authentic, life-changing relationship with him...that they would realize they *can* have the fullness of Jesus Christ, without the burdens the church places on them...that they discover that Jesus meant what he said in Matthew 11:28-29: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”

In this module, we present a few tips, and another acrostic “memory hook.” But first the tips:

TIP #1: Keep your church out of the spotlight. In the video module, we refer to the term “disestablishmentarianism” which is a fancy word meaning “support of

separation of church and state.” No, we’re not making a political statement; we’re asking you to *separate* the church from your story—to “disestablish” it from center stage. By now, you can probably guess the reason why. It’s *not* because there’s anything wrong with your church. It’s because in the Mormon mindset, *The Church* is central to their testimony, and it’s hard for them to conceive of authentic spiritual life apart from it. So when you de-emphasize your church, you avoid sounding like you’re making a case of “your-church-versus-my-church.”

Your church may be a great blessing in your life. But when you tell your story, make sure that there’s no way your listener misses the point that it is *Jesus* who saves you, not your involvement in a church.

They may ask about your church, and that’s okay. You’re not *hiding* your church. But what they may be getting at is why you think *your* church is the *right* church. Since Mormons believe *their* church is the only true church, they likely think that *you* believe the same thing about *your* church. That’s why it’s important to communicate that our eternal life is not tied to membership in a church or denomination.

We Christians are used to referring to ourselves by our church affiliations and denominations. “I’m a Baptist, but grew up Methodist” and so forth. ***Don’t do this with Mormons.*** When you say things like this, what they’ll hear is that you are a follower of a *church*, not a follower of Jesus. It’s much better to say “I’m a follower of Jesus, and I attend a Lutheran church,” rather than “I’m a Lutheran.” We need to identify first and foremost with *Jesus*, not a church.

You may notice that we even discourage you from using the term “Christian.” In both Mormonism and in secular society, the word *Christian* has become so muddled and that its true meaning is all but lost. For Mormons, the word *Christian* has become practically synonymous with “a good, moral person.” So if you suggest that a Mormon is *not* a Christian, what they hear you saying is that they are a *bad person*. So bypass the conflict altogether by referring to yourself as a “follower of Jesus” or something of the sort. Now, Mormons would likely say that they follow Jesus too. That’s fair enough, because it gives you the opportunity to say, “That’s great! Tell me about what that means in your life!” And then this can open up a real discussion about what it means to follow Jesus, without getting bogged down with conflicting terminology.

TIP #2: Talk about your own personal encounters with Jesus Christ. In the video module, we refer to the term “sacred grove.” According to the Mormon story, Joseph Smith was a teenager when he had his first personal encounter with God, and it happened while he was praying in a grove of trees near his home in New York. It was here that God supposedly told him that all the churches were an abomination, and that he was to join none of them. This experience set him on a course to establish a new, “restored” church. This same grove of trees is now a pilgrimage site for Mormons, and

thousands of visitors go each year, looking for their own connection with God. So this idea of a personal encounter with God—a personal story about the way he has worked in your life—is compelling to Mormons. They will be interested to hear yours.

TIP #3: Avoid “religious words” like the plague. The term “Christian” is not the only problem word. Even the everyday words that we use in church settings, or in talking about our spiritual life with other Christians—words like salvation, saved, grace, faith, gospel, etc.—these all have potential for misunderstanding in your conversations with Mormons. (See Chapter 7, *Misunderstood Terminology*, for tips on how to work around them.)

This problem of “same words, different definitions” is pervasive, and many biblically-minded Christians get frustrated because throughout their conversations with Mormons, the missionaries make it sound like they agree on practically everything, even when a well-informed Christian knows they don’t! This isn’t unusual. Be patient, and gently press on with questions, and seek opportunities to interject gospel truth.

Okay, so on to our acrostic: **BASEBALL!**

We’ll divide this into the two component words, “BASE” and “BALL”. “BASE” will spell out some pointers for telling your own story, and “BALL” will be for extending an invitation to your Mormon friends.

This is not a canned formula for talking about Jesus, but just some practical hooks to hang your story on. It shouldn’t be scripted, but it’s worth your while to give some thought to these things before your missionary appointment. Think of some personal stories, events, situations that you can share, that illustrate these points.

So, here we go.



B is for “Before.”

That is, your life *before* you followed Jesus. Talk about the ways your life was different without him. What circumstances began to point you toward him, and made you aware of your need for him? This doesn’t have to be a tell-all about your darkest moments, but some vulnerability is not a bad thing and gives more weight to what you say.

And if you’ve been a follower of Jesus from an early age, and don’t have a tidy “before and after” story, that’s okay. You have your own experiences that demonstrate your

ongoing need for Jesus. And most of us have had “prodigal” times in our lives, when we understand what life is like when we’re not walking closely with Jesus.



A is for “Accepting.”

Talk about what happened when you first accepted Jesus. What was that experience like? What things changed in your life? And even if accepting Jesus was a gradual process for you, or if you don’t remember a singular, specific moment that marked your conversion, you can point to times when you had to “accept” *his* way over *your* way. Or when you have returned to him after wandering. When you were faced with the choice to take his path or yours. After all, we have to daily “put on Christ” and “take up our cross.” What does that mean to you?



S is for “Sin.”

The idea here is to talk about the reality of sin that still *persists* in your life.

“What?!” You ask. “Why would I want to do that?!” Just hold tight. The idea is not to turn this into a confessional. In fact, missionaries are generally told *not* to discuss their own past transgressions, and will not encourage you to talk about yours. But because the problem of sin is such an essential component of the biblical gospel, it’s an important subject to deal with. And we *need* to talk about it, because Mormons have some skewed notions about what sin really is.

In most Mormons’ minds, *sin* refers more to *behavior* than anything else. They see sin in terms of bad thoughts, words, and deeds that can be avoided with enough effort, will power and motivation. But the Bible sees sinful behavior as symptomatic of a deeper problem—a condition of the *heart*, which we are helpless to do anything about on our own.

Remember that Mormons think “born again Christians” teach that salvation is about praying a little prayer to be forgiven of all our sins forever, which then frees us to go live a life of sin, confident that we’re saved no matter what. That we take the easy way, and that we don’t take sin seriously. They need to understand that pursuing a life of sin is an *offensive* thought to someone who really follows Jesus. We *can* rejoice in the confidence that all our sins—past, present, and future—are covered and forgiven, but this confidence doesn’t lead us to go sin all the more. We *hate* our sin because we know the Lord hates it. But when we stumble—and we *will* stumble—we have the

confidence to “approach the throne of grace” as we read in Hebrews 4:16, to find help in time of need.

They need to realize that the life of a follower of Jesus is about growing to love what he loves, and to hate what he hates. We will never be totally free of sin in this “mortal life.” It still contaminates our flesh. But we *are* free from the eternal consequences of it, and the guilt and shame it brings. We are free from the fear that just one failure can ruin our relationship with Jesus, or send the Holy Spirit fleeing from our presence. And we are free to pursue lives that please our Lord without the unrelenting burden of self-perfection.

Sadly, this is not a freedom that most Mormons can relate to. Mormons generally think that this fear, guilt, and shame are the necessary motivation to keep our noses to the grindstone and prevent us from sinning (mostly). Otherwise, what would stop us from diving head-first into a life of shameless sin?

Apart from Jesus, nothing. But a life given to Jesus is a life that is changed by him. Without Jesus, we *are* powerless over sin. We might be able to modify our outward behavior to a degree, and convince others (and maybe even ourselves) that we have conquered sin by sheer grit and determination...but we are powerless over the underlying condition of our hearts. When our lives are yielded to Jesus, the power shifts to him. He not only forgives and cleanses, but also takes upon himself the task of changing and shaping us, of “weeding” the sin out of our lives.

You could say something like this: “My life in Christ has brought such a relief about daily sin. I used to carry so much guilt. But Christ has fully taken the burden of my sin and He is actually transforming me now. And because of this, I find myself hating sin more and more and depending upon Him more and more to rid my life of it. He is doing for me what I could never do for myself, no matter how hard I tried.”

Sin is the core problem which Jesus came to address, and what makes the biblical gospel necessary. Which leads us to...



E is for “Experience.”

This is our day-to-day experience with Jesus. How is your life different today as a result of your walk with Jesus? What do you love about him? Talk about what worship is like for you, and about your relationship to his Word. How does He open your eyes, and guide you on a daily basis? How does his presence give you purpose, meaning, and hope? Think about what your life would be like now, if Jesus were not at the center of it.

How does Jesus meet you in your darker moments? You might even be in the midst of some right now. Your honesty and vulnerability can communicate his grace and love in ways you might not even be aware of. Showing how Jesus operates even in the midst of *your* brokenness can have a remarkable impact on Mormons who secretly struggle with their own. There is so much pressure in Mormonism to put on a good face and act like all is well, even when they're falling apart on the inside. When they see that you can still confidently approach God with your pain, your fears, your struggles, your doubts, and yes, your sin...that's not something most Mormons can relate to.

A note here about feelings. We all engage emotionally, to some degree, in our walk with Jesus. We experience joy, peace, conviction, assurance, nudgings and promptings. This is all well and good; but remember that Mormons rely heavily on their feelings to "know" truth, so be careful that your story doesn't play into that mindset. For example, a common experience many people have upon accepting Jesus is a sense of the enormous weight of our sin and guilt being lifted off of us. It's a very real experience! And it is also an emotional one for many. So when you relate these experiences, consider how you can back it up with God's Word (for example, you could refer to Matthew 11:29-30, in which Jesus gives us rest from our burdens; or Hebrews 12:1-3, in which we cast off the burden of sin so that we can "run the race" while looking at Jesus). This way, you are bringing God's Word to bear, and not just appealing to your own feelings to "prove" the validity of your experience.

So to sum up:

B is for your life **BEFORE** Jesus (or growing up with Jesus **BESIDE** you).

A is for **ACCEPTING** Jesus, either the first time, or how you do so on a daily basis.

S is for **SIN**, and what your struggle with it means, even while following Jesus.

E is for your **EXPERIENCE** with God, how you have grown and changed in your walk with him.

All right, now it's time to turn from our story and turn to *theirs*, with the word "BALL".



B is for "Bondage."

That is, *bondage* to sin. Not the most comfortable thing to talk about, is it? But remember, the biblical gospel makes no sense without understanding the fundamental problem of sin. Introduce the idea that every last one of us was born in bondage to sin (e.g., Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:3). And that the reality of sin is much

deeper and more pervasive than most people realize. We might not feel so bad when comparing ourselves to others. But “others” are not the standard; God is. But because we are quick to compare ourselves with those around us, we are notoriously blind to just how bad our sin problem really is.

When Jesus taught about sin, he went beyond the external behaviors that others can see, and burrowed right into the heart, where only God can see. In the Sermon on the Mount, he identified anger with murder, and lust with adultery (Matthew 5:21-30). We may never have shed blood, but who of us can claim innocence from anger, lust, impatience, selfishness, greed, envy, grudges, unforgiveness, pride, or any of the other “internal” things that other people may never see? Yet these are things that God sees, and they grieve him. Even if we manage to fool others (or even ourselves) into thinking we’re doing okay, does that really gain us any standing before God?

You can ask them what kinds of things help them to overcome sin, and what we must do to live lives that please God. And pay attention to where the focus is. Chances are, it will be mostly on things that they do—modifying their behavior, avoiding temptation, trying harder, religious rituals, praying and reading scripture more. Rarely will you hear something like “I appeal confidently to God for grace, mercy, and help in time of need.” Bookmark Romans chapter 3 for some great insights into both sin’s pervasive and universal bondage...and the solution God brings to this problem! It may be helpful, before your meeting with them, to pre-select a few relevant passages that you want to share, and you might even ask them read them out loud with you, and ask them what they think about them. These can be great points for discussion.



A is for “Accepting.”

You want to communicate that turning to follow Jesus means not only forgiveness of sin, but *empowerment* to overcome sin. It’s not about joining the right church, or performing the right rituals. It’s a response to Jesus’ call to yield your life to him—and find your rest and security in him.

For a Mormon, the *organizational structure* of Mormonism is what gives them their sense of security, and the thought of stepping away from that is terrifying. The life of an active Mormon is highly regimented, filled up with church duties and callings. Their moral code gives them a measuring stick to see how well they’re doing. It’s a safety net that keeps them tethered. To be cut loose from that is to be cast adrift...or so they think.

What they need to see is that Jesus is your anchor, and your faith in him is your tether. When you invite a Mormon to “accept” Jesus, to yield to him fully, and rely on him apart

from their religious structure, it may seem too simple to them. So remember...you're planting seeds. Somewhere down the road, weeks, months or even years later, the Holy Spirit can call to mind one of those "seeds" and they might dare to reach out to Jesus in a way they never had before. And when they do, he will not disappoint!

Which brings us to our final part of the acrostic, and it takes up both L's of BALL:



Loving the Lord.

No Mormon would say "I don't love God." But what we want to do is help them explore what *loving the Lord* really means. For many Mormons (indeed, even for many professing Christians), love for God is distant, almost theoretical. It's not an intimate, relational, personal love, but a religious, duty-bound obedience. After all, in Mormonism, that's how we prove to God that we love him—by following the commandments.

The idea of a genuine affection and desire to be in relationship with God *for its own sake* is a foreign concept for many. Remember, their idea of the afterlife is about being with their families and becoming gods themselves. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are appreciated, but too often they're seen as a means to an end, rather than the end itself.

As Christians, however, our desire is to dwell forever in the awe and wonder and beauty and praise and worship of who God is. It's a different matter entirely, when we realize that Jesus *himself* is, and always has been, the culmination of all our hopes and desires, the one who is infinitely beautiful, pleasing, enjoyable, exciting, and *satisfying*. Even those of us who have walked with him for years don't grasp but a tiny fraction of what this means. How much harder it is for Mormons who see God as just another man, whose role in our lives is little more than utilitarian and not relational.

So how do we talk about this with the missionaries? Start off by asking them simple questions. Ask them about their own love for God, and what that means to them, how it is they give and receive his love. And listen for their responses—is their love for God about treasuring his companionship and enjoying his presence, and looking forward to eternity at his side? Or is it about obeying his commandments and being cautious not to offend him? Is it a distant affection for a benevolent influence...or is it a passion and excitement for a God who is alive and near?

Then ask them to talk about the people in their life that they love—their family, their closest friends, their favorite people, those for whom they have the greatest affection. The people that they love to be with simply because they love who they are. What do they love about them, and how is that demonstrated in their life? What do they feel for them? How do they show their love to those people in their life? And again, pay

attention to their responses—is it through begrudging obedience to satisfy their demands, or the enjoyment of their company and taking delight in being with them?

We want to help them make the connection (or see the disconnect) between what it's like to love God, and what it's like to love the people that we treasure. Perhaps for some it may raise the question—*I know the love I have for my family...but do I really love God that way? I enjoy my good friends...but do I enjoy God that way?*

In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Ask the missionaries what this means to them—heart, soul, and mind. How do we love God like that? Mormons often interpret “love” as “obey.” And yes, obedience is a natural outgrowth of our love for God; but obedience without love is a dreary obligation, not a joyful response.

If they don't have that kind of love for God, that kind of desire to be in his presence, then we pray that it will awaken in them! (Indeed, many of us need to pray this for ourselves!) After all, it was God who first loved us. We pray that God would continue to reveal himself to the missionaries, long after they've gone out of our lives. We expect that God will use the seeds he's given you to plant, the opportunities he's set before you, to partner with him in the work of bringing Mormons to himself. And that is why we do what we do.

So to sum up, here we have the last acrostic, **BALL**:

B is for your **BONDAGE** to sin—it's stuck in us all!

A is for **ACCEPTING** Jesus—anyone can do it, and it's not a “church” thing!

L L is for **LOVING** the **LORD**—treasuring who he is above all else, desiring to be in his presence.

As we make the invitation to know Jesus more fully and more deeply, this is a great place to use God's Word. There's a lot to choose from, but we'll share a few passages that we have often found helpful.

1 John 4:7-21...especially verse 10: “In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us...” God made the first move, and love begins with him.

Luke 7:36-50, the story of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet. She loved much, because she had been forgiven much. Jesus praised her for her love, he didn't condemn her for her sin.

Luke 18:9-14, the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple. Jesus said that the hated tax collector was the only one who went away justified, because all he knew to do was beg for God’s mercy, while the arrogant Pharisee relied on his religious works. Who would the Mormon most identify with?

Luke 15:11-32, the story of the prodigal son, though we want to pay special attention to the *other* son, the one who remained with his father and who was obedient, yet was filled with jealousy toward his wayward brother, who seemed to be rewarded for his sin. Who would the Mormon most identify with? Who does God extend mercy to, the repentant sinner, or the self-righteous laborer?

Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus talks about those who, at the judgment, will say “Lord, Lord” and appeal to their righteous works—“Look at what we’ve done for you!” And yet Jesus says “depart from me, I never knew you!” How could this be? What does it mean that Jesus “never knew” them, and what has to happen for Jesus to “know” us?

Do not underestimate the power of God’s Word to draw Mormons to Jesus Christ. One friend of ours was on his LDS mission when a Christian pastor challenged him to read the Bible “as a child”...that is, to read the Bible without any of the preconceived notions, without the filters, but simply seeking to understand what it *says*. Our friend took him up on the challenge, thinking that he would be able to prove, from the Bible, that Mormonism was true. But as he studied the New Testament—reading it like a child—he began to be moved by the power of its gospel, and over the course of a year or so, he became an avid student of the Bible. By the end of his mission, he had been *born again*. By nothing more, and nothing less, than falling in love with the gospel found in God’s Word.

Consider giving your missionaries a similar challenge. You might be surprised at how little of the Bible your missionaries have ever read (though they will not likely admit this). Most of them have a handful of proof texts at their fingertips, but few have ever sat down and read and meditated on the Bible to any significant degree. Ask them to read the Bible, especially the New Testament; not to prove or disprove Mormonism, but just to understand what it says. To read it “like a child.” We often recommend they start with the gospel of John, then read through the rest of the gospels, and the rest of the New Testament. If they do this with the purpose of seeking to understand it, then it might just awaken a love for God they’ve never experienced before.

We know that you really would like to come away from this experience having walked a missionary right into a living relationship with Jesus. And by God’s grace, you might get that opportunity someday. But for many of you reading this, the results of your investment in these dear Mormons’ lives may never be known to you, at least not this side of eternity. The pastor that issued the challenge to our missionary friend we

mentioned above...he didn't learn about the powerful result of his challenge until *years* later. He had merely been faithful to plant the seed; it was God who made it grow.

But if God should grant you the privilege of walking alongside a Mormon who is finally beginning to embrace what it really means to follow Jesus, then patience and understanding are the best things you can offer them. There's no need to push and pull. Be available to listen, answer questions, and speak truth when opportunities arise, but the work belongs to God. A Mormon who takes the first steps to becoming a true follower of Jesus may not fully realize the implications of it at first. They might not even realize that it's a journey that will eventually lead them out of Mormonism. But if Jesus becomes a reality in their life, if their eyes are opened by the Holy Spirit to understand his Word and what that means...they will begin see the disconnect between their Mormon life and their walk with Jesus. Once Jesus becomes their first love, they will choose him over Mormonism, and everything else.

Remember, it will *never* be dependent upon the weight of your compelling presentation, or the power of your clever insights. It won't be about how well you remember "APPLE PIES" or "BASEBALL." It will *always* be the result of God's Spirit at work, usually in spite of our clumsiness! So even if you still feel not quite up to the task, remember that God is *very* up to the task; and he has a special affection for using us, weak and small as we are, in his plans...so the glory is always his. So what is your part? It's as simple as letting God's word be near you, in your mouth and in your heart. With that, you have good news that they need to hear!

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:9-17

6. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. *The missionaries have invited me to go to church with them. Should I*

A. *go?*

That's entirely up to you. But...why not? It would be a good learning experience for you. Then ask them if they'd be willing to go with you to *your* church. It would give you some good points to talk about. They may or may not be willing. But remember, don't make it so much about your *church* as about Jesus. In fact, if you attend a Mormon meeting, pay close attention to the kinds of things they talk about, and especially how often, and in what context, Jesus is mentioned.

Mormon church meeting dress code: If you go, adhere to the dress code as best you can. For men this means wearing a business suit (jacket and pants), white shirt, and tie. For women, this usually means blouse (high neck line, no bare shoulders) and a long skirt, or a conservative dress. You won't be denied entry if that's not an option for you, but dress as nicely and modestly as you can. It's a sign of respect.

Q. *One or both of my missionaries got "switched out" on me. What gives?*

A. A missionary is always paired up with a companion, but they switch companions every few months, and are often rotated throughout a geographical area from time to time. They pair up a senior (more experienced) companion with a junior (less experienced) companion. In addition, they will sometimes "mix things up" temporarily, or even show up with an older adult missionary leader or ward member. This is not unusual, so if it happens, it's nothing to be concerned about. You can carry on with them as you have done with the others.

Q. *One of the missionaries seems more receptive than the other. Is there any way I could meet alone with only that missionary?*

A. The rules for missionaries are strict; they are not to be out of each other's presence for any longer than a couple minutes (like to use the restroom), so getting a one-on-one meeting with a missionary would be difficult, and would require him or her to break those rules. While the two-by-two rule is for

accountability and “protection,” it also serves to keep tabs on one another, and discourages one or the other from “going astray.”

If you sense that one of the missionaries is struggling in their faith, you can quietly make sure they know that you’re available if they need to reach out for help (make sure they have your phone number), and allow them to make the first move. This doesn’t happen frequently, but it has happened.

Q. Why do their name tags read “Elder” or “Sister” so-and-so, and why don’t they call one another by their first names?

A. It is common practice for the missionaries to **not** operate on a first-name basis while “on the job” or in church settings. Even in their off-hours, they’re encouraged to speak formally with one another—“Elder Smith” and “Sister Jensen”. This strictness of this rule may vary from place to place. But generally, the young men are “Elder” and the young women are “Sister.” It’s designed to promote a sense of dignity and respect to the missionaries, even though it may seem odd and even presumptuous to those of us who operate in a more informal culture. Nevertheless, we generally recommend not pressing too hard to know their first names, at least up front. If you begin to develop a good rapport with them, you can ask to call them by their first names, and they may or may not be comfortable with that. Either way, follow their lead in this manner.

Q. I actually want the missionaries to come visit, but they’ve never stopped by. How do I get a visit?

A. Good news! There are numerous ways you can get on the list. Perhaps the most direct way is to request a visit online. If you go to:

www.mormon.org/missionaries

there is a form you can fill out. Also, if you visit any of a number of Mormon visitor’s centers (like Temple Square in Salt Lake City), there will be many opportunities to give your contact information. And if you happen to run into a couple of Elders or Sisters while out and about (you will instantly recognize them by their nametags), you would probably make their day by approaching and asking them for an appointment.

The only time this might be a problem is if your house has been “blacklisted” because you have a history of having contentious

encounters with the missionaries, or if you have a reputation for open criticism of Mormonism. (You may laugh, but this neighborhood blacklist is a real thing.)

Q. *Is the “Missionary 911” video series something I should share with the missionaries?*

A. We don’t recommend giving or showing the *Missionary 911* program to Mormons, unless they specifically ask to see it. That’s not what they were intended for. Dumping this material, uninvited, on an unsuspecting Mormon is not the way to go. It will likely be labeled as “anti-Mormon” propaganda. Although we oppose that label, we also understand why Mormons react that way, and we don’t want to provoke them unnecessarily. Nevertheless, we stand by the information we have presented. Any missionary or Mormon who shows a genuine curiosity about what it contains is welcome to watch it of their own free will (it’s freely available online), and we’re available to answer questions or concerns they may have.

Q. *The missionaries are telling me that I have wrong information about Mormonism, or are questioning me about my sources. How do I respond?*

A. If you bring up a lot of the information you learn about with *Missionary 911*, they may catch on that you are more informed than the average investigator. They might say something like, “Well, I don’t know where you’re getting your information about Mormonism, but that is just not true.” If they start saying things like this, graciously ask for a clarification or “correction.” But be aware that many missionaries are not very well informed about the thornier issues in Mormonism (and now is not the time to school them.) If you get some push-back, you may not be asking enough questions, and instead may be making too many assertions.

If they ask you where you are getting your information, be honest. They will likely discourage you from going to critical or “anti-Mormon” sources. Mormons see these as malicious attacks on something sacred. (By now you realize that our motivation is to bring Good News of Jesus Christ to Mormons; but most Mormons won’t see this. They cannot conceive of any other motivation except the persecution of God’s true church!) So be open to seeing a different perspective from *their* sources. But be careful not to turn this into a *my-source-versus-your-source* type of argument. You’re only doing your due diligence. After all, if you’re going to be a well-informed car shopper, you will look at what the

manufacturer says about the car, but you're also going to want to hear what independent reviewers, the competition, and even their critics have to say!

Q. *One or both of my missionaries got upset with me. Did I step on a "landmine"?*

A. Maybe. Sometimes it's unavoidable. Or maybe your missionary is just naturally more hot-tempered or sensitive. (After all, they are individuals, and come in all personality types!) While they are expected to be polite and gracious, their own nature may sometimes get the better of them. Sometimes when a missionary is faced with a challenge they can't answer, even if it's presented in the most inoffensive and gentlest way possible, it can still trigger a sensitive "contention detector" and that threshold can vary from missionary to missionary. The important thing to remember is not to take it personally, and don't respond in kind. Keep your head cool and your words gentle.

And if the flare-up *was* the result of your *own* hot-headedness or careless words (hey, we've all been there), be quick to acknowledge it and apologize to them. True humility will speak volumes, and it may help keep your dialog on track.

Q. *The missionaries that I encountered are pushy, insistent, or rude. What's up with that?*

A. It's uncommon, but it happens from time to time. While it's *not* the image the LDS Church wants to project, there is a lot of pressure on the missionaries to have something to show for their efforts...and logging contacts is one of the main ways to do that. So once in a while, missionaries will resort to high-pressure tactics. (Think about a car sales rep trying to make quota at the end of the month!) If their behavior is off-putting, you can calmly say something like: "I'd really like to talk to you guys, but I gotta tell you, I'm having a hard time with your attitude right now. If you can dial it down a notch, maybe we make an appointment for a later time?" This might be enough to cause them to take a step back. Above all, be gracious, even if they are not.

In the rare case that a missionary is becoming a persistent problem (frequent unwanted contact, *really* inappropriate behavior, etc.), contacting your local bishop may be the next step. To find "your" ward, go to www.lds.org/maps, type in your home address, and it should

identify the ward that your residence is a part of, and usually the bishop's name and contact information. If the local leaders learn that their missionaries are giving people negative experiences, they will usually step in quickly to correct the situation. If you do contact the local LDS leaders, though, remember you still want to represent Christ. Avoid harsh accusations and season your words with grace.

Q. How effective is it to give them tracts, books, or evangelistic videos to missionaries?

A. It's hard to say. There are rules about what the missionaries are allowed to read, watch, and listen to. You can offer, but don't be surprised or offended if they refuse. And if they do refuse, don't be pushy. They are technically not allowed any reading material that's not Church-approved. No TV, no newspapers, no movies, and any music must be on the "approved" list. Internet and phone use is often monitored. In practice, these rules may not be strictly enforced by every mission, but certainly anything that could be considered "anti-Mormon" would be off-limits to them.

Some people have gotten the missionaries to agree to watch a film in the investigators' home. We typically recommend that you wait until you've at least established some rapport with them. But a film we produced a few years ago, entitled *Unveiling Grace* might be a good place to start. You can watch it online or get a copy at: www.unveilinggrace.com. (Just make sure you watch it on your own, first, and use your own judgment about whether it would be appropriate for your particular missionaries.)

The rank-and-file Mormons you may know aren't under the same restrictions as missionaries, but faithful Mormons will still be reluctant to take anything that is "anti-Mormon" or something that they fear could damage their testimony. And even those Mormons who are quietly asking questions and seeking answers may be afraid to be caught with "contraband" material in their home. There is no harm in offering, but make your offer gentle and without any pressure.

7. MISUNDERSTOOD TERMINOLOGY (AND HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT)

One of the things that consistently gets in the way of effective communication with Mormons is the phenomenon of “same words, different meanings.” Here we have selected some of the most common terms that fall in this category. We’ll give the standard Mormon definition (as simply as we can; there may be some variation in how individual Mormons understand them), followed by the traditional biblical definition, and some tips on how to talk around those misunderstandings so that you don’t get bogged down by conflicting terminology. We also provide some relevant Bible references to help lend more insight to these ideas.

APOSTASY

How Mormonism defines it:

Apostasy is a rejection or “falling away” from the true faith. The “Great Apostasy” refers to the period of time between the death of Jesus’ apostles (when all priesthood authority was lost), and the restoration of the true Church through Joseph Smith in the 1830s. During that time, there was no priesthood authority at all on the earth, and so no one was authorized to perform the saving ordinances, or to keep people from falling away. All institutions claiming to be Christian, but which do not have this priesthood authority are considered “apostate.”

Apostasy on an individual level is the act of rejecting Mormonism after having received the fullness of what Mormonism offers. Usually this refers to “temple Mormons” who fall away. These “apostates” are destined for Outer Darkness. (See *Hell / Outer Darkness*.)

Biblical definition:

Apostasy is “a falling away from faith in Christ.” It’s the result of faithlessness, and turning away from God (not an institution). While apostasy may involve rejection of a church, it doesn’t have to; likewise, one can reject an institution without rejecting faith in Jesus Christ.

-- APOSTASY --

Nowhere in the Bible is it associated with an organized religion or a lack of a proper priesthood with the necessary “keys” or authority.

How to talk about it:

Remember that Mormons place a great deal of emphasis on the *institution*. If the institution is broken, then so is our access to God, or so they reason. The Bible does talk about apostasy (see relevant verses below); people *will* fall away from the faith. But it’s the result of sin, selfishness, and faithlessness of human hearts, not the result of the loss of institutional authority. People fell away from Jesus even while he was in their very midst! (See John 6:66-68). But despite Mormon claims, the Bible never predicts a universal apostasy—a time when there would be no legitimate Christianity on earth. In fact, Jesus promises that his church will endure (Matthew 16:18), as will his words (Matthew 24:35).

Some relevant Bible verses:

Jeremiah 2:19; Hosea 14:4; Matthew 24:5-12; Mark 13:6;
Galatians 1:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:1-4;
Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 John 2:19

ATONEMENT

How Mormonism defines it:

Atonement is to suffer the penalty of a sin. So when Jesus made atonement for our sins, he suffered the penalty of our sins. Mormonism teaches that Jesus made atonement for our sins in the Garden of Gethsemane, and this is emphasized as much as, or even more than, his death on the cross. The atonement of Jesus in Mormonism, however, is incomplete. It is only one stepping stone on the path toward eternal life. Our obedience to the Mormon laws and ordinances is required for Jesus’ atonement to be effective for us, and to be exalted in the Celestial Kingdom (see “Heaven”).

Biblical definition:

Atonement literally means “a covering.” Jesus’ death “covered” our sin, *all* of our sin, once for all. In the Old Testament, “atonement” was connected to the system of animal sacrifice, which was intended to point to the final, perfect sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament. The atonement of Jesus is *not* a “stepping stone” on the way to eternal life...it *IS* our eternal life.

How to talk about it:

Sin brings death. The Old Testament sacrificial system was intended to be a constant, bloody reminder of that. Jesus completely and totally covered our sin—past, present, and future—by his own death on the cross. And it is only through Jesus’ sacrifice that we can be forgiven, and be able to live in God’s presence after we die. It’s not something we can earn or qualify for, not through good behavior, works, or religious rituals. It is freely given to those who will surrender their lives to Jesus. Even though we are guilty and deserve God’s punishment, Jesus’ righteousness is counted as our own. Even though we are guilty, we are declared *not guilty*, and we can stand upon Jesus’ purity and perfection, as if it were our own. It is our *sin*—not our failure to perform the right ordinances—that prevents our passage into God’s presence; therefore it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ which removes that obstacle between us and eternity with God.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Romans 3:22-26; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Ephesians 2:13;
Colossians 1:19-20; Hebrews 9:11-28; Hebrews 10:10;
Hebrews 10:19-22

BAPTISM

How Mormonism Defines It:

Baptism is an ordinance of the Mormon gospel and a necessary ritual to join the LDS Church (and consequently, necessary for exaltation/eternal life). It can only be performed by someone who holds the Melchizedek

-- BAPTISM --

priesthood (see **Priesthood**) and must be by full immersion. It is the first ritual a new convert experiences. Children born into Mormon families (“born in the covenant” as they call it), are usually baptized around the age of eight, which they teach is the age of accountability.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The word “baptism” or “baptize” is the translation a Greek word that means “to submerge” or “to place into.” While in the New Testament it was frequently used in reference to the ritual of water baptism, it also was used in the literal and everyday sense—to immerse or place something into something else. For example, in Mark 1:8, John the Baptist says “I have baptized you with water, but he [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Water baptism is a strong picture of being placed into Jesus Christ and identifying with his death and resurrection, and as such, it has historically been a part of a Christian’s public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. But to call it a prerequisite for salvation adds a “work” that contaminates the pure gospel of salvation by grace alone, which is emphatically declared throughout the Bible.

How to Talk About it:

We don’t encourage you to actively pursue a discussion of baptism, but we want you to be prepared in case the subject comes up. Mormons often point to the disagreements among Christian churches about modes and meaning of baptism as evidence for why “apostate Christianity” is corrupt. And it’s true that Christians may have disagreements over certain issues like baptism; but in biblically-based Christianity, mode of baptism itself is not a salvation issue. The doctrines of salvation are what unify the Christian churches. (See **Church** for further discussion on this.

For more discussion on ***Baptism for the Dead***, see Chapter 8, *Mormonism’s Misuse of the Bible*.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Mark 10:83-39; Mark 16:16; Luke 3:16;
Luke 12:50; Acts 1:5; Acts 2:38; Acts 19:1-5; Romans 6:3;
1 Corinthians 1:13-17; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27.

BIBLE

How Mormonism defines it:

The Bible (specifically the King James Version of the Bible) is considered one of the “four standard works” alongside the three scriptures unique to Mormonism: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. It is said to be the “word of God as far as it is translated correctly.”²⁹ But Mormonism teaches that the Bible has been heavily tampered with over the centuries, and that what we have today is copies of copies, and therefore it is unreliable. Modern English translations are viewed with even more skepticism; they are believed by many to be dogma-driven paraphrases of the King James (instead of faithful translations of original texts). Even so, Mormons will happily refer to passages from the Bible that at least *appear* to support Mormon doctrine, but will ignore other passages that contradict it (presumably those passages are the portions that have been corrupted). Chapter 9, “Mormonism’s Misuse of the Bible,” provides some examples of this.

Biblical / Christian definition:

Traditional Christianity accepts as authoritative scripture the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, and considers them God-inspired and suitable for teaching and doctrine. A Christian’s confidence in the Bible rests on a number of factors. First and foremost is the understanding of who God is, his promise to keep his word, and his motivation and ability to do so. Its prophetic nature has also been well-established. In addition, many academic disciplines, including secular scholars, have shown the Bible to be an authentic historical document, with a great deal of corroboration from archaeology, anthropology, history, and other secular disciplines. Furthermore, the mathematical science of textual criticism

²⁹ *The Pearl of Great Price*, Articles of Faith, Article No. 8.

-- BIBLE --

which analyzes the thousands of ancient manuscript copies available to us, has verified the accuracy of the text we have today in relation to the original, and modern translations are faithful renderings of that original text. So the accusation that the Bible has lost its reliability through tampering and retranslation does not hold up, neither scientifically nor historically.

How to talk about it:

The Bible is God’s word, and so it is “living and active.” Therefore, don’t shy away from using it, even if you know that Mormons take a lower view of it. Mormons generally know that Christians have a high regard for the Bible, and so they probably won’t speak badly of it in front of you. In fact, you might hear the opposite. Many Mormons will say they have a great love and respect for the Bible, and will insist that the Bible “complements” the Book of Mormon, and that Mormonism is entirely consistent with the Bible (which, by now, you realize is nonsense). But remember that the missionaries’ presentation is designed to avoid contention. The best way to deal with this is not to challenge this false claim, but rather to let the Bible speak for itself. Encourage the missionaries to share their favorite Bible passages, and use these as a point of discussion; and have your own on hand to share as well.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 22:29; Luke 24:27-32; John 10:35; Acts 17:2; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12

CHRISTIAN

How Mormonism defines it:

Mormons consider themselves Christians, although it wasn’t long ago that they used the term disparagingly, to refer to the “church of the devil” or apostate Christianity. However, in recent years, there has been a strong push within Mormonism to include itself, if in name only, under the umbrella of “Christianity.” They will sometimes go so far as to say

that Mormonism is the only authentic or most complete form of Christianity. In recent years, the term “Christian” has become muddled in Mormonism to mean anyone or any organization that claims some kind of connection with Jesus Christ, his teachings, or his principles.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The word *Christian* is derived from a Greek word which means “little Christ” and refers to someone who is a follower of, an imitator of, or belonging to Jesus Christ. The idea is something like in today’s terms, “a chip off the old block.” The word is actually not used very frequently in the Bible—a passing reference in Acts, and in 1 Peter. It’s likely that it was originally a term of mockery used by those who opposed Jesus and his gospel, but then adopted by followers of Jesus.

How to talk about it:

We generally advise you not to use the term at all, because it is so prone to misunderstanding. A good substitute for the term “Christian” is “Follower of Jesus.” Don’t waste energy arguing about the traditional definition of *Christian*, when you can talk instead about what it actually means to follow Jesus, to belong to him, and imitate him. What is different about your life because of Jesus? Ask the missionaries to talk about their own experience with Jesus, what he means to them.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Matthew 10:38; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16; 1 Timothy 4:6

CHURCH

How Mormonism defines it:

Mormonism teaches that *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is the one and only true church that exists today on Earth and that membership in this organization is necessary to enjoy the benefits of exaltation (see ***Eternity/Eternal Life***). Because the LDS Church alone has the authorized priesthood from God, it is the *only* institution authorized to perform the ordinances necessary for exaltation. Traditionally it has been taught that there are only two churches: the “Church of the Lamb” (Mormonism) and “The church of the devil” (all other churches).

-- CHURCH --

Nevertheless, today they tone down this kind of language, saying that other churches may “have some good” in them, or have “part of the truth”; however, because they lack the priesthood, these other churches lack the authority to perform the saving ordinances.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The word translated as “church” is the Greek work “Ekklesia” which means “a called-out assembly or congregation.” That is, a gathering of people called out to follow Jesus. The Bible often refers to congregations at particular locations (e.g., the church in Corinth, the church in Antioch, etc.) Sometimes it carried a broader meaning to encompass the entire “assembly” of all people everywhere who follow Jesus Christ (e.g., Matthew 16:18, “on this rock I [Jesus] will build my church...”).

What the church is *NOT*--nor ever has been--is an institution that serves as the gatekeeper for salvation or eternal life. That authority rests with Jesus Christ alone, and not any earthly organization, denomination, or affiliation. The church does not and cannot “save”; rather, the church—in its purest sense—is made up of those whom Jesus *has already saved*.

How to talk about it:

When you talk with Mormons about the church, keep in mind that for them, membership in *The Church* (that is, the LDS Church) is necessary for eternal life. And so they conclude that Christians have a similar belief about *our* own churches. In a Mormon’s mind, all the other churches are fighting for the title of “One True Church”. Sometimes they will challenge Christians with questions like “How do you know that **your** church is true?” What they mean is “What do you think makes *your* church the one and only true church?” They often do not understand that for Christians, it’s not about the *church*. This is why we encourage people to place more emphasis on Jesus and less emphasis on the church, lest the discussion degrade into an argument about whose church is better.

As for the supposed disunity among Christians, most Mormons do not realize that historic, biblical Christianity is unified by a handful of simple doctrines of salvation: 1) The One-ness of God as a Trinity; 2) The full and unqualified deity of Jesus Christ; 3) The historical reality of Jesus’ bodily death on the cross and resurrection; 4) Eternal life comes by grace

through faith in Jesus' completed sacrificial work, and not by any work or merit of our own.

Agreement on these doctrines of salvation allow people across denominations and traditions to call one another "brothers and sisters in Christ." However, Mormonism categorically rejects three of those four statements (they acknowledge Jesus' death and resurrection, though do not give it the same degree of importance) and adds several other "essential" doctrines and works, including belief in Joseph Smith, the LDS Church, the Book of Mormon, the modern-day prophet, and obedience to Mormon laws and ordinances as essential for eternal life.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12;
Ephesians 1:22-23

CROSS

How Mormonism defines it:

Mormons acknowledge that the cross is the instrument of Jesus' death, but reject it as a legitimate symbol of Christianity. For them, it's a morbid symbol that celebrates the dead Jesus, rather than the living Jesus. Therefore, you will not see crosses in their meeting houses, or hanging on their walls, or worn around their neck. You might hear things like, "If Jesus had been executed by electric chair, would you want to wear one of those as a symbol around your neck?" And so they are often puzzled by Christians' fondness for the symbol.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The cross is central to the New Testament and the life of a Christian. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the **power of God**. And I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and **him crucified**.* (1 Corinthians 2:2). Later on, when giving instructions for the Lord's Supper, he says that we "*proclaim the Lord's **death** until he returns.*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). While a Mormon might think it morbid to dwell on the death of Jesus, the true followers of Jesus know that it is

-- CROSS --

his death—and his victory over death—that gives us eternal life. Jesus himself tells us to take up our cross and follow him. It is a reminder of the seriousness of sin, and Jesus’ authority over it. Because of this, the cross as a symbol is deeply meaningful and sobering, but one we embrace with deep gratitude and joy, because of what it represents.

How to talk about it:

If the subject comes up, ask them about their views of the cross, and talk about the meaning the cross has for you...why you would, for example, have a cross around your neck or hanging on your wall. You could share that it is a reminder to you of the great sacrifice that was made on your behalf, how that knowledge increases your love and gratitude to Jesus for what he has done for you.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 1 Corinthians 2:1-3; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 3:18; Colossians 1:20; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 12:2

ETERNITY / ETERNAL LIFE

How Mormonism Defines It:

Eternity, Eternal Life, and Exaltation are generally synonymous in Mormonism, and mean the highest status one can achieve in the Celestial Kingdom, which is to become like God. The word “eternal” in a Mormon’s mind means “the kind of life God lives” and not necessarily about “forever” or “timelessness.” So when a Mormon says that God is “eternal,” this *doesn’t* mean that they believe God has always existed as God through eternity past; rather, it’s way of referring to the quality of life that God lives. And therefore “eternal life,” which is the expectation of worthy Mormons, is living the life of a god.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

When applied to God, “eternal” means “having no beginning or end.” The Bible teaches that God had no beginning and will have no end. God is, in fact, the *only* one that is or ever will be *eternal* in the fullest sense. He alone pre-existed everything else. *Eternal* can also mean “unending.” Eternal life, then, is God’s invitation to know him fully and enjoy life with him forever. Salvation and eternal life are essentially synonymous.

How to Talk About it:

While “salvation” and “eternal life” are basically the same idea in Christianity, this is not the case in Mormonism. This is why we favor using the term “eternal life” instead of “salvation” since for both Mormons and Christians, it is the highest hope of the afterlife. But you still need to account for the differences in meaning.

It’s better to talk in plain, everyday terms. For example, talk about “being able to live with and enjoy God’s presence forever.” A Mormon will likely agree with this. In fact, they often refer to “*returning* to Heavenly Father” (remember, since we all pre-existed in the Celestial Kingdom, we can *return* when we die—if we are worthy). However, the main goal of the Mormon afterlife is to be reunited with one’s family in exaltation; being in fellowship with God is not the main attraction of eternity. For Christians, however, it is quite the opposite. While we may look forward to seeing our loved ones who have died before us, this is secondary to the real goal of dwelling fully in God’s presence.

Mormon missionaries will likely avoid talking about the doctrine of becoming gods. They know that Christians are put off by it. If the subject is unavoidable, they might say something like, “Don’t you think Heavenly Father would want the same thing for his children that he has for himself?” Of course, we know that this isn’t how it works. Yes, God *does* desire good things for us, but we are and forever will be creations of the Creator who are invited to be his children. We are not, nor ever will be, the same “species” as God. He is God alone, and always has been and always will be. (see Isaiah 42:8 and 43:10-11).

Some relevant Bible verses:

John 3:15-17; John 3:36; John 5:24; John 10:28; John 17:3;
Romans 6:22-23; Titus 3:4-7

FAITH

How Mormonism Defines It:

Faith is “belief”, yes, but in Mormonism, it carries the idea of emotional or spiritual “energy” that we possess, by which we can shape and even create reality. It resembles the folksy (but unbiblical) attitudes about faith characterized by sayings like “If you just have enough faith, you can make it happen.” It is the ability to believe something, often despite what reality tells us. In fact, blind faith that *contradicts* reason or evidence is actually seen as more noble and *real*. After all, if you already have the facts and evidence, then faith is unnecessary.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

While biblical faith may call us to trust beyond what is seen (Hebrews 11:1), it does not call us to defy reality or ignore facts and reason. On the contrary, real faith is a confidence based on what we already know to be true. Faith *has* to be grounded in reality. Faith in God, then, is confidence based upon our knowledge and understanding of God’s character. It is an expectation based upon knowledge and experience, not on baseless hopes and wishful thinking.

How to Talk About it:

Be cautious not to speak of “faith” in vague generalities, but instead in terms of ***what*** or ***who*** you have faith ***in***, and ***why***. Mormons will often say things like “I ***know*** the Church is true” or “I ***know*** that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.” Since these are actually *belief* statements, not *knowledge* statements, ask them how they “know” these things. What is the source of their confidence? This is where they appeal to their idea of “faith.” Their answer may focus on their feelings, or a “witness” which they will say is the Spirit’s personal revelation to them. If this is where they go, ask them more about this: what convinces them that it is really the Spirit telling them this? Introduce your concern about relying on your own feelings, and remind them that the Bible tells us to test all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1). But be respectful. Remember, you’re not trying to back them into a corner, or force them to defend their beliefs’ legitimacy; you want to be genuinely curious about how their faith works for them.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Genesis 15:6; Acts 15:8-10; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 3:22-28;
Romans 5:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 2:15-16; Galatians 3:22-26;
Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:8-10; Hebrews 11; James 2:14-26.

GOSPEL

How Mormonism Defines It:

The gospel is also called the “Plan of Salvation” and is the process by which we can achieve exaltation/eternal life. For Mormons, “the gospel” is synonymous with “the laws and ordinances of the Mormon Church.”

Biblical / Christian Definition:

“Gospel” in the New Testament means “good news.” It is the good news that Jesus, by way of his death and resurrection, grants eternal life to those who place their hope and trust in him and follow him. The true Gospel is what God has done for us, not what we do for God.

How to Talk About it:

You might want to replace the word “gospel” and use its original meaning, “good news”. And talk about what is so good about the news. Mormons will say that their “gospel” is good news too—that through obedience to the Mormon gospel, we can return to Heavenly Father and become like him. But this is not the “good news” that the Bible teaches. The good news is that Jesus has already accomplished everything that is necessary for us to spend eternity with him. It is not dependent upon works or rituals that we perform, or membership in an organization, but a trust and belief that manifests itself in an authentic life-change.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:6-12; Ephesians 1:13-14

GRACE

How Mormonism Defines it:

Grace is defined as a “gift” or “God’s favor” but even so, it is conditional in Mormonism. It is something that we receive only after we have adequately proven our obedience and our worthiness (which technically doesn’t make it a “gift”). In the Book of Mormon, book of 2nd Nephi 25:23, there is a well-known verse that reads, in part, “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do.*” The ambiguity of this statement is troubling to many. How much is “all I can do”? How do I know when I’ve done all I can do? If I haven’t done all I can do, am I really saved?

Now, Mormons will usually agree with the statement that we are “saved by grace and not by works,” but only when “saved” is used in the sense of being resurrected (see ***Salvation***). In other words, resurrection from the dead is the only truly “free gift” that Jesus gave us, and it’s given to all mankind, regardless of whether they acknowledge Christ or not. So what happens to us in the judgment *beyond* resurrection, then, depends on our works and personal worthiness.

Biblical / Christian Definition

Grace comes from the Greek word *charis* which means “gift.” A gift is, by definition, something given freely without strings attached, and is dependent upon the generosity of the giver, not the worthiness of the recipient. Therefore, grace is God’s *unearned and unmerited* favor. It is not given on the basis of our goodness, obedience, or worthiness, but rather on the basis of God’s will, love, and kindness...*in spite of* our unworthiness.

How to Talk About it:

Talk about the life-changing power of God’s free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Talk about how it changes us from the inside out, and about your own experience with it. When many Mormons hear Christians say “We’re saved by grace”, they think we’re saying, “We can live as we please.” It’s important that they understand that when we receive God’s gift, it changes our hearts, minds, and attitudes. It doesn’t prompt us to

live to please ourselves, but rather frees us to live to please God--not out of duty or obligation, but out of love and devotion.

Some relevant Bible verses:

John 1:14-17; Acts 15:10-11; Romans 3:23-25; Romans 5:15-17;
Romans 6:1-3; Romans 11:5-6; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:4-10;
Titus 3:4-7

HEAVEN

How Mormonism Defines It:

In Mormonism, “Heaven” is composed of three levels, the Celestial Kingdom (the highest; for worthy Mormons), the Terrestrial (the middle; for the decent, moral people who didn’t embrace the Mormon gospel), and the Telestial Kingdom (the lowest; for earthly reprobates and sinners). All the levels of Heaven are said to be more pleasant than our earth life, but only the Celestial Kingdom has the surpassing joy of eternal life. The term “paradise” refers to the temporary place in the Spirit World that good Mormons will occupy prior to final judgment. (See more discussion of the Three Degrees of Glory in Chapter 8.)

Biblical / Christian Definition:

Heaven in the spiritual sense is the dwelling place of God, and the Kingdom of Heaven is the destination of all who have embraced him by faith. It’s worth noting that in the ancient Biblical world, “heaven” *did* have three different possible meanings—however, not the meanings that Mormonism teaches. The “first heaven” was equivalent to our modern idea of “atmosphere,” where the birds fly and where the weather comes from. The “second heaven” was equivalent to our idea of outer space, where the heavenly bodies are—the sun, moon, and stars. And finally, the third heaven would be the dwelling place of God. (Note Paul’s reference to the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2).

How to Talk About it:

Discuss heaven in terms of what happens to us after we die. Ask them what they most look forward to in the afterlife, what they believe will be

their final destiny, what they think it will be like, and what is required to get there. Talk about your own hope and excitement for spending eternity with God. But emphasize that what you most look forward to is being in God's presence forever. Experiencing the presence of Jesus Christ as infinitely beautiful, absolutely satisfying, and endlessly wonderful may not be a concept that your Mormon friends have thought much of. Many Mormons view Jesus in a more utilitarian way—he accomplished something for them, and so they may love and appreciate him for that, but he is a means to an end (their own exaltation, achieving their own Godhood), rather than the end itself.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Psalms 73:25-26; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 8:11; Matthew 18:3-4; Philippians 3:19-21; Hebrews 11:15-16

HELL

How Mormonism Defines It:

Hell is an ambiguous term in Mormonism, and so it's not used much in a formal sense. Technically it is "spirit prison," or the temporary place where spirits of non-Mormons and reprobates go immediately after death. It has some similarity to the Roman Catholic concept of "purgatory." It's not a permanent place, but a place where we have an opportunity to pay for our earthly sins, possibly even accept the Mormon "gospel" and thus earn our way to a better final outcome in the afterlife.

The Mormon term for the eternal "bad place" that best matches what Christians would call "hell" is *Outer Darkness*. In Mormon thinking, Outer Darkness is reserved for Satan and his demons, and for the worst human offenders. Opinions differ on where that line is drawn between those who deserve the lowest (Telestial) kingdom and those who deserve Outer Darkness, but the general idea is that there won't be many people in Outer Darkness, except for apostates from Mormonism—people who were deeply into Mormonism and then rejected it completely. Chances are, missionaries will not initiate any discussion on Outer Darkness because they don't see it as a real danger for you or for them.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

Hell is state of complete separation from God’s goodness. It is the fate of all souls who rejected the salvation that Christ offers in this life—those who sought independence from God.

How to Talk About it:

To avoid ambiguity, you may want to stick with the term “outer darkness.” (It *is*, after all, a biblical term, used by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew.)

Hell (or outer darkness) is worth mentioning because Jesus mentioned it quite a bit. Ask them what they believe about outer darkness, who they think goes there and why, how they’ve come to believe that, and use that as a starting point to compare and contrast your understanding of what hell is and why anyone would end up there.

Mormons will frequently ask Christians: “So, do you think I’m going to hell because I’m Mormon?” This is often a “bait” question to expose you as judgmental and narrow-minded. A good response to this question is to remind them that our eternal destiny is not determined by our church membership, but rather by our standing with God. We have neither the authority nor wisdom to proclaim eternal judgment on anyone else, but we *can* point to what the Bible says in places like John 3:16-18. Eternal life versus condemnation is stark in its black-and-white simplicity.

Sometimes Mormons will fall back on, “Well, we’ll get it all sorted in the Spirit World anyway.” But the Bible doesn’t offer any reason to expect a “second chance” after death. Quite the contrary—Hebrews 9:27 tells us that judgment comes right after death. (Ironically, in the Book of Mormon, Alma 34:34-36 states this with even more explicit clarity. This is another instance where Book of Mormon theology differs drastically from current Mormon teaching.)

Another question they ask is, “What about the people who lived before Jesus?” Mormons believe that their baptisms for the dead are the solution to this problem. Even so, if you play out this logic, it *still* doesn’t

seem to work; what about the millions upon millions of people who have lived throughout history without any kind of genealogical record of their existence (since Mormons rely upon this to baptize for the dead)? What hope is there for them?

God is the perfect judge for every soul that stands before him at the judgment. It is his judgment, and *not* whether or not we performed the right rituals (or had them performed for us) that will determine our eternal destiny. We stand condemned because of our *sin*, not because of what we didn't have a chance to learn. Paul says in the first chapter of Romans that everyone is without excuse; all have access to the knowledge of God (Romans 1:19-20). Since God's grace is the only thing that saves *any* of us from hell/outer darkness, his judgments are right in both who he receives and who he condemns, and he grants grace according to his perfect knowledge and will.

But make no mistake; Jesus said very specifically that he is the *only* way to God's presence (John 14:6). The doctrines and teachings of Mormonism lead down a much different path. Whoever persists in rejecting Jesus in favor of a different way (like the Mormon system of works righteousness) has "fallen from grace" as it says in Galatians 5:4. Those are sobering warnings that we must take seriously.

Limit your discussions on hell to what you read in the Bible and can defend biblically. This is not the time or place to trot out extra-biblical speculations, suppositions, or theological debates. And remember, if you are asked questions about hell, or any other biblical subject that strays into areas where you are uncertain, you are always free to say, "That's a good question, let me do some study, and we can talk about it next time."

Some relevant Bible verses:

Daniel 12:2; Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 25:31-46;
Luke 12:5; Luke 13:24; John 3:18; John 5:24; Romans 2:5;
Hebrews 9:27.

JESUS

How Mormonism Defines Him:

Jesus is the firstborn³⁰ child of Heavenly Father (and a Heavenly Mother). Since we are all children of Heavenly Father and a heavenly mother, we are the literal siblings of Jesus Christ in the pre-existence. He is our “elder brother.” He became our Savior because he proposed a plan of salvation for humanity that pleased Heavenly Father. Incidentally, Lucifer, who would go on to become the devil, is also one of our elder spiritual brothers. He, too, proposed a plan of salvation, but it was rejected, and in a jealous rage, he rebelled and became a fallen angel together with those who followed him.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

Jesus is God (**John 1:1; 14**). He is in very nature God (**Philippians 2:6**); in whom the fullness of deity exists (**Colossians 2:9**); and he is the exact representation of God’s being (**Hebrews 1:3**). His Godhood was foretold in the Old Testament (**Isaiah 9:6**). He made all things, and existed before all things (**Colossians 1:16-17**). It is through his death and resurrection that the penalty of our sin was canceled (**Colossians 2:14**) and by which we can be declared righteous by turning to him with faith in his completed work (**Romans 4:5**), and be adopted as children of God and fellow heirs (**Galatians 4:7**).

³⁰ There are several references in the Bible to Jesus as the “firstborn” (e.g., Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15 & 18) that sometimes cause confusion among Christians, and are misunderstood by many Mormons. While Jesus is rightfully called the firstborn of Mary (Luke 2:7), the term firstborn in both the Old and New Testaments was frequently not about biological birth order, but rather was a title given to someone meaning “possessing the full authority and weight of the Father.” For example, when Jesus is called the “firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15) it is not saying that Jesus was the first being that was created. That would contradict the verses immediately surrounding it. Instead, it is saying that Jesus has complete authority over *all creation*.

How to Talk About Him:

Jesus should be at the *center* of your discussions with the Mormons—Jesus, not church. Communicate the reality of your relationship with him, and how that plays out in your life. For many Mormons, Jesus is a means to an end—someone whose sacrifice opened up the pathway to the “Plan of Salvation” for us. However, the Bible presents Jesus not as someone who opened the way, but who IS the way. He IS our eternal life. He is central to all that we do.

While the Jesus of Mormonism is starkly different in nature and being from the biblical Jesus, be cautious about throwing around terms like “false Jesus” or “another Jesus.” This can be misunderstood, or stir up unnecessary offense. Instead, try something like, “In Mormonism, Jesus seems to be portrayed in such-and-such a way, but what I read in the Bible says something very different. What are your thoughts on that?” Ask them questions about their own relationship with Jesus, what they believe about him, how he impacts their life. This makes it more natural for you to share your own experience and biblical understanding with them, in a way that is direct, but not contentious.

Your missionaries may be familiar with some of the differences between what Mormonism and biblical Christianity teach about Jesus. They will probably not actively pursue a discussion about those differences. They will speak highly of Jesus, saying things like, “Everything we do is about Jesus” or “We talk about Jesus all the time in our meetings.” They might actually believe this, but chances are, they have no idea what it really looks like to have Jesus at the center of their meetings...real worship, and praise of Jesus, or discussion of his sacrifice, his love, and his life-changing power in our lives. In fact, Mormons tend to shy away from speaking about Jesus on a familiar, first-name basis, which to them sounds presumptuous and irreverent. They will frequently refer to him instead as “Christ” or “The Savior.”

Some relevant Bible verses:

Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-4; John 8:57-59; John 10:30; Romans 5:1; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:9-10; Galatians 4:7; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-20; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 13:8

PRIESTHOOD

How Mormonism Defines It:

“The Priesthood” is the catch-all term for God’s leadership structure on earth. In Mormonism, God cannot govern his people apart from the Priesthood. At the top of the hierarchy (presumably) is Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith, followed by the current living Prophet, the “Presidency” (the prophet plus two counselors), the “Quorum of the Twelve,” (the twelve senior apostles), followed by the “Quorum of the Seventy” and together these men (and they are always men) are called “General Authorities.” Below the General Authorities are the local ecclesiastical leaders, stake presidents, and bishops.

In Mormonism, the two priesthood “levels” are the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood. Either priesthood is *only* conferred upon “worthy males.”

The lower level is the Aaronic priesthood, which can be conferred upon boys as young as twelve. The Melchizedek priesthood can only be conferred on worthy adult men. “Elder” is the entry-level “rank” of the Melchizedek priesthood. You’ll see the missionaries’ name tags printed as “Elder” followed by their last name. Prior to 1978, people of black African origin were disallowed from the Mormon priesthood. (See “FYI” inset note on page 23.)

Biblical / Christian Definition:

A priest is one who mediates between God and man. In the Old Testament, the priesthood consisted of only the biological male descendants of Aaron (Moses’ brother), who was of the tribe of Levi. No other man could be a part of the priesthood. The priests’ job was to intercede between God and the people, principally through the system of burnt sacrifices in the Jewish temple.

In the New Testament, the Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood fulfilled its purpose and was done away with because Jesus became the final atoning sacrifice for all time. For Christians, then, the only priesthood is the priesthood of *all* believers (see 1 Peter 2). Jesus Christ is the *only* high priest, our one mediator between God and man. Yet we as followers of Jesus—male, female, old, young, regardless of ethnicity, background, or

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any other distinction, are together called “a royal priesthood” because we are *all* to be representatives of the Lord toward those who don’t yet know him—to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). As for the “Melchizedek” priesthood, its mention in the Bible is brief, and in the New Testament it is only in reference to Jesus as our high priest. (He was not a Levite, so he would not be a priest in the traditional sense).

How to Talk About it:

Discuss the historical nature of the priesthood. In the Old Testament, the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood was religious servanthood, specifically performing the sacrifices God ordained to deal with the sin of Israel. It was not a hierarchical authority structure as you find in Mormonism. They were not a “ruling class.” The Aaronic priesthood was intended to foreshadow the coming final high priest, Jesus Christ, whose own sacrifice provided the full covering of our sin. This sacrifice did away completely with the need for the services of the Aaronic priesthood.

The idea of a “priesthood of all believers” is a foreign concept for most Mormons. But the Bible’s picture is of an egalitarian society with Jesus as the head, and all believers—young, old, male and female—on equal footing before him (Galatians 3:28). While some Christian churches do have internal authority structures, they are generally administrative in nature, and have no bearing on issues of eternal life. In fact, Jesus specifically warns against the type of authoritarianism that is characteristic of Mormon leadership (see Luke 22:25-27).

Some relevant Bible verses:

Luke 22:25-27 (authority); Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 3:1;
Hebrews 4:14-15; Hebrews 5:5-10; Hebrews 7:11-28; 1 Peter 2:5-9

PROPHET

How Mormonism Defines It:

The Prophet in Mormonism is God's only mouthpiece on earth at any given time. He is called a "prophet, seer, and revelator." The modern-day prophet is also the president of the LDS Church and inherits the same gift and "keys" (power and authority) as the previous Mormon prophets, all the way back to Joseph Smith. Mormonism teaches that these keys were handed down through all the biblical "prophets" going back to Adam. (Many Old Testament figures like Adam, Noah, Isaac and Jacob are called "prophets" in Mormonism, though the Bible never refers to them as such.) Prophets are considered leaders of the people, and they are at the top of the hierarchical pyramid.

A modern prophet is believed to be necessary to govern God's true church. During the "great apostasy," that period of time from the apostles' death until the time of Joseph Smith, there was no living prophet on the earth, therefore no priesthood authority to speak on God's behalf.

The President, his two counselors, and the Quorum of the Twelve are all referred to as "apostles and prophets" but when they speak of *The Prophet* or *The Living Prophet*, they are referring to the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The word *prophet* just means "a messenger who speaks on God's behalf." It's a title of function, not authority. Prophets were raised up by God at specific times and for specific purposes. Prophets could be male or female, young or old. There could be one, few, or many living and prophesying at the same time. With a few exceptions, they were not considered "leaders." For that matter, they weren't necessarily even part of the Levitical priesthood line (some were, but it was not a prerequisite). Neither was it a calling that was to be transferred from one person to another (though there is an instance of this, in the case of Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2). By and large, prophets were not loved by their contemporaries. Most Old Testament prophets pronounced warning and judgment on their people and were often despised and even killed by their own people!

In the New Testament, God continued to use people to speak truth on his behalf. Like in the Old Testament, it was not connected to an office of leadership or authority; rather, it was one of many functions and gifts that exist within the churches. Not all prophets were leaders, and not all leaders were prophets. Prophets were not elevated above any of the other functions in the church, either in importance or in authority.

How to Talk About it:

Mormon missionaries think of prophets as *leaders with priesthood authority*. It's difficult to get past this mentality. They will say that God needs these leaders to govern his church today, just like in biblical times. Mormon prophets command awe and reverence, and function almost like heads of state. There is little resemblance between the biblical prophets and the prophets of Mormonism. The Bible repeatedly warns us to test prophets; Jesus himself said that there would be many false prophets.

Mormons believe that the "living prophet" of Mormonism is their safeguard against error and apostasy, and that it's necessary to have a specially-anointed man to steer and guide the church. For Mormons, the idea of being without a "living prophet" is unthinkable, and they marvel that "apostate" Christianity can function without one. But here's the point you may want to bring before the missionaries: we *aren't* without a living prophet. If they believe Jesus was a prophet, and if they believe that Jesus is alive, then he is our "living prophet" in the most literal sense. His presence is real, his guidance is real, and it shapes and directs our lives, because we are in relationship with him. Mormons tend to see traditional Christianity as a disorganized free-for-all, lacking any legitimate organizational structure or authority; what they fail to understand is that there is a remarkable amount of "coordination" that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Matthew 5:17; Matthew 7:15; Matthew 11:9-15;
Matthew 23:37; Matthew 24:11; Matthew 24:24; Luke 2:26-38;
Acts 3:17-25; Acts 7:52; Acts 10:42-43; Acts 13:1-2;
1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 1 Corinthians 14:29; Ephesians 4:11-12;
Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

REPENTANCE

How Mormonism Defines It:

“Repentance” in Mormonism is defined as a conviction of sin, godly sorrow for sin, and the abandonment of sin, by which we can be forgiven. The traditional teaching is that for repentance to be authentic, it must result in the *complete cessation of the sin*—that is, making yourself sinless. Only in this way do we qualify for God’s forgiveness.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The Greek word **μετάνοια** (*metanoia*) is the New Testament word translated as “repentance” and means, literally, “the change of one’s mind” or “transformation of one’s thinking.” The idea is a personal transformation that results from a personal encounter with God. It can be equated with “conversion,” or the “renewing of our mind” mentioned in Romans 12:2. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated as “repent” means “to turn back,” as in, to turn away from our current selfish course, and turn toward God and his ways. So repentance *does* carry the meaning of turning from our sin, but it goes much deeper than that. It is the opening of our blinded eyes, and a life-changing encounter that causes us to see that our sinful ways lead to death, but that walking with Jesus leads to abundant life.

How to Talk About it:

Because “repentance” in Mormonism is ultimately the complete ceasing of sin, most Mormons who are honest with themselves realize that this is unrealistic. They are still “trying” but never fully succeeding. This either sends them into despair, or requires them to believe a milder version of this teaching. More recently, there has been some softening of their hard-line stance on repentance, but it is *still* something that we must accomplish by our own efforts. Either way, the Mormon teaching misses the true point of repentance.

When you speak of repentance, speak of it in simple terms to reflect the biblical meaning. For example, you can say things like, “When I committed my life to Jesus, he began to change my will and my appetite for sin, and he has given me power over it. He has made me see how destructive it is, and this causes me to hate it more and more. And even

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when I do sin, I know that I can acknowledge it before him, and trust in his forgiveness, and his power to enable me to overcome it.” When we give our lives to Jesus Christ, we are turning toward him, and our thinking about him...and everything else...is restructured. This involves dealing with sin, but it is not dependent on willpower or human effort. In fact, repentance is even described as a gift from God (e.g., Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25); it is connected to God’s power in our lives to be rid of sin and be in fellowship with him.

Some relevant Bible verses:

2 Chronicles 6:36-39; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; Acts 11:18; Acts 20:20-21; Acts 26:20; Romans 2:4; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5

SALVATION

How Mormonism Defines it:

Salvation in Mormonism has two different definitions: “Universal Salvation” and “Individual Salvation”. *Universal* salvation refers to the resurrection from the dead (salvation from the grave), and this is the only “salvation” that Jesus’ atonement purchased (and is given to all mankind, good and bad alike). When a Mormon says that we are “saved by grace” they usually mean “Jesus has freely given us the gift of resurrection.” What happens *after* resurrection depends upon us, though.

This is where “Individual Salvation” comes in. This refers to exaltation to the highest kingdom in Mormonism, or eternal life. Individual salvation is made *possible* through Jesus’ atonement, but only as one stepping stone. Beyond that, it depends on Mormon temple ordinances, temple marriage, and obedience to Mormon teachings.

Biblical / Christian Definition

The Bible refers to “salvation” or “being saved” as Jesus paying the complete penalty for our sin (we are saved **from** God’s justified wrath and punishment). Since our sin is *the* problem that prevents us from

spending eternity in God’s presence, being saved from the eternal consequences of our sin is what enables us to live in that hope. We are simultaneously saved *from* the penalty of our sins (hell) and saved *to* eternal life with God, and that salvation begins and ends with Jesus.

How to Talk About it:

Because “salvation” and “saved” are one of the most misunderstood words, we strongly urge you to avoid them whenever possible. Speak instead about the meaning *behind* the word. What happens to us when we die? What kind of life do we expect to live with God? What does our eternal future look like? What has to happen for us to enjoy that? What are the things that could get in the way of our life with God? What is the source of our confidence that we can live with God forever? Do the missionaries have that confidence? If so, why? If not, why not? If the missionaries use the word “saved” or “salvation,” *gently* ask them to define it for you.

Keep in mind, they likely know that “salvation by works” is a hot-button issue for Christians, so they may soft-pedal this in your presence and be cagey on the traditional Mormon teaching that eternal life depends on upon our works. Talking about “eternal life” gets *closer* to the meaning of saved, but even that carries some potential for misunderstanding. (See ***Eternity/Eternal Life.***)

Some relevant Bible verses:

Exodus 15:2; Psalm 13:5; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 62:1-7; Isaiah 45:22; Isaiah 51:6; Joel 2:32; Luke 18:25-27; John 3:16-17; Acts 4:12; Acts 15:11; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 3:4-6; Hebrews 2:2-4; 1 Peter 1:8-10

SIN

How Mormonism Defines It:

Sin is that behavior which displeases God. Mormons will all admit that they’re “not perfect” or that they “make mistakes” but generally don’t like to call themselves “sinners” since that’s a term that usually refers to

someone who is involved in really bad behavior and breaking the moral code of Mormonism. Thoughts and attitudes can be sinful, but Mormonism focuses more on the outward behaviors (which can be managed, at least in part), rather than on the inward condition of the heart.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

According to the Bible, sin is the condition into which all humans, save Jesus himself, are born. We are all sinners and all deserving of condemnation. It is the pervasive rebellion against God and his standard of righteousness that affects and infects each and every one of us. Jesus said that the heart condition was just as important as the outward manifestation of sin—hatred is equal to murder, lust is equal to adultery, and so forth. Jesus taught that it is what is in our hearts that defile us (Matthew 15:19-20).

How to Talk About it:

Mormons who are doing a good job of keeping up with the Mormon codes of conduct will not want to think of themselves as “sinners.” So when they hear Christians freely admit that “we are all sinners” they find this idea troubling. To them, it sounds like we’re saying, “we all engage in immoral behavior, and that’s okay.” This connects to their belief that the Christians’ idea of “saved by grace” means we can pray a little prayer to be saved, and then can go revel in an immoral lifestyle without consequence, feeling secure in our eternal life.

What Mormons need to understand is that the nature and problem of sin is far deeper and more pervasive than they might realize. It’s not only about misbehaving or being immoral. The real issue lies in the heart. Talk about our natural bent toward rebellion against God—even in what we might think of as “little” ways—the things that we might euphemistically call “imperfections” or “mistakes.” If God’s standard of righteousness is 100% perfection, then there is no such thing as a “small” sin. The murder, the theft, and the “harmless” little lie are equally deserving of God’s wrath. And just as a criminal is convicted on the basis of his crime (any other good works he may have done don’t count in his favor), our guilt cannot be “balanced out” by our good deeds.

Sin is not just the outward behavior, which we can sometimes control—to a degree. It is *stuck* in our hearts and our minds, and those things are beyond our ability to fix. Our external behavior might be exemplary compared to our peers, but if we have ever secretly harbored pride, resentment, self-righteousness, unforgiveness, selfish motives, anger, uncharitable and impure thoughts, then sin is still stuck in us—we are sinners deserving God’s wrath, every last one of us. And to say otherwise is to fool ourselves and call God a liar (1 John 1:8-10).

Some relevant Bible verses:

Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 51:4-5; Psalm 103:10; Matthew 1:21; Matthew 9:6-13; Matthew 15:19-20; Luke 15:7; John 8:34; John 16:7-9; Acts 3:19-20; Romans 3:21-26; Romans 5:7-9; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6 (whole chapter); Romans 7:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 9:28; James 2:10; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 1:7-10; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 John 3:6-9; 1 John 4:10

TEMPLE

How Mormonism Defines it:

The Mormon temples are sacred places where saving ordinances are performed and where deeper doctrine is taught. The primary rituals performed there are:

- 1. *baptisms for the dead***, in which people are baptized by proxy for people who have died without the benefit of a Mormon baptism. This is said to give the dead person an opportunity to become Mormon in the afterlife. It is frequently performed by youth in a special part of the temple where youth are allowed to go.
- 2. *The endowment ceremony***, which involves a symbolic washing and anointing, the receiving of special undergarments which are to be worn at all times, and oaths of allegiance to the Mormon Church.

3. Celestial marriage, in which couples are married, or “sealed” for eternity. Celestial marriage is necessary for exaltation. (Originally “celestial” marriages were *plural* marriages.) Both the endowment ceremonies and celestial marriages can also be performed by proxy for the dead.

Only Mormons who are considered “worthy” are allowed inside the temple. To be considered worthy, a Mormon must have a “temple recommend.” This comes in the form of an identification card that Mormons receive after a successful interview with ecclesiastical leaders, who determine whether or not that the person is worthy—that is, that they are following all the laws and ordinances of the Mormon Church.

As of this printing, there are more than 150 Mormon temples around the world.

Biblical / Christian Definition

The Temple as a building was singular; before the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, there was one Tabernacle which traveled with the Israelites through the wilderness following their escape from Egypt. This was eventually replaced by a solid building, but there was only one place that was authorized for a temple to be built, and that was on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, which is today called “The Temple Mount.” The function of the Temple (and before that, the Tabernacle) times was chiefly about performing sacrifices for the sins of the people. Only male descendants of Aaron were allowed inside the temple building itself (meaning even Jesus himself wasn’t eligible to enter the temple building). There were no other rituals performed in the temple (no endowment ceremonies, no marriages, no baptisms for the dead or for the living).

How to Talk About it:

As we’ve frequently mentioned before, the subject of Mormon temples is tricky, because there is much secrecy that surrounds them, so we don’t encourage questioning about the details of the ceremonies that go on in the Mormon temple. Keep your questions directed at the ultimate *purpose* of the temples. For example, Mormons often try to draw a connection between today’s Mormon temples and the Old Testament Jewish temple. But this is a difficult connection to make. For example,

Mormon temples don't do animal sacrifices, and there were no baptisms for the dead or marriage ceremonies that went on in the Jewish temple. The Bible describes the purpose and activities in the Jewish temple in great detail. No secrets!

The temple, and the sacrifices performed there, were intended to prefigure the coming of Jesus, who would be the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. He even referred to *himself* as the temple (John 2:18-21). When Jesus died on the cross, three of the gospels record that the thick curtain in the Jewish Temple was ripped from top to bottom. The implication of this is that through Jesus, the veil that separated God's presence from man was done away with. As of that moment in time, the temple building was no longer necessary for people to approach God. This was affirmed later by Paul when he addressed the Athenians in Acts 17; and in several places in the New Testament, the believers themselves that are called the "temple" of God (for example, 1 Corinthians 6:19).

Some relevant Bible verses:

1 Kings 6-8; Matthew 26:61; John 2:18-21; Acts 17:24;
1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Revelation 21:22.

TRINITY / GODHEAD

How Mormonism Defines It:

Mormons reject the traditional doctrine of the Trinity (that God is revealed as three persons, yet one God). Mormons will, however, acknowledge that Heavenly Father is a god, that Jesus is a god, and that the Holy Ghost is a god. They are collectively known as "The Godhead" and are considered united in purpose, though not in being or essence.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

The Trinity is a doctrine that recognizes four declarations that the Bible plainly makes: 1) there is only one God; 2) The Father is God; 3) Jesus Christ is God, and 4) The Holy Spirit is God. That is the Trinity, in its most basic definition. Theologians have spent centuries discussing the mechanics of how this works, but God is not bound by our human

limitations of matter, time and space, so there are aspects of his nature that will defy our finite ability to grasp. Nevertheless, when you gather together the Bible's descriptions of God's nature and character, the Trinity is an inescapable conclusion.

How to Talk About it:

The Trinity is a hot-button topic for Mormons, who mischaracterize the doctrine as an ugly, three-headed monster. They will often claim that it was developed as a concession to pagan Greek philosophy during the Council of Nicaea. (This, by the way, is a common myth, but it is historically inaccurate.)

Nevertheless, pursuing a course of discussion on the Trinity is usually not productive. This is not to say that the Trinity isn't important. A right understanding of the Trinity facilitates a deeper understanding of God and the the biblical gospel. But there are so many fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of God that have to be unraveled before any productive talk about the Trinity can even begin to happen.

First is a Mormon's materialistic view of God—that God the Father is a physical man of flesh and bone, someone who is bound by the same space-and-time reality that we are. For this reason, the Trinity doesn't make sense in their worldview. It prompts questions like "Was Jesus praying to himself in the Garden of Gethsemane?" Some of the fundamental characteristics of God—infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-present, not bound by space or time; creator of, and existing independently of, all creation...these are all concepts that have to be dealt with before you can gain any traction with the Trinity. While Mormons may use words like "infinite" and "eternal" and "almighty" in reference to God, the reality is, Mormonism teaches a God who is not infinite, not eternal, not all-powerful, not all-present, not all-knowing. He exists within the confines of space and time, and is bound by the same laws of eternal progression that bind everyone else.

Because the nature and divinity of Jesus Christ are usually at the center of the Trinity controversy with Mormons, it is more practical to focus on the nature, being, and purpose of Jesus Christ. As a perfect and exact representation of God's being (Hebrews 1:3), knowing Jesus is knowing God. Jesus came to make God known and knowable. There is no God separate from, or "hiding behind" Jesus. As Jesus said in John 14:9,

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Therefore, when Jesus is rightly understood, the issues concerning the Trinity are more easily resolved.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 43:10-11; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1, 14; John 8:58; John 10:30-38; John 12:45; John 14:7-10; John 20:28; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:10; Colossians 1:15; Colossians 2:8-9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:3-8; 2 Peter 1:1; Revelation 22:13

WORKS / DEEDS

How Mormonism Defines It:

The works that are necessary for exaltation (eternal life) include obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Mormon gospel (that is, the Mormon moral code and the temple rituals). Mormons teach that eternal life is dependent upon both the atoning work of Jesus to forgive sins, AND our continued obedience to the Mormon gospel. Failure to live up to those standards adequately will prevent you from achieving a place in the Celestial Kingdom.

Biblical / Christian Definition:

Works (good deeds) are a natural product of someone who has been transformed by a relationship with Jesus Christ, and evidence of a changed life; they are not, however, something that contributes to salvation, or that qualifies (or disqualifies) anyone from eternal life. According to Jesus, the two greatest commandments are to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. There is no mention of religious rituals in these “works”. Jesus further stated that the “work” that God requires is to believe in the One he sent (John 6:27-29).

How to Talk About it:

Mormons frequently quote James 2:14-17 (“Faith without deeds is dead”) to justify their position that works are required for eternal life. They often presume that Christians ignore or reject this passage.

Remember that Mormons are taught that “born again” Christians believe and teach that we can call ourselves “saved” and then go live as we please. This idea is offensive to someone who has really been converted. So when James 2 is brought into the discussion, it’s important that they understand that we agree *wholeheartedly* with what James is saying: faith without deeds IS dead. Because authentic faith will, by its very nature, manifest itself in works. If it doesn’t, then we are right to question whether it’s a living faith. But even here, you need to press further: what are the “deeds” that James is referring to? Many Mormons automatically assume they are the “works” of Mormonism. But none of this is found in James, or anywhere else in the Bible. (In this context, James is referring mainly to the way we treat one another, which also forms the basis of most of Jesus’ commands to us.)

Our salvation—that is, the work of God in us—moves us to do works that please him. Works, then, are *evidence* of our salvation—that is, things we would expect to see in someone who is saved. But it is not the cause or qualifier of salvation.

Some relevant Bible verses:

Psalm 49:7-8; Isaiah 64:6; Luke 18:9-14; John 6:27-29; Romans 4:1-7; Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 2:20-23; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-5; James 2:14-17.

Other common terms you might run into...

Agency: (also “Free Agency”) a common Mormon term that approximates the Christian idea of “free will,” but with some added spin. Jesus’ “plan of salvation” includes our free agency to choose to obey or not to obey the gospel of Mormonism. “Free Agency” is also used as a denial of the biblical doctrine of “original sin,” or the idea that mankind is born into sin and is naturally bent toward rebellion.

Burning in the Bosom: An emotional and/or physical experience that is perceived as a confirmation from God concerning a matter. Often in reference to the truthfulness of the LDS Church or one of its tenets.

Holy Ghost: The third person of the Mormon godhead, a separate being from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit: (Less common in usage) refers specifically to the spiritual presence of Heavenly Father. Sometimes just called “The Spirit.”

Priestcraft: Paid clergy, which is a sign of the corruption of apostate Christianity. The Mormon clergy on the local level are unpaid volunteers, a point which they take great pride in. However, there is a certain hypocrisy here, as the General Authorities of Mormonism are all well-compensated. This in itself is not a problem, because the Bible teaches that those whose vocations are in service to the church should be compensated. (See: Matthew 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 9:13-15; 1 Timothy 5:17-19). But Mormonism takes great pains to accuse churches who have paid pastors of engaging in this evil “priestcraft.”

Testimony: A statement of belief in the LDS Church, or one of the tenets of the Mormon faith. To “bear one’s testimony” is to state this belief to someone or in a public setting.

Witness: A “testimony,” that is, a conviction or confirmation of something. A common phrase is to “receive a personal witness from the Holy Ghost” which often refers to a feeling that comes over someone to convince them of the truthfulness of something (usually the LDS Church or one of its tenets.) *Testimony*, *Witness*, and *Burning in the Bosom* are often used almost interchangeably.

8. MORMONISM'S MISUSE OF THE BIBLE

Like many heretical movements, Mormonism claims to draw many of its teachings from the Bible (while at the same time challenging the Bible's authority and reliability). So the Bible is, at best, considered subordinate to Mormonism. Passages are given more respect based on whether they fit (or appear to fit) Mormonism's teachings. Often in order to make a passage "fit" Mormon doctrine, it has to be removed from its proper context, and/or given an interpretation that is often bizarre and even nonsensical. When Mormons are challenged on this, the typical comeback is "what makes *your* interpretation better than ours?" It's an important question. The answer should always be that the best "interpretation" isn't really an interpretation at all, but a straightforward reading of the passage, taken in its full context, and in the context of all of scripture. (Bible scholars call this *exegesis*—letting the Bible speak for itself, without imposing preconceived notions upon it.)

If you spend much time discussing the Bible with a Mormon, you will likely run into at least one of these examples we provide here. And this is by no means an exhaustive list.

1. The "Burning in the Bosom": A legitimate test of God's truth

Luke 24:32 – "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"

When the unnamed disciples were walking to Emmaus immediately following Jesus' death and resurrection, they were visited, unbeknownst to them, by the risen Jesus. However, Mormons have used this passage to "prove" that our feelings ("burning in the bosom") are a valid test of truth. The verse, of course, suggests nothing of the sort. Was the disciples' emotional reaction real? Of course. But it was the revelation of Jesus in the scriptures, and not their emotional response, that put the seal of truth on this encounter.

2. The Great Apostasy: The total disappearance of authentic Christianity

1 Timothy 4:1 – "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

2 Thessalonians 2:3 – “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (KJV)

Matthew 24:24 – “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

The Bible does indeed warn about apostasy, and says that people *will* be deceived, and will fall away from the faith. But Mormons will say these verses are the Bible’s prediction of a universal “Great Apostasy.” The trouble is, there is nothing in any of these verses to even hint that the falling away is total and universal, as is taught in Mormonism. Ironically, these verses are the very ones that are often used by Christians to warn about the false teachings of Mormonism and other false belief systems!

3. Works are Necessary for Salvation

James 2:17, 24 – *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

1 Corinthians 9:27 – *I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*

Matthew 25:45-46 – “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

The Bible contains a number of sobering reminders of what kind of behavior is expected of followers of Jesus, as well as the consequences of disobedience. The crown jewel in Mormonism’s claim that salvation is by works is James chapter 2, which they usually set up against the frequently-cited “saved by grace” verses, like Ephesians 2:8-9. But it is a merely a “phantom contradiction” which disappears when the full context of scripture is taken into account. James rightly says that a faith that produces no good works is worthless. Good fruit is the evidence of the life changed by the grace of God. Salvation results in good works, not the other way around. Mormons often accuse biblical Christians of licentiousness, believing we are saved and can then sin with impunity. But anyone who really thinks this way has no knowledge of God’s grace.

4. The coming of the Book of Mormon is Propheesied in the Bible

Ezekiel 37:16-17 – “Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Belonging to Joseph (that is, to Ephraim) and all the Israelites associated with him.’ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

Somewhere in the previous decades, Mormon apologists grabbed ahold of this verse and declared that the “two sticks prophecy” of Ezekiel 37 was really a reference to the Bible (“Belonging to Judah”) and the Book of Mormon (“Belonging to Joseph”, presumably a reference to Joseph Smith). Granted, this seems like a bizarre and far-fetched interpretation to outsiders, but we mention it here because it is so built-in to Mormon thinking, that to them it is practically *self-evident*. They are so convinced of the correctness of this interpretation that they will confidently throw this passage down in front of a Christian and say, “See? Proof that the Book of Mormon is genuine!” But if you read a few verses later, the metaphor is explained with crystal clarity—it refers to the reunification of the nations of Judah and Israel. (It is ultimately a messianic prophecy.) But most Mormons have never read the verses that immediately follow, or at least have not considered the implications.

5. Jesus refers to visiting the Americas in the book of John

John 10:16 – I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Mormonism teaches that shortly after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Native Americans (or the “Lamanites”) in the Americas, and taught them. So for Mormons, this verse *obviously* refers to that American visit. Now, if there were even the tiniest shred of evidence that Jesus had actually visited the Americas, then they might be on to something. However, a far more likely interpretation, and one assumed by practically every biblical scholar, based on the full context of the New Testament, is that the “other sheep” refer to the Gentiles—that is, the non-Jews. Elsewhere Jesus says that he intended that the gospel be preached in all nations (e.g., Mark 13:10, Matthew 28:19, and Luke 24:47), not just the Americas.

The idea of Jesus going to the Americas is based on the assumption that the Native Americans are among the lost tribes of Israel, and so Jesus was just completing his mission of bringing the gospel to his people Israel. However,

there is no evidence to support any connection between Native Americans and Israel, and plenty of evidence to contradict it.

6. Heaven is divided into the Three Degrees of Glory

1 Corinthians 15:40-41 – There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. (KJV)

2 Corinthians 12:2 – I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.

John 14:2 – In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

Mormonism teaches the existence of three heavenly kingdoms—the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial. When Mormons appeal to the Bible for support, they usually cite one or more of the verses above. However, the “bodies” that Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 15 are not kingdoms, they are...well, *bodies*. Paul is comparing the bodies we have here on the earth (“bodies terrestrial”), with the bodies we will have after the resurrection (“celestial bodies”) when we are with Christ. The word “telestial” is not found anywhere outside of Mormonism. It appears to be a word that Joseph Smith made up.

When Paul speaks of being caught up into the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12, this is a throwback to the ancient view of heaven. The “first heaven” is what we would today call the atmosphere, the “second heaven” is outer space beyond our atmosphere, and the “third heaven” refers to the place where God dwells.

As for the “many rooms” or “many mansions” of John 12, it’s another odd interpretation that makes sense in the confines of Mormon interpretation, in which this understanding has been drilled into Mormon believers from an early age.

7. Man Can Become a God

Genesis 2:26 – Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...”

1 John 3:2 – But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Psalms 82:6 – “I said, ‘You are “gods”’; you are all sons of the Most High.’”

Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Revelation 3:21 – To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Mormonism teaches that God was once a man, and that men can become as God through obedience to the Mormon gospel. When they appeal to the Bible to support this idea, some of the above verses are often referenced. In **Genesis**, we are made “in his image” but that is not the same thing as being gods in embryo; a photograph of a mountain (which, you could argue, is made “in the image of” a mountain) will never *become* a mountain, even though it partially reflects its nature and beauty.

Likewise in **1 John**, we are called to be imitators of Christ, and so we will be “like” him in certain characteristics. To share certain qualities, even to bear his image, though, does not mean that we become his equal.

The reference to “gods” in **Psalms 82** is an ironic statement, especially considering that the following line reads, “...But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.” The Psalmist (and later Jesus quoting that Psalm in John 10) is using this as a rhetorical argument, not to teach that man could become equal to God.

Matthew 5:48 is perhaps one of the best-known (and most quoted) Bible verses among Mormons. After all, why would Jesus command us to be perfect like Heavenly Father if it weren’t possible to do? But this passage is not talking about sinlessness, but perfection in the sense of “complete-ness” or “wholeness”. And that is something that we can only experience in relationship to Jesus Christ. If it really did refer to sinless perfection, who could qualify?

In **Revelation** it is promised that those who belong to Christ will rule with him. But just as in the 1 John example, it’s a far leap from there to becoming equal to God.

8. All people were born in the Pre-Existence

Jeremiah 1:5 – Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...

Psalms 139:16 – Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Mormonism teaches that we all existed as spirit children prior to our birth on earth. There are a number of places in which the Bible alludes to God's foreknowledge, which makes sense if God is not bound by the confines of time and space like we are. However, there is no biblical teaching on pre-existence, and in fact there are a number of passages that categorically refute that idea (e.g., Genesis 2:7, Isaiah 44:24, John 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:44-46).

9. The Spirit World / Spirit Prison: a step between earth-life and judgment

1 Peter 3:18-20 – For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

1 Peter 4:6 – For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

There are some legitimate differences of opinion about the meaning of **1 Peter 3:19**, but most scholars take it at its simplest face value—that after his death, Jesus went to proclaim his victory to the spirits in prison—possibly the evil spirits (though this is not explicitly stated). It does not specify that these were *human* spirits, nor that it was preaching salvation for them. Some suppose that it was Jesus' victory cry over the fallen spirits.

As for **1 Peter 4:6**, it doesn't necessarily teach that the gospel was preached to people who had already died; given the context of the rest of scripture, the most straightforward reading is that it refers to the preaching of the gospel in the past to people who were alive at the time, but who have since died.

Even with the uncertainty of the meanings, what is for certain is that you can't extract from it the Mormon teachings that: 1) The Spirit World—either Paradise

or Spirit Prison, depending on where you stood with Mormonism—is a temporary destination of everyone who dies; 2) That temple work on earth is necessary for those in Spirit Prison to be saved; 3) That it offers a second chance after death to get things right, especially when taken in the context of other passages (e.g., Hebrews 9:27, Luke 16:19-31) which provide no support for that idea.

10. Baptism for the Dead must be practiced.

1 Corinthians 15:29 – Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

Mormons practice baptism on behalf of the souls trapped in Spirit Prison, who never had the opportunity to be baptized into the LDS Church in this life. Since baptism is a requirement for exaltation, this provides the opportunity for those who were born and died before the Mormon gospel was known on the earth. The verse in 1 Corinthians 15, by the way, is the *only* reference in the Bible to this practice. And note that the wording is “what shall *they* do...” and not “what shall *we* do...” When you look at the context, Paul isn’t talking about baptism, he’s talking about the resurrection, and why it matters that it actually happened. Paul is neither condemning or endorsing (and certainly not commanding) the practice of baptism for the dead. He’s just pointing out that it’s hypocritical for those who deny the resurrection yet still baptize for those who are dead. The Bible’s near-silence on the subject suggests that it is not an important issue, much less necessary for eternal life.

11. The Structure of the Mormon Church follows the early church model

Ephesians 2:20 – ... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ...

Ephesians 4:11-14 – And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ...

At any given time, Mormonism has one and only one “prophet,” and twelve “apostles” who make up the highest authority in the Church. The prophet functions like a CEO, and the apostles like vice-presidents. So whenever Mormonism appeals to the Bible to justify this authority structure, the two verses above in Ephesians almost always come up. Yet a simple reading of their context shows *absolutely nothing* to suggest that this was describing some sort of pyramid diagram of authority. The original twelve apostles, by virtue of

spending years under Jesus Christ when he was physically present in the world, served as the foundation for the teaching in the early church. There was no one “prophet” who sat over them (except Jesus himself). In fact, there was never just one “prophet” at all; there were many, and they were not necessarily considered leaders. Even the word “apostle” itself comes from a Greek word meaning “one who is sent out” so it could be synonymous with “missionary.” However, the term “apostle” in most cases is reserved for those who were present with Jesus during his incarnate ministry on earth—which no one alive today can claim.

The authority structure of the early church as we find described in the Bible was astonishingly simple. Jesus was the head; his people were (and are) the body. That’s it. While there are different functions within the body, each member’s purpose is to serve the body as a whole, and is all coordinated by the head, Jesus. In fact, the “lording over” mentality was actually *forbidden* by Jesus (Matthew 20:25-28), with whom there is no favoritism.

12. Modern-day Prophets are Required by God

Amos 3:7 – Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. (KJV)

When Mormons are challenged by Christians about their dependence on modern-day prophets, the verse Mormons often appeal to is Amos 3:7. Like many Mormon faulty interpretations of the Bible, a single passage (or in this case, a mere 17 words) is lifted out of its context, and transformed into a universal principle.

But when the verses before and after are read, we get a completely different picture. The context of Amos 3 is one of God declaring judgment on Israel. The previous verses list a number of warning signs (a lion roaring, a bird falling into a snare, a trumpet blowing, etc), followed by verse 7. The context clearly shows that the “nothing” that God would do without revealing it to prophets is referring specifically to the situation at hand; it is **not** some kind of universal principle that was meant to be applied at all times, to all situations.

9. SUGGESTED READING & ONLINE RESOURCES

This list is NOT exhaustive. There are many excellent resources out there with great information. Here are some of the ones we most frequently use and recommend.

BOOKS

- ***The Case for Christ*** (Lee Stroebel, Zondervan, 1998.)

To encourage the Christian's confidence in the rationality of faith in Christ. (Also see *The Case for Faith*, Stroebel, Zondervan, 2000.)

- ***How Good is Good Enough?*** (Andy Stanley, Multnomah Books, 2003.)

A great booklet for addressing the question of worthiness and what it really takes to get to Heaven. It makes no mention of Mormonism, so it's "safe" and not "anti-Mormon." We keep copies of this on hand to give away to seeking Mormons.

- ***How We Got the Bible*** (Neil R. Lightfoot, Baker Books, 2003.)

A great primer on how the Bible came to be, and why it is reliable. This information is helpful in discussing the misconceptions many Mormons have about the Bible's history and unreliability.

- ***Mormonism 101: Examining the Religion of the Latter-day Saints*** (Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson, Baker Books, 2015.)

An excellent overview of the doctrines of Mormonism and how they compare to orthodox Christianity.

- ***No Man Knows My History*** (Fawn Brodie, Vintage Books, 1995. Originally published by Knopf, 1945.)

This is for serious history buffs, but this classic book remains one of the few definitive works on the life of Joseph Smith.

- ***Understanding The Book of Mormon*** (Ross Anderson, Zondervan, 2009.)

A short volume that provides an outline of the Book of Mormon, its history, and its use in Mormonism, as well as its problems.

- ***Understanding Your Mormon Neighbor*** (Ross Anderson, Zondervan, 2011.)

A guide to understanding Mormonism’s culture and how to relate compassionately with Mormons.

- ***Unveiling Grace: The Story of How We Found Our Way out of the Mormon Church*** (Lynn K. Wilder, Zondervan, 2013.)

An intimate and compelling portrayal of a convert family’s ascent through the ranks of Mormonism, and their encounter with the living Jesus Christ.

WEBSITES

Information about Mormonism

Answers for Mormons (www.mscbc.org/mormonism)

Our own “clearing house” of information about Mormonism. It contains a number of our own original articles as well as links to many more resources.

Utah Lighthouse Ministry (www.utlm.org)

The research ministry of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, former Mormons and evangelical Christians who were pioneers in the effort to bring factual, reliable, and well-documented information concerning Mormonism. The extent of their resources is unequalled.

Mormonism Research Ministry (www.mrm.org)

Another ministry dedicated to sound and thorough research on Mormonism, covering a variety of subjects ranging from history to doctrine to methods of evangelism.

The Mormon Essays (www.mormonessays.com)

The official Mormon responses on some of the more controversial aspects of Mormonism and its history (racism, polygamy, unusual doctrines, etc.) The website is NOT an official LDS website, but the essays are collected from the text of official www.lds.org website (which is often hard to find). While these essays reflect the Mormon “spin” on these subjects, they are nonetheless valuable to anyone who is studying modern Mormonism and the way it addresses these matters.

Online Multimedia Resources of Main Street Church

Missionary 911 (www.missionary911.com)

Free access to online video and manual...plus updated information as it becomes available!

The Sacred Groves Network (www.sacredgroves.net)

A compilation of extended testimonies of people who have left Mormonism for an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Ex-Mormon Files (www.exmormonfiles.com)

A weekly online television program featuring the stories of people who have left Mormonism for Jesus Christ, featuring as host a former LDS bishop, Earl Erskine.

Polygamy: What Love Is This? (www.whatloveisthis.tv)

A weekly online television program featuring host Doris Hanson. The program covers a number of topics related to Mormon polygamy from a biblical Christian perspective.

Other Helpful Resources

Christian Apologetics & Research Committee (www.carm.org)

Institute for Religious Research (www.irr.org)

Watchman Fellowship (www.watchman.org)

The Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com)

The Bible Hub (www.biblehub.com)

Official LDS Resources

While obviously we don't "endorse" the content of these websites, we provide them for those who wish to explore Mormonism from the perspective of what it chooses to make public. Critics of the websites charge that it provides a "whitewashed" version of the Church that is neither thorough nor entirely honest. Nevertheless, it does contain useful information to those seeking to understand the Church better. View with discernment.

www.lds.org: *Official website of LDS Church*

www.lds.org/maps/meetinghouses: *Find local contact information for your area*

scriptures.lds.org: *Searchable text of all LDS scriptures*

www.lds.org/general-conference: *Audio, video and transcripts of all LDS general conferences*

www.mormon.org: *A promotional site intended for non-Mormon investigators, including online chatting with missionaries*

www.lds.org/manual/preach-my-gospel-a-guide-to-missionary-service: *The full contents of the missionaries' training manual, including the lessons they teach investigators.*

APPENDIX: BIBLE VERSE REFERENCE SHEET

We've listed many of the Bible verses that we've referred to in this manual here, roughly in the order in which they appear. Copy this page, or cut it out and stick it in your Bible for quick reference.

We become / are adopted as God's children: John 1:12; Romans 8:15, Romans 8:23; Romans 9:4, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5

There is only one God: Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 43:10-11; Isaiah 45:21; Isaiah 46:9; (Multiple references from Isaiah 40-46); 1 Timothy 2:5.

No second chances after death: Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:19-31 (Rich man and Lazarus).

We should pursue knowledge: Proverbs 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Jesus' Kingdom not of this world: John 8:23; John 18:36

Satan deceives by appearing as light: 2 Corinthians 11:14

Feelings not to be trusted: Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9

No pre-existence: Genesis 2:7, 1 Corinthians 15:45-47, John 1:18; John 3:31-32.

Sin infects all of us (original sin): Romans 5:12

The wages of sin is death: Romans 6:23

The "work" of God is to believe: John 6:28-29

Eternal life is knowing Jesus: John 17:3

Jesus speaks of condemnation: Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 25:31-46; John 3:18; Luke 16:19-31

Repentance is a gift from God: Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25

God keeps us from falling: Jude 1:24; and completes his work in us: Philippians 1:6

Endurance of the Church (no great apostasy): Matthew 16:18; John 15:16; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

Real history matters (Jesus' death and resurrection): 1 Corinthians 15:3-19

False prophets: Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Matthew 7:15

Jesus gives rest from labor: Matthew 11:28-29

Confidence to approach God: Hebrews 4:16

The Greatest Commandment is love God: Matthew 22:36-40

God loved us first: 1 John 4:7-21

The woman who anoints Jesus' feet: Luke 7:36-50

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Luke 18:9-14

The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-13

The final judgment: Matthew 7:21-23

---TOPICAL---

APOSTASY: Jeremiah 2:19; Hosea 14:4; Matthew 24:5-12; Mark 13:6; Galatians 1:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:1-4; Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 John 2:19

ATONEMENT: Romans 3:22-26; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7-8; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:19-20; Hebrews 9:11-28; Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:19-22

BAPTISM: Matthew 3:11; Mark 10:83-39; Mark 16:16; Luke 3:16; Luke 12:50; Acts 1:5; Acts 2:38; Acts 19:1-5; Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 1:13-17; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27.

BIBLE: Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 22:29; Luke 24:27-32; John 10:35; Acts 17:2; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12

CHRISTIAN: Matthew 10:38; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16; 1 Timothy 4:6

CHURCH: Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 1:22-23

CROSS: Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 1 Corinthians 2:1-3; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 3:18; Colossians 1:20; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 12:2

ETERNAL LIFE: John 3:15-17; John 3:36; John 5:24; John 10:28; John 17:3; Romans 6:22-23; Titus 3:4-7

FAITH: Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:6-12; Ephesians 1:13-14

GRACE: John 1:14-17; Acts 15:10-11; Romans 3:23-25; Romans 5:15-17; Romans 6:1-3; Romans 11:5-6; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:4-10; Titus 3:4-7

HEAVEN: Psalm 73:25-26; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 8:11; Matthew 18:3-4; Philippians 3:19-21; Hebrews 11:15-16

HELL: Daniel 12:2; Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 12:5; Luke 13:24; John 3:18; John 5:24; Romans 2:5; Hebrews 9:27.

JESUS (IS GOD): Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-4; John 8:57-59; John 10:30; Romans 5:1; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:9-10; Galatians 4:7; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 13:8

PRIESTHOOD: Luke 22:25-27 (authority); Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 3:1; Hebrews 4:14-15; Hebrews 5:5-10; Hebrews 7:11-28; 1 Peter 2:5-9

PROPHET: Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Matthew 5:17; Matthew 7:15; Matthew 11:9-15; Matthew 23:37; Matthew 24:11; Matthew 24:24; Luke 2:26-38; Acts 3:17-25; Acts 7:52; Acts 10:42-43; Acts 13:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 1 Corinthians 14:29; Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

REPENTANCE: 2 Chronicles 6:36-39; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; Acts 11:18; Acts 20:20-21; Acts 26:20; Romans 2:4; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5

SALVATION: Exodus 15:2; Psalm 13:5; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 62:1-7; Isaiah 45:22; Isaiah 51:6; Joel 2:32; Luke 18:25-27; John 3:16-17; Acts 4:12; Acts 15:11; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 3:4-6; Hebrews 2:2-4; 1 Peter 1:8-10

SIN: Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 51:4-5; Psalm 103:10; Matthew 1:21; Matthew 9:6-13; Matthew 15:19-20; Luke 15:7; John 8:34; John 16:7-9; Acts 3:19-20; Romans 3:21-26; Romans 5:7-9; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6 (whole chapter); Romans 7:24-25;

1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 9:28; James 2:10; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 1:7-10; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 John 3:6-9; 1 John 4:10

TEMPLE: 1 Kings 6-8; Matthew 26:61; John 2:18-21; Acts 17:24; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Revelation 21:22

TRINITY/GODHEAD: Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 43:10-11; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1, 14; John 8:58; John 10:30-38; John 12:45; John 14:7-10; John 20:28; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:10; Colossians 1:15; Colossians 2:8-9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:3-8; 2 Peter 1:1; Revelation 22:13

WORKS/DEEDS: Psalm 49:7-8; Isaiah 64:6; Luke 18:9-14; John 6:27-29; Romans 4:1-7; Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 2:20-23; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-5; James 2:14-17.

---MEMORY HOOKS---

APPLE PIES (Module 4):

A: Apostasy (Why did Jesus fail to keep the church together?)

PP: Plain and Precious (Where are the “restored truths” from the Book of Mormon?)

L: Lands (Why are there no known Book of Mormon Lands?)

E: Evidence (Where is the evidence that Jesus established a church in the Americas?)

P: Prophecies (Does Joseph Smith pass the test of a true prophet?)

I: Inspired Version (Why doesn't the LDS Church use Joseph Smith's translation?)

E: Everlasting Covenant (Why did Joseph Smith hide an important doctrine all his life?)

S: Successors (Do modern prophets exhibit the traits you'd expect from a prophet?)

BASEBALL (Module 5):

B: Before: Describe your life before you knew Jesus

A: Accepting: Describe what led to you follow Jesus

S: Sin: How do you deal with the sin still in your life?

E: Experience: Tell about your daily walk with Jesus today.

B: Bondage: Share that we are ALL in bondage to sin.

A: Accepting: Accepting Jesus is something we all can do; not a church thing.

LL: Loving the Lord: What does it mean to Love God?