

Nearly every salvation testimony I've heard from former LDS Church members contains one of the following phrases - "I had a Christian friend ..." or "A Christian was really nice to me." Far too often well-meaning Christians alienate LDS people with a confrontational approach that merely affirms stereotypes perpetuated by LDS folklore. Christian kindness is an essential ingredient to winning LDS individuals.

I can hear the question now - "Shouldn't theological differences be confronted?!" Yes, in due time. Unfortunately, born-again believers are often too eager to win a theological argument, too insecure to enter a genuine conversation, or too ignorant about the LDS worldview to witness effectively.

So how does the Christian demonstrate Christlike compassion, build redemptive friendships, and enter a meaningful conversation with an LDS friend? Well, I'm not going to lie - it's tricky. And it takes time - lots and lots of time. Here are five points I rehearse regularly.

Accept that the LDS Worldview is Different

Orthodox, Protestant Christianity assumes certain worldview realities: Bible authority in all matters of faith and practice; historical accuracy as a prerequisite for divine revelation; Scripture's plain sense; Biblical translation governed by normal linguistic practices; God has only ever been God; grace, by definition, cannot be earned; the necessity of a trained clergy; the need for theological coherence; the paramount place of an individual's theology; and I could fill up my word allotment just highlighting these basic convictions. Not only will your LDS friend reject all of the above, but he will immediately recognize them as constitutionally opposed to his own belief system. So fundamental are these differences that we must accept that LDS people possess a different worldview altogether.

Once the Christian accepts this sobering reality, he can begin demonstrating weaknesses in the LDS system. Here's the encouraging part - simple kindness from Christian to Mormon attacks a cornerstone of LDS faith: *Exclusivity*. LDS people believe they alone possess the restored gospel, the true priesthood, and the keys to happiness, morality, and faith. Yet, when LDS people are confronted with a Christian who graciously understands LDS doctrine, it waylays their worldview. Mormons alone possess priesthood authority, not you. You're supposed to be an obnoxious know-it-all that speaks confrontationally and utters all sorts of blasphemy about Joseph Smith. Simple kindness undercuts the LDS claim to exclusivity.

Appeal to Emotional Dissonance

LDS people almost uniformly experience intense personal doubts about Mormon history and theology. Every LDS friend of mine has admitted to these doubts and has chosen one of three paths. 1) Leave the church, usually to a form of deism. 2) Stay in the church on paper, but disconnect for all intents and purposes - we call these *Jack Mormons*. 3) Bury those doubts and use involvement in the LDS Church to repress nagging uncertainties. People in the third category are ripe for conversion.

Your LDS friend might put on a brave face in front of a Gentile (that's you!) - it's a mask. In fact, LDS leaders teach not to pursue doubts, not to think too hard about them, but to trust that Heavenly Father will work it all out in the end. These breezy platitudes ineffectually whitewash genuine concerns - they demand an unreasonable leap of faith that presumes on the Heavenly Father they purport to worship. Yet, you can tap those doubts with lovingly worded questions like, "Does it bother you that ...?" or "I'm curious, how would the LDS Church reconcile ...?"

The most effective emotional query in your arsenal demands a little insider knowledge. Every two years LDS people are required to attend a "Worthiness Interview" with their Bishop and Stake President to determine whether they can enter a temple. The two most important questions you can ask are as follows, "At your last Worthiness Interview, did you get the Temple Recommend?" After they recover

from their amazement that you, an outsider, know about *Worthiness Interviews* and *Temple Recommends*, the answer will always be affirmative. Then you lovingly ask, “Did you feel worthy?”

Of course they didn’t!

But no matter how they answer, you can have an honest conversation about grace. Grace ceases to be grace if we’re worthy of it. Show them the liberating truth that we are never worthy of God’s grace.

Ask Questions

I’ve already alluded to this method, but it demands its own category - conversations should revolve around questions, not assertions. When I talk to an LDS friend, I pretend God is watching with a word-counting scoreboard - make sure they win the word-count contest. Questions force your LDS friend to do what he’s been taught to avoid - deep thinking. In fact, they’ll likely be explaining their reasoning to themselves just as much as they are to you; they’ve probably never thought through the natural consequences of their worldview.

Be patient when your LDS friend fails to answer your questions. Remember, this is a clash of worldviews. Protestant Christianity places a premium on thoughtful responses to life’s hard questions. The LDS worldview, on the other hand, finds happiness in work, relies on emotional verifications, and fears the faith-challenge. A few months ago I wrote a letter to an LDS friend asking several questions about his worldview. His response shouldn’t have surprised me, but it did. He made no effort to answer my queries. Rather, he mailed a CD of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir with an explanation that the performances were emotionally stirring. That was all I got. It occurred to me, in his LDS worldview kind of way, he was answering my questions.

Avoid Attacks on LDS Leadership

Attacking Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or any subsequent LDS leader will get you nowhere fast. And this is probably the hardest piece of advice to follow because there’s just so many easy targets. Yet, here again, we encounter another worldview difference. Some of my LDS friends genuinely believe, for example, that Joseph Smith would have been elected President of the United States were it not for his untimely martyrdom. And yes, my LDS friends are convinced of his martyrdom. Instead of attacking, just elevate Jesus as the perfect, resurrected Prophet. Your LDS friend will take great pride in his living Prophet; just let him know that you serve the Eternal Prophet.

Access the Bible

It’s harder than you think to get LDS friends to read the Bible - they’ll probably feel guilty about it initially. When I talk with LDS friends, I rarely push them toward the gospel right away - I focus all of my counsel to a simple reading of the New Testament. If they’ll just read it, the worldview chasm will become apparent soon enough. By encouraging them to read the Bible, you’re guiding them to faith rather than arguing a point. Further, it’s important to refer to the Bible as “the Bible,” rather than “Scripture” or “God’s Word.” This practice will help your LDS friend keep his terms straight.

May the Lord bless your efforts to direct dear LDS people to God’s Word. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

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