

# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH MORMONS

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GENERAL EDITORS



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## Sharing the Good News with Mormons

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## Foreword by Josh McDowell

God loves Mormons. Let me say it again, and yet in a different way, to be sure it sinks in—*God loves the Mormon people*. God desires to be in a relationship with them, as He does with all people.

The stark reality, however, is that the gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is different than the gospel of the historic Christian faith. This should come as no surprise because Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed that God the Father and Jesus appeared to him as a 14-year-old boy to tell him that the entire Christian church had been corrupted in his day. This is also clear when comparing the teachings of the LDS Church—on the nature of grace, the person of Jesus, and requirements for the afterlife—with biblical Christianity.

Thus, it is critical that we have the courage, confidence, and training to share the good news with our LDS friends. And this is why I love the new book *Sharing the Good News with Mormons*, which is edited by Eric Johnson and my son, Sean McDowell. It is full of practical ideas to reach Mormons with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not a book of abstract ideas, and it is not merely a theological or apologetics book (although these kinds of books are vitally important). However, if we have knowledge without using the information in evangelism situations, what's the point? This book uniquely brings together a number

of qualified Christian voices to offer a variety of practical approaches for lovingly reaching out to Mormons.

The variety of contributors in this book is one of its great strengths. After all, there is no “magic bullet” approach that works for everyone in evangelism. Even Jesus used a variety of different approaches when sharing truth with people. Sometimes He asked questions, other times He told stories, and He even engaged in heated debate (for example, see John 6–8).

This is certainly the case with evangelism to Mormons. There are a number of different ways that have proven effective in seeing Mormons come to Christ. The key is to find an approach (or approaches) that match your personality as well as your unique situation. And then when you find one, *go for it*. You don’t need to have it all figured out before you begin. Just give it a try and learn along the way. God can (and will) use your efforts regardless of the results.

The chapters in this book were written by people from a range of backgrounds, including full-time missionaries to the LDS people as well as pastors, teachers, and scholars. Some chapters may resonate with you more than others. There are some you may want to read and apply right away. And there are some you may never want to read. That’s okay. The whole point of this book is simply to equip *you* with some practical ways to lovingly reach out to Mormons.

Through my books, speeches, and personal conversations, I have had the privilege of leading many people to Christ, including some Mormons. Seeing people come to Christ is one of the greatest joys in the world. That’s my hope for you. Take the strategies in this book and put them into practice and experience the joy of seeing the LDS people, whom God loves dearly, become transformed by the gospel. Go for it.

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**Josh McDowell** is an internationally recognized speaker and the author or co-author of more than 150 books, including *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Than a Carpenter*.



Introduction:

## Should Christians Share the Good News with Mormons?

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ERIC JOHNSON

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It is not always easy for Christian believers to share their faith in this politically correct twenty-first century. Those who attempt to do so are criticized more than ever, even by some who identify as Christians.<sup>1</sup> Common questions raised by critics of evangelism include:

- Who are you to judge others?
- Isn't it bigoted to claim that your religion is the only way to truth?
- Why do you impose your values on others?

### **Common Objections to Christian Evangelism to Mormons**

Before we go any further, let's explain how we will refer to the Salt Lake City-based church—known officially as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and its membership throughout this book. According to LDS Church member Gary C. Lawrence:

Our members are properly referred to as Mormons or as Latter-day Saints. Our church may be referred to by its full name or as the LDS Church. We prefer not to be called the Mormon Church.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, to be respectful and prevent any unnecessary arguments, we will refer to those who belong to this religion as “Latter-day Saints,” “LDS,” or “Mormons.” While we will leave direct quotes using the term “Mormon Church” intact, we will not use this designation in our writing; instead, we will refer to the church using its full name or as “LDS Church.”

With that said, let me make a guarantee. If you, as a Bible-believing Christian, try to discuss your faith with your LDS friends, family members, and neighbors, you will receive pushback. And, undoubtedly, you will be asked one of the following five questions:

- “Don’t you believe Mormons are Christian?”
- “Hasn’t the LDS Church changed its teachings to be more Christian?”
- “Aren’t Christians (like you) hateful of Mormons?”
- “Don’t you think I’m a good person?”
- “Can’t we just work together for good?”

Allow me to provide a response to each question.

### *“Don’t you believe Mormons are Christian?”<sup>3</sup>*

The Latter-day Saint who asks this question places the Christian in a catch-22 situation. Saying *yes* does nothing more than confuse the issue because Mormonism is a unique religion, with obvious essential doctrinal differences between the two faiths. Say *no* and it’s off to what can too easily become a going-nowhere argument. (“We’re Christian.” “No, you’re not.” “Yes, we are!” etc.)

It becomes more confusing when Mormons adamantly contend that having the name of Jesus Christ in their church’s title means they too are “Christian.” They may even use terms such as *salvation by grace*, *atonement*, and *eternal life* that are commonly used in Christianity. This can make even the best-intentioned Christians want to go home, climb into bed, and pull the covers over their heads in frustration!

First and foremost, every Christian needs to know what he or she believes. Before hoping to engage a Mormon in a fruitful discussion, a

solid foundation in understanding the basic teachings of the Bible is necessary. Learning about God’s Word, including doctrine, should be a lifelong pursuit for *every* believer.

While the Mormon may think that he or she is a Christian, it helps to properly define terms. A good question to ask is, “What do you mean by [choose any doctrinal term]?” Listen carefully and you will hear a definition that probably doesn’t sound the same as what your Sunday school teacher taught! But be ready to ask additional clarifying questions just to make sure you understand. To help the reader on this end, we have included 101 unique terms as defined by the average Mormon in Appendix 2. This tool will help the Christian reader comprehend what a Mormon means, especially for those terms also used in Christianity. We recommend using this feature while reading the book.

Only when these differences are evident is it possible to have a fruitful discussion with a member of another religion—or we end up talking past each other. Latter-day Saints who discover that you don’t think Mormonism is synonymous with biblical Christianity may even declare that you are a Christian even though you don’t think they are. While this might be their way to soften the tension, this response may come across as condescending. When this happens, I like to show how my position (i.e., not considering Mormonism to be the same as Christianity) is not intended to be personal. To make my point, I typically say,

I haven’t been baptized into the LDS Church—after all, I already was baptized at a Christian church—and I reject Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. I also don’t believe the Book of Mormon is historical or scriptural. Would you say I am destined for exaltation in the celestial kingdom?

To better understand my question, we must define the words *exaltation* and *celestial kingdom* according to Mormonism. As defined in Appendix 2, *exaltation* means “becoming glorified as gods in the highest level of the celestial kingdom and living forever in the family unit.” Meanwhile, *celestial kingdom* is “the only kingdom of glory where one

may enjoy the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as well as abide with one's family forever.”

In other words, the faithful Mormon who is baptized into the LDS Church, gets married in the temple, and keeps all the church's commandments has the opportunity to become a god in the next life and live forever with his or her earthly family. Those who are *not* baptized in this religion and deny Mormonism's major teachings and practices—as I do—are *not* allowed to participate in Mormon temple rituals, which are essential ordinances necessary for those wanting to reach the celestial kingdom.

By asking if I am destined for exaltation (also known as “eternal life”), then, I am giving the Mormons a chance to make their own judgment call. Most likely they will respond, “I don't know.” While they may say this, LDS leaders have made it very clear that the answer to the question is no, as they have regularly criticized Christian churches and their doctrines while maintaining the necessity of the “restored church” that was imperative since Christianity lost its authority during the “Great Apostasy.”<sup>4</sup>

Another good response is this: “So if Mormon and Christian are synonymous terms, I must be a Mormon.” This will cause some head scratching. Since those who reject the basic tenets of the LDS faith should not be considered Mormons, your point has been made. Words do have meaning and precision in any conversation with a Latter-day Saint is imperative for effective communication to take place.

### *“Hasn't the LDS Church changed its teachings to be more Christian?”*

Some will insist that the differences in beliefs are minimal. Others may claim that the LDS Church is moving closer to orthodoxy. While their current church leaders have tried to downplay their more controversial teachings, Mormons typically accept doctrines that are in juxtaposition to creedal Christianity, including:

- God the Father has a body of flesh and bones
- Jesus is not eternally God
- The addition of scripture beyond the Bible<sup>5</sup>

Don't assume your Mormon friend's belief, but ask if they believe

the points above.<sup>6</sup> It is true that the rhetoric once prominent in the LDS hierarchy has softened in recent years while some (including Mormon apologists and professors at the church's universities) want to make Mormonism's doctrines sound almost synonymous with Christian teaching. Despite the change in approach, Mormonism continues to deny or distort every fundamental teaching of the historic Christian church when LDS beliefs are carefully considered.

*"Aren't Christians (like you) hateful of Mormons?"*

Many Mormons can become defensive when evangelical Christians attempt to engage them in spiritual conversations. Any disagreement with Mormonism might be taken as direct criticism of the Mormon people. Christians must extend courtesy, respect, and patience to everyone despite our disagreements. After all, the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:15 that we should speak "the truth in love."

A term sometimes used to define well-meaning Christians who are attempting to share their faith with Latter-day Saints is *anti-Mormon*. The connotation is that someone who disagrees with Mormonism must be motivated by hatred for the Mormon people. This is far from accurate. One response to this unfair accusation is to ask, "Do Mormon missionaries knock on my door to share their faith with me because they 'hate' me?" Of course not! While they may disagree with those who are Christian, the missionaries generally will try their best to explain why Mormonism is true. Many faithful Mormon adults who are RMs ("returned missionaries") will resonate with this logic since they believe their service was dedicated to helping others, even when they disagreed with those on the other side of the door.

It comes down to this: If Mormonism and biblical Christianity are different in their view of biblical teachings, shouldn't Christian believers have concern for the spiritual welfare of those holding wrong beliefs? We believe the answer is yes, and this is the reason for this book.

*"Don't you think I'm a good person?"*

While Latter-day Saints will generally plead that they are "good"—and I think we can agree that, generally, this is true—doing the right

things is *not* enough to have one's sins forgiven. After all, isn't a Christian someone who knows he or she is forgiven of all sins? (See Matthew 1:21; 1 John 5:11-12.) It is impossible to keep God's perfect standard of holiness. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:21-23 that many will call out "Lord, Lord" at the judgment while pointing to their "good" works. Yet Jesus said they will be told, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

People who consider themselves "good" enough to go to heaven do not understand the definitions of *holiness* or *sin*. As Jeremiah 17:9 puts it, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"<sup>7</sup>

*"Can't we just work together for good?"*

If Mormons belonged to a religious organization that agreed with the Bible on the essential issues of faith while rejecting heretical doctrines, it would be possible to unite and work together for good. Yet we would be fooling ourselves to think that we are on the same team when it comes to spiritual matters if we have contradictory beliefs. In Utah, some liberal Christian churches work together with Mormon congregations. For instance, I once attended a Christmas musical event at a Mormon chapel that included the members of a nearby Christian church along with the pastor. The choirs joined in a cantata while the bishop presented a spiritual talk to the mixed audience.

If Mormons are people who need to understand that forgiveness of sins is possible only by having a relationship with Jesus through faith alone as presented in the Bible—not through baptism, temple worship, or keeping commandments—we cannot pretend that these differences should be overlooked merely to get along or not rock the boat. Any need to evangelize is neutered through a desire to work together. It can be very confusing to both congregations. If Mormons who accept their church's heretical teachings are not forgiven of their sins, who will tell them the truth?

We will address a final question that Christians may be asked, though this one usually comes from fellow believers.

*“Isn’t ‘lifestyle evangelism’ the best way to share our faith?”*

According to this view, Christians should prioritize the living of a good life and let others observe their fruit without overtly evangelizing. Some have even cited a saying that has been falsely attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel, use words if necessary.”<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that it is vital for a Christian to live a godly life, which only provides credibility to the Christian witness. However, this is not the *only* way to share one’s faith. Good reasoning skills and purposeful evangelistic methods must also be utilized. Without intervention, some people are headed into an eternity of separation from God. As Romans 10:15 says:

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!”

The word *preach* translated here literally means “one who *is preaching*.” Imagine a pastor who just stands up in the pulpit and stares back at the congregation. That would make no sense at all. Effective evangelism usually requires some type of oral or written communication—this was certainly true with the apostle Paul. A “silent witness” could be too quiet for Mormons to hear, as many Latter-day Saints might be living extremely moral lives that far outshine those of any Christians they know. In essence, Mormons may not see a Christian’s “fruit” as much different from their own.

Now that we’ve dealt with some common objections to Christian evangelism to Mormons, let’s take a closer look at this book’s format.

## **A Worm or a Fly?**

Evangelism is like fishing. Some use fly rods, many like bait, and still others just put an empty hook at the end of their poles so they can take a nap! When it comes to sharing the Christian faith with others, there are a variety of ways to fish for people (Matthew 4:19). As you choose your approach, understand that this book is meant to deliver a

potpourri of evangelistic strategies. Some ideas may resonate with you, while other concepts will not draw your interest at all.

When I walk through a restaurant's buffet line, I don't make a meal of everything offered. On my first go-round, I take samples of a variety of dishes before heading back once I've had a taste of each. Consider this book your evangelistic smorgasbord. Nibble on some of the ideas and see if an approach fits your taste. Learn how a method has worked for someone else. If you allow yourself freedom to explore, we think you will find some ideas here that will correlate with your own gifting. But as coeditor Sean McDowell says in the conclusion, don't get so bogged down by trying to partake in so many of the available dishes (the approaches offered in this book) that you end up becoming frustrated and not eating anything at all!

## A Tactical Toolbox

Often when I am speaking to a gung ho, tell-the-world-about-Jesus Christian who wants to share the faith with Mormons (and praise God for those who take evangelism seriously), I get asked, "What's the one way/question/strategy to get a Mormon to convert?" They're looking for what we call the "magic button." Imagine if the third-base coach on a baseball team merely had to flash the home-run sign before the batter could hit a home run. If a team hit home runs 100 percent of the time when the coach gave his cue, that would forever change the game!

Yet we all know no home-run signal is completely effective. In the same way, no evangelism strategy will work every time. If it did, we would have skipped the variety of methods in this book and just focused on the one that works for everyone on a consistent basis.

Terry Glaspey, the director of acquisitions for Harvest House Publishers, used a phrase that stood out to me as we discussed the idea for this book. He explained that the idea Sean and I proposed would be a "toolbox of tactics," something that could be offered to those who want to learn how to share the Christian faith with Mormons. After all, inside the average toolbox are many tools. Although I'm not much of a handyman, even my basic setup includes a hammer, several screwdrivers, a putty knife, an adjustable wrench, and duct tape. (Almost anything can be fixed with duct tape!) Depending on the assignment



my wife Terri sends me on, I will use the appropriate tool to get the job done. Indeed, there are many ways to effectively share the gospel (which means “good news”) with Mormons.

Sean and I are very excited to have 24 experienced Christians with a variety of backgrounds join us in this venture. Never before has such a diverse group of qualified believers been featured in one book focusing on Mormonism from an evangelical Christian perspective. These men and women bring plenty of experience to the table. Seven contributors hold professional doctoral degrees while several have little to no college experience. You’ll also hear from several pastors and a number of qualified apologists, some of whom serve full time in Christian ministry while others are bivocational.

One thing they all have in common is this: Each contributor has a desire to equip you to effectively share the Christian faith by presenting a different approach to evangelize Latter-day Saints. In fact, they will each write as if their method is the best one anyone could ever use... while fully understanding that evangelism tactics are like ice cream flavors. What might be *their* favorite might not be *yours*, or mine for that matter. And that’s okay. The passion with which they present is compelling.

With that said, feel free to take any idea presented here and go in a slightly different direction to make the strategy work for you. Indeed, creativity is encouraged! We won’t pretend this book covers every successful evangelistic method. For instance, we decided not to include chapters talking about door-to-door evangelism, handing out Christian tracts in the streets, or utilizing service projects to gain relationships—all strategies I have used with great success over the years—because of space limitations. There might be other effective approaches, even some we don’t know about.

I encourage you to be open-minded when considering options. I am reminded of the woman who told Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist from the nineteenth century, that she didn’t like the way he shared his faith. He asked, “Tell me, ma’am, how do you do evangelism?” “I don’t,” she said, to which Moody replied, “Well, I like my way of doing it better than your way of *not* doing it!” Be careful, then, when tempted to criticize a particular approach.

Not everyone will appreciate our desire to share biblical truth or jump for joy over the method(s) we use. Imagine if someone you knew had something green between her teeth and you decided to tell her. While your intention might have been good, perhaps your information shocked or embarrassed her. She might even have gotten upset and told you to mind your own business. This can happen. Speaking the truth comes with a risk. The alternative (not saying anything and letting her walk around looking like she was missing a front tooth) doesn't seem to be a good option. In the same way, every Christian who believes in the gospel message advocated in the Bible should be willing to take a chance by exposing others to the ultimate truth about the gospel, even with the possibility of offending someone.

Yet we need to be cautious because, like a sharp nail or screwdriver sticking up in a toolbox that can stab a person attempting to find a hammer, we don't want to go out of our way to intentionally offend people. Being a jerk when sharing Christian beliefs will only detract from the presentation. Appropriate tactics do matter. However, remaining silent and keeping the gospel hidden is not the loving thing to do.

### **Are You Ready?**

While you are looking through your tactical toolbox, you'll see that these chapters are arranged in six particular themes. Please understand that they don't have to be utilized in chronological order since they don't build on each other. A short summary at the beginning of each chapter will help you determine what that strategy is about. Knowing a little more about it will prepare you to adequately consider the material.

We include two additional tools that I want to mention here. The first is the six "Spotlight" interviews featuring full-time Christian missionaries. This allows a showcase of other ministry strategies that have been successfully used all over the United States. In addition, our book has a website ([www.SharingWithMormons.com](http://www.SharingWithMormons.com)) that contains additional information not found in the book, including bonus chapters. Be sure to check this out. Even if you have little background with Mormonism, this book and the information available on the website will

be an asset for anyone who wants to learn practical strategies on how to effectively and lovingly share the Christian faith with Mormons.

Finally, you may like some more information on Mormonism or other apologetic topics. Here are some excellent Internet resources from some of the contributors to this book (in alphabetical order):

- [BeggarsBread.org](http://BeggarsBread.org): General apologetics, including Mormonism (Fred Anson)
- [Carm.org](http://Carm.org): General apologetics, including Mormonism (Matt Slick)
- [ColdCaseChristianity.com](http://ColdCaseChristianity.com): General apologetics (J. Warner Wallace)
- [EvidenceMinistries.org](http://EvidenceMinistries.org): Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses (Keith and Becky Walker)
- [Irr.org](http://Irr.org): General apologetics, including Mormonism (Joel Groat, Robert Bowman)
- [MormonInfo.org](http://MormonInfo.org): Mormonism (Rob Sivulka)
- [Mrm.org](http://Mrm.org): Mormonism (Bill McKeever, Eric Johnson, Sharon Lindbloom, Randy Sweet)
- [NGIM.org](http://NGIM.org): General apologetics (David Geisler and Brian Henson)
- [RatioChristi.org](http://RatioChristi.org): General apologetics (Corey Miller)
- [SeanMcDowell.org](http://SeanMcDowell.org): General apologetics (Sean McDowell)
- [StrivingforEternity.org](http://StrivingforEternity.org): General apologetics (Andrew Rappaport)
- [Theopedia.com](http://Theopedia.com): Encyclopedia of Christianity (Aaron Shafovaloff)
- [UnveilingMormonism.com](http://UnveilingMormonism.com): Mormonism (Lynn Wilder)
- [Utlm.org](http://Utlm.org): Mormonism (Sandra Tanner)

I'm so glad you picked up *Sharing the Good News with Mormons*. Regardless of which approach(es) you take, may the Lord bless and guide you in your endeavors!