

Talking to Mormons about Jesus

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You are finished after a long day of uni, you are beginning the trip home but you do have some time to kill, you are confronted by a clean-shaven, well-dressed twenty-one year old with an American accent who says, "Hi, I'm Elder Smith and this is Elder Jones, we're from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and we'd like to talk to you about Jesus ..." What do you do next? I reckon you have a few options:

- a. Just ignore them and keep on walking.
- b. Declare to them and everyone around that they are polytheistic, Arian, salvation-by-works, anti-Bible heretics preying on the weak, vulnerable and lonely.
- c. Ask them all the things you've always wanted to know about Mormons and their mysterious underwear.
- d. Stop and talk to them about Jesus.

I would argue that responses a, b and c, do not honour Christ and are ultimately unfruitful for the gospel. Mormon missionaries present us with a unique opportunity to talk to people about Jesus because often they bring the conversation to us. We also might find ourselves with Mormon friends and family and unsure of how to talk to them about Jesus. In order to have a fruitful conversation about Jesus there are a few things that are important to remember.

1. Who's evangelising whom?

It's important to realise who you are talking to. If it is a Mormon missionary, they are there to convert YOU! The missionary is not interested in becoming a Christian. They think that they are already a Christian and that you are the one in need of saving. They think you've missed out on the vital revelation of Joseph Smith and that your life and salvation is the poorer for it! Unfortunately this means that they are not interested in an open and frank discussion of ideas. Also, they will generally treat non-Mormon material and resources with suspicion.

Keeping this in mind, we should try to engage them on a personal level. You might ask, "If you are saved by faith *and* works, how can you be sure?" You might share, "Because of the work that Jesus' finished on the cross, I can be confident that my sin has been dealt with and that I am saved." Make it personal, make it real but also expect them to be working as hard to convert you. Some have found sharing narrative stories from the Gospels helpful when talking about how you become right with God and how to be forgiven (e.g. Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 18:21-35).

2. Same word different meaning

This is one of the biggest frustrations in Mormon evangelism. We might share with them what we believe and they will say in return, "Yeah, that's right. I believe that too!" It is not until we begin to define what we mean by our words that we begin to see how big the differences are.

For example, when they say 'grace', what they mean is God's enabling power that allows people to "lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own efforts".^[1] This is obviously different to a Christian understanding of grace as the God's unmerited favour given to those who have faith in Jesus.

Some other key words with major differences are salvation, heaven, hell, atonement, eternal life, the fall, and apostasy. Sometimes conversations might feel like a mêlée over meanings. However, clarifying what we mean and what they mean is essential if we are going to talk clearly with them about Jesus.

3. Save the silly questions for the Internet

I know we have these questions about Mormons from watching *Big Love* or *John Safran vs God* but save them for the internet. Questions about what they do at the temple, polygamy, connections to the Freemasons and 'special' underwear can all wait for the next Google search. I know that to you these things seem weird and a little curious but to the Mormon these questions can be offensive, disrespectful, and can kill conversations immediately. Generally Mormons are very conservative and talking about these things while trying to talk to them about Jesus will be really unhelpful. They consider some of these to be personal and private.

Treating them, their beliefs, and their practices with respect does not mean that you condone or agree with them. It is simply being courteous in order that you might share Jesus with your words and your actions. The great thing about asking our question on the internet is that we do not offend anyone and all the answers are out there. Some great websites about Mormonism include: [Mormon Outreach Ministries, Sydney](#), [Berean Christian Ministries](#) and [the Institute for Religious Research](#).

4. Know your Bible(s)

While the Christian has the Bible as Scripture, the Mormon has the Bible and three other books: The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants. They might quote to you from any of these books to prove their point but insist that they show you from the Bible and in context. Context is key when dealing with Mormon claims from the Bible.

However ye might find that when they shareth parts of the Bible with ye it might feel like ye hath travelled back in time. This is because Mormons use the King James Version (translated in 1611) as their authorised version of the Bible. Although it probably is not your preferred version, try and work with it when sharing the Bible with them. Remember that the 'battle of the Bibles', although important, can normally be saved for another day. It is important that you show them your trust in the Bible as the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. If possible, try and read large passages of the Bible with Mormons and show them how to read it in context. Keep presenting them with the word of God and pray. Rather than pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon, pray that the Spirit might convict them of the truth about Jesus.

5. Mormonism is a subculture as well as a religion

Your Mormon missionary, friend or family member's life is probably completely entwined in the Mormon church. Mormonism provides a system of religious belief as well as a self-sustaining community with its own unique subculture. Very high levels of commitment and accountability to the Mormon church can mean that any major shifts in their beliefs will have significant social consequences. My own experience of leaving the Mormon church shows that someone can lose serious numbers of friends and suffer severe dislocation in their family relationships simply by choosing to follow Jesus. This does not mean it is impossible for them to choose Jesus but as the Christian shares the gospel, the Christian church needs to offer a viable alternative community at the same time. They need to build a bridge into the world of the Mormon and show them that they will get the same (or better) love, care, support, prayer, fellowship and friendship from Christians to make up for what they stand to lose from the Mormons. Also being aware and sensitive of Mormon cultural norms - no coffee, tea, alcohol or smoking - will always be helpful in evangelism.

Talking to Mormons about Jesus will be very similar to talking to Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, or your average Aussie pagan. It is simply sharing God's word with them, praying for them and building real relationships with them. If you feel you need help with the specifics, there are plenty of resources out there to assist you. If you don't know what to say just relax, pray, open the Bible and talk about Jesus.

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[1] *LDS Bible Dictionary*, p. 697.