

The Mormons You Know Who are they, anyway?

As a Christian, you want to speak about your faith to Mormons. What can you say that will be useful and without unnecessary offense? Why should they listen to you? Will they understand?

Mormons are raised with an unusual view of themselves, and of you, too. It affects their hopes and fears about the future for themselves and their families, and personal relationships with others.

Consider their perspective, outlined below, as you look for ways to share your faith and good news many have never heard.

In its simplest form, this is the Mormon church's view of all men and women: Literal siblings with a heavenly family life before creation. •All proved themselves worthy of a mortal life. •Mortality is a test: Who will prove worthy again and return to heaven?'

Mormons sing "I Am a Child of God"²

*I am a child of God, and he has sent me here...
If I but learn to do his will I'll live with him once more.*

Another hymn in the same vein is "O My Father"³

*O my Father,... When shall I regain thy presence...?
[Reason]...tells me I've a mother there.
Father, Mother, may I meet you in your royal courts on high?
...when I've completed all you sent me forth to do, with your
mutual approbation, let me come and dwell with you.*

You too: Divine origin, divine potential

A Mormon church proselyting pamphlet⁴ (excerpted here) tells non-Mormons:

Life for you did not begin here on earth. You lived before you were born.... We all once lived [as his spirit children] in the presence of God, the Eternal Father. ...With this divine parentage, your destiny, through righteous living, is to become like your Father in Heaven and return to his presence. ...In the spirit world, before this life, you were among the faithful. You earned, there, the right to be on earth today. ...While on earth you also have an opportunity to live by faith, away from the presence of God, and to thereby prove yourself. ...The law God gave Adam, 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' applies not merely to physical sustenance; it is also a law for the salvation of the soul. You harvest what you sow. ...[After mortal life] men will live forever, gaining the reward which they have earned in God's program for his children's progression.

MORMON IMAGE OF MAN

It's not your fault, but Mormons believe that their church, leaders, and scriptures transcend yours. Their gospel is somehow "fuller" than yours, but it's not easy and requires "all that you can do." This is instilled in Mormons subtly and repetitively through song and sermon, from childhood to adulthood, but usually expressed to the public and Christian community dis-

You have a credibility problem

The Mormon church tells Mormons incessantly that **your church** descends from a long history of total apostasy. That **your pastor** is untutored in the full truth of the gospel and without authority to minister in the name of Christ. That **the Bible** is rife with errors and omissions.

armingly and with seeming innocence and tolerance. **Suggestion:** Don't argue about your church or pastor, or theirs. Simply stick with the Bible; Mormons are not likely to reject its good news out-of-hand.

Mormons think they have something in common with you: You lived together in heaven and grew to adulthood with all of God's spirit chil-

You have common ground

The Mormon you know starts exactly where we all started: "Guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). Sin is the issue.

And Mormons want what you want: heaven. Salvation (heaven) is at stake.

The question: How can sinners live now and forever with a holy God?

eternal life, or concern about progressing and "returning" to heaven.

Ignore "pre-mortal life." Start with the here-and-now. Ask Mormons how they are doing in their progression. What do they feel they still must do to be worthy of eternal life? Whatever their answer, mention the peace and confidence you have because of such biblical assurances as 1 John 5:13. Mormons are told that only those who do their best might gain eternal life.

Mormons often complain that they are misunderstood. Be sure Mormons can see that you understand, but differ in important, irreconcilable ways

Some DON'TS

Don't raise the same old complaints about Mormons and their church's history. **Don't** identify with "anti-Mormons" (as Mormons are quick to label them). Remember, the issue is sin. **Don't** cut corners: Salvation is by grace through faith, totally undeserved; it really is a gift.

with their church's teachings. If a Mormon suggests that doctrinal differences are few and minor, don't agree. Even Mormons who know better may say, "We believe that, too," although their church rejects many essentials of Christian faith.

Notes: 1. "Heaven" is an imprecise term for Mormons. They often identify heaven as life in God's presence, and believe all mortals lived there as pre-mortals and may return there as immortals after death if they prove worthy of that. Sometimes Mormons use the term loosely in describing "eternal life," "everlasting life," "celestial glory," "paradise," or "salvation" — terms with specific, different meanings in Mormon doctrine. 2. The Mormon church's hymnal, *Hymns*, #301. 3. *Hymns*, #292. 4. "The Purpose of Life," 1983.