

Try this: talk to Mormons about families.

Information for Christians who think there's nothing to talk about, because Mormons say they are Christians; and for those who tried and think they failed, or wonder how to start a useful conversation.

WHY FAMILIES?

Why? Because Mormon religion is about families — healthy, traditional families on earth, and vibrant “forever families” after death. The subject permeates Mormon testimonies, hymns, and sermons; and is a focus in Mormon missionary, advertising, and public affairs efforts.

Families: a natural starting point for amicable conversation with Mormons and substantive Christian witness.

BACKGROUND: THE BIG PICTURE

The concept of happy, healthy families transcends virtually all cultures and religions. Generally Christians share with Mormons an interest in traditional family behavior and values: monogamy, fidelity, making time for family fun, prayer, and scripture study, for example. The Mormon church is active in public and private, secular and religious, national and international arenas to establish itself as the world's authority on families.

Unique Mormon religious doctrines, however, describe mortal life as a transition from a life with divine parents in heaven to a future life in an advanced, ever-expanding “forever family” in heaven again. The scenario, as attractive or naive as it may seem to some, is neither true nor harmless.

Note below the big picture excerpted from Mormon hymns: life with divine parents in heaven before mortality, a desire to *return* to heaven to live there in one's own family, and the role of mortal families in teaching and doing all things required to merit a return to heaven.

Not all Mormons will know their own doctrines or express them in the same way. Some may reject or ignore the doctrines but use their church to help raise their families. Others believe them.

MORMON FAMILY: the big picture in Mormon music

◇ **The Spirit whispers this to me and...tells me this is true. ...[My Father] sent me here to earth.... ◇ I am a child of God, and he has...given me an earthly home with parents kind and dear. ...If I but learn to do his will I'll live with him once more...Teach me all that I must do to live with him someday. ◇ Families can be forever, through Heavenly Father's plan. I always want to be with my own family, and the Lord has shown me how I can. ◇ O my Father,...when shall I regain thy presence...? Father, Mother, may I meet you in your royal courts on high? ...With your mutual approbation let me come and dwell with you.** —from *Hymns*, #302, 301, 300, 292

KEEPING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Christians talking with Mormons often find that Mormonism can sound fine. But when talking about families, Christians should keep in mind this unusual Mormon perspective, as the church expressed it in its Aug. '06 *Ensign* magazine: “We cannot understand the purpose of this mortal life” without specific truths “restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith”: “that we are literal spirit children of God, that we lived with Him in a premortal existence, and that we have within us the seeds of godhood, the potential to become like Him. This was our great desire in the premortal world....”

[Godhood, eternal life, forever family, exaltation—often interchangeable expressions—are goals of Mormon life, to be earned in mortality.]

Mormon doctrines are complex and are rarely stated clearly and authoritatively by the church. When examined in detail they can be confusing and contradictory. Individual Mormons hold widely different views, all of which are acceptable in the Mormon lifestyle. The Mormon doctrines cited in this paper can be found (but not easily) at www.lds.org. Suggestions:

1. Go ahead; just do it! Talk to a Mormon. Family life in the here-and-now is a natural topic. Share freely your common interests, experiences, and concerns. You might ask questions such as these:

- Were you (or do you aspire to be) married in your church's temple? [Temple marriage is the gateway to an eternal family. There Mormons gain knowledge and perform rituals thought necessary for eternal life. Other families, such as yours, are honored, but are thought to dissolve at death.]
- Were your parents LDS (Mormons), too? [You might hear how someone has “always” been Mormon, or converted from another church, and why.]
- Are you into genealogy? [Mormons are encouraged, even obligated, to “search out” their ancestors so the dead can be saved and possibly be a part of the future, reconstituted family in heaven.]
- What does your church teach about the purpose of life?
- What do “forever families,” “eternal life,” and “exaltation” mean?

2. Listen. Don't lecture Mormons on what you presume they believe. Don't argue. Calling Mormon doctrines lies or silly or naive rarely helps! But remember that what Mormons say is only part of the story — the easiest, most palatable part — and, in fact, may be personal, inaccurate views.

3. Witness to your own confidence in biblical truths. You believe you have eternal life, but you do not aspire to godhood. You accept the truth of John 3:15-16, verses many Mormons are familiar with. You believe you became a child of God by faith in Christ (John 1:12-13). You are confident that because of Christ you will be with Him forever, and that through faith in Christ your family members, too, can become children of God and enjoy eternity with Him. You can testify of the peace, confidence, and freedom that comes from faith in Christ alone (Romans 3:28; 4:6,8; 5:1).