

A Letter to Our LDS Friends and Neighbors

Ahh, Utah... what a wonderful place – some of the most beautiful scenery in the entire world, great weather, a clean and moral environment, a culture that seems to be very in tune with God. There really isn't a greater place to live, is there?

There are, however, some paradoxes about this state. Utah ranks #1 in the prescription and use of anti-depressants. Utah also ranks very high on the list for pain-killer drug abuse and teen suicides. We have been rated third in the nation in bankruptcy filings. How in the world could a state that is so beautiful and apparently so in tune with God still be so broken up inside? Why all of the anti-depressants? (Are we depressed?) Why all of the pain-killer abuse? (Are we in pain?) Why all of the bankruptcy? (Are we trying to fill voids in our lives with toys too expensive for us to afford?)

These are very puzzling questions! You may well have your own opinion about the reason for them, but if you'll take just a moment to keep reading, I'd like to share with you what I have come to understand to be the source of these paradoxes. I believe the problem is religion. That's right, religion. You might find it odd for a pastor to say that. With your background you probably think that religion is what holds this state together. Let me explain where I'm coming from.

Religion is, at its very core, the act of people trying, through their own actions, to please God and to be deemed acceptable in His sight when they meet Him. In fact, friend, if you're honest with yourself, that's exactly what you are doing. You are going to church, being baptized, living a moral life, tithing your income, going on a mission, fulfilling your calling, getting married, having children, and obeying the commands of the Lord for one purpose: to gain acceptance in God's eyes so that you can return to Him. And by the "grace" of God, "if you do your best, then Christ will do the rest," and you'll end up in heaven with God. That's really what you're doing, isn't it?

Well, that is *stressful!* To fulfill all the commands of the Lord and the demands of the church with your eternal life hanging in the balance...that's enough to cause a person to seek some form of stress relief (anti-depressants, pain-killers, toys to distract us). You may have asked yourself from time to time, *"How do I know I'm good enough? My neighbors look like they're doing a good job. My bishop appears to be doing okay. The elders and sisters appear to be doing just fine. But what about me?"* That kind of pressure can make one quite stressed and even depressed.

Let's be real - we all respect and fear God. That's why we want to work so hard to please Him. Well, that is exactly what religion is. Religion is man trying with all his might to be pleasing to God and to earn the right to be in His presence. So what are we to do? Should we just keep living like we are, even if our religious efforts overwhelm us?

I've been using the terms "we" and "us" throughout this letter to you, but I do want you to understand something. There is a big difference between what we believe as a Bible Church and what you believe as a member of the LDS Church. I realize that you may be thinking that because we only study the Bible we don't have the whole truth, and that you, because you have the Book of Mormon and the teachings of your prophet, do have the whole truth (that's an issue for another time). I think we can agree, however, that what a person regards as his source of truth impacts the way he practices his everyday faith, and determines what he depends on for his eternity.

Even though you may call yourself a Christian, you and I are depending on some very different things to ensure our acceptance by God. And these differences are in very critical areas.

One key difference is that although you may be religious, we are not. We are not bound up by the stress and slavery of religion. I am not saying that we don't want to obey and please God, and be found acceptable in His sight when we meet Him (we wholeheartedly do!), but the Bible, when studied by itself, clearly teaches us how to be approved in God's sight in a freeing way. God doesn't desire religion, He desires a relationship! He doesn't desire or expect that we change ourselves in order to come to Him. What He does desire and expect is that we first give ourselves to Him and let Him change us and clean us. At Valley Bible Church we teach biblically what God desires of us to start and progress in our relationship with Him.

God calls His followers His "children." The relationship between parent and child is not built upon works, is it? We are to simply go to God, Who desires a relationship with us, and in faith trust in Jesus for eternal life, receiving it as a free gift. **I strongly encourage you to read, ["What exactly is the gospel message?"](#) There you'll see how to start that relationship with Him on His terms, not a set of man-made terms.**

I don't know you personally, but I wonder if you doubt your faith at times. Through the years I have talked with many people of the LDS faith who do have doubts. Yet despite those doubts, they continue to ignore the things that eat away at them. They beat themselves up by believing they are just weaker in the faith than their neighbor, or that they must have something wrong with them, or that they are the only one with the doubts they face. (And, more often than not, in reality, their neighbor is feeling the same way-they just haven't said anything either!)

These people go to their bishop or another religious authority and bring up their concerns, only to be told to pray about it and they'll feel better. So week after week, these people just stuff the doubts inside and go through the church motions. Is that truly the best thing to do? You may feel that you might as well just stay "Mormon" because everyone else is and you'll cause waves if you leave; and after all, it's a good way to bring up kids, isn't it? The problem is, if it's not the truth, why live it? Is it better to live a lie and be accepted by your peers, or find the truth and be accepted by God in the end?

Someone may ask you, *"Why not just leave then? What is there to lose?"* Do you want the honest answer? There is much to lose! You'll probably lose respect from your LDS parents, children, spouse, neighbors, friends, co-workers, you name it. The price of genuine discipleship in Utah is very high. Jesus speaks to you when He says, *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."* (Matthew 10:37-38) Our love for the Lord needs to far surpass both our love for anyone else and our own desires to stay in our comfort zone.

Is it worth it? Is it worth leaving and making waves in your family and neighborhood to follow Jesus as presented in the Bible? I would encourage you to talk with someone who has left the church and accepted Christ as the Bible teaches. ([Here is one example](#)) These folks will tell you that it's difficult, but it's freeing, and it's the right thing to do!

Friend, this is a big deal, and shouldn't be taken lightly. And maybe you don't agree with me. You may believe that it is worth staying where you are, even if you doubt it, so that you can keep your good standing with others.

If so, Jesus asks you a good question to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider: "*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?*" (Mark 8:36)

You may feel that giving up so much for the Lord would be depressing, and that Utah's depression problem would only increase if you and everyone that felt the same way gave up your reputation for God. That's another one of life's mysterious paradoxes! The more you give up for the Lord in following Him, the more joy, love, fulfillment, and acceptance you find in Him!

Sincerely,
Pastor Tom Jeffcott

Feel free to respond with any questions or comments by [contacting us](#).
