

“Not only does Corey Miller offer practical tips on speaking with members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; he gives pertinent information regarding their theology in such a way that the Christian reader can’t help but gain a better understanding and compassion for those immersed in this system.”

**Bill McKeever**, Founder and Director,  
Mormonism Research Ministry

“*Engaging with Mormons* is an insightful guide to lovingly sharing your faith with Mormon friends.”

**Sandra Tanner**, Author; Founder,  
Utah Lighthouse Ministry (utlm.org)

“Corey Miller has that rare combination of academic understanding and personal experience which makes his contribution to this discussion invaluable. As someone who has been involved in campus ministry in Utah for over thirty years, I look forward to sharing this book with students and faculty alike!”

**Rob Gunn**, Cru staff, Utah/Idaho

“Corey Miller offers an accessible and practical book on the Mormon belief system. Here he provides helpful information for both discussing Mormonism and for sharing the gospel with Mormons. Coming from a former Mormon, this book provides you with a good overview of the Mormon faith and how it relates to Christianity.”

**Dr. Leo Percer**, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies  
and Director of the PhD in Theology and Apologetics  
Program, Liberty University

*“Engaging with Mormons* is a helpful introduction to key concepts surrounding the history, doctrine, and worldview of Latter-day Saints. Corey has done an excellent job of articulating a winsome and practical way to engage LDS people. I love his tactics and illustrations! If you are looking to embody love while speaking the truth, then this is a great volume to help you start.”

**Dr. Bryan Hurlbutt**, Lead Pastor, Lifeline Community,  
West Jordan, Utah; Author, *Tasty Jesus*; Contributor,  
*Sharing the Good News with Mormons*

“Dr. Corey Miller weaves together historical, cultural, and theological LDS thinking and experience in a time when, as for the last 30 years, so many facets of the Mormon world are changing under its leadership. This book will enlighten anyone wanting to be introduced to the subject of Mormonism in a balanced way.”

**Dave Roberts**, Pastor, Church of the Risen Christ,  
Sandy, Utah

“Mormons are warm, gracious, non-Christian religious people. Dr. Corey Miller’s story, expertise, and experience help tremendously in showing us how to engage with these people who so desperately need the real Jesus.”

**Bret Johnson**, Former Pastor; President, The Hastening

“Instead of focusing on doctrinal disputing, Corey helps Christians get out of the weeds and into the minds of Mormons. As a pastor in Utah, I am grateful for this book.”

**Mike Bell**, Pastor, South Mountain Community  
Church, Draper, Utah

ENGAGING  
*with...*

# Mormons

understanding their world  
*sharing good news*

Corey Miller

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*This book is dedicated to several people on my journey. First and foremost, to my mother, Lynette Sopko, who sacrificially raised me with unconditional love. To my aunt, DeEtte McLachlan, who was the first to introduce me to the biblical concept of the gospel when I knew no other than that found in Mormonism. To Don, Mary, and Jeff Wallen who invited me, housed me, and provided the first context for me to be challenged to receive Christ in 1988. To Bret Johnson, my first youth pastor, who was seminal in my development by pouring into me that first year and later giving me my first opportunity in ministry. To Timothy Oliver, the former LDS missionary-turned-Christian, who helped straighten out my thinking early on when I left Mormonism to follow Christ. To Dave Roberts, my pastor in Utah, whose discipleship lifestyle is unmatched. Finally, to my in-laws, Bob and Lynnae Ness, who've lovingly absorbed me and my family into theirs through the gift of their daughter, Melinda, as one of the brightest spots in my life.*

*Corey Miller*

Engaging with...

## Preface

Christians have a wonderful message to tell the world. As the angel said at the birth of Jesus, it is “good news that will cause great joy *for all the people*” (Luke 2 v 10). But sometimes we have been slow to take that message of forgiveness and new life to others.

Sometimes it’s because we have become *distracted*. There are so many things that can push the need to tell others from its central place in our calling as individuals and churches. We get wrapped up in our own church issues, problems and politics. Or we get sidetracked by the very real needs of our broken and hurting world, and expend our energies dealing with the symptoms rather than the cause.

Sometimes it’s because we have lacked *conviction*. We look at people who seem relatively happy or settled in their own beliefs, and just don’t think Jesus is for them. Or perhaps we have forgotten just how good the good

news is, and how serious the consequences are for those who enter eternity unforgiven.

But often it has been *fear* that has held us back from sharing the good news about Jesus. When we meet people whose culture, background or beliefs are so different from ours, we can draw back from speaking about our own faith because we are afraid of saying the wrong thing, unintentionally offending them, or getting into an unhelpful argument that leads nowhere.

This little series of books is designed to help with this last issue. We want to encourage Christian believers and whole churches to focus on our primary task of sharing the good news with the whole world. Each title aims to equip you with the understanding you need, so that you can build meaningful friendships with others from different backgrounds, and share the good news in a relevant and clear way.

It is our prayer that this book will help you do that with Mormon people wherever you meet them: a neighbor, friend, work colleague, or missionary. We pray that the result would be “great joy” as they understand that the true message of Jesus is good news for them.

*Tim Thornborough*  
*Series Editor*

# Introduction

Why do Christians need a book about engaging with Mormons?

After all, Mormons are generally very nice people. And the official name of their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), seems to center on Jesus. Surely, anyone who belongs to such a church is a Christian already?

But what if the LDS perspective is not simply another testimony about Jesus? Instead, what if it is a testimony about another Jesus? What if Mormons need to hear the true gospel just as urgently as anyone else?

That is the conviction of this book. Given that most of us don't know much about Mormon beliefs, plus our wider cultural reluctance to label any belief as "wrong," most Christians are often afraid, mystified, or otherwise apathetic to sharing their faith with Mormons, as if it does not really matter. It does matter! As we'll see later, it's a matter of life and death.

I love Mormons. Much of my family is Mormon, and has been for seven generations. We can trace our roots as

far back as 1836, just six years after the Book of Mormon was published. I lived in Utah as a Mormon for the first 16 years of my life, and, after coming to Christ, lived there another three years as a Christian. I have experienced Mormon culture both as an insider and an outsider. I've also been a pastor and a professor of comparative religions at a university, and now work for a ministry that seeks to share the gospel on campus. And I can say this with certainty: God loves Mormons.

But because I love Mormons, I simply cannot love Mormonism. The latter threatens the former. So this is a book for any Christian who wants to lovingly engage Mormons with the truth—but who isn't sure where or how to start. It will help you talk compellingly and compassionately to Mormon friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, and missionaries.

### Who are Mormons?

So, who are Mormons? As a matter of branding, they don't want you using the word "Mormonism" anymore.<sup>1</sup> According to the Church website, when describing the combination of doctrine, culture and lifestyle unique to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term "the restored gospel of Jesus Christ" is preferred. While that may be preferred, the Bible-believing Christian won't grant that what Mormons have is the "restored gospel."<sup>2</sup> In this book we will continue to use "Mormonism" or "LDS," not out of disrespect, but simply due to those being the words in common use.

Mormonism is a religion with a great deal of affluence and influence. At the end of 2019, there were almost

70,000 full-time Mormon missionaries. Nearly every election cycle we see at least one Mormon running for the presidency of the United States. While only 2% of the US population is Mormon, they make up 6% of the US Senate. The LDS Church has more than 16 million members around the world, and is still growing (although not quite as quickly as it was a few years ago).<sup>3</sup>

Mormons are a people who are zealous for God, but whose zeal is not according to the knowledge of God. Mormons are very successful people, often contributing to societal good. They are a people with whom evangelical Christians share much in common, in terms of moral and political views. But we do not share the same theology—not even close. In view of our cultural and moral similarities and theological differences, one Christian seminary president said in his address to an audience of Mormon college students, “I do not believe that we will go to heaven together. But we may go to jail together.”<sup>4</sup>

## Bash or dash?

As we seek to engage with Mormons, there are two approaches that we need to avoid: I call these the “bash” and “dash” approaches.

The “bash” approach looks more like blasting opponents than it does blessing neighbors. Some people mock Mormons and look for every opportunity to “prove them wrong,” merely to win an argument. Obviously, this is more likely to make enemies rather than converts. As in all evangelism, when engaging with Mormons the aim is to win the person rather than merely winning an argument.

Equally ineffective is the “dash” approach, which tries to avoid meaningful interaction. Perhaps we draw the blinds and close the curtains upon seeing the LDS missionaries approaching our door, pretending not to be home. Or if we do open the door, we simply tell the Mormon, “Thanks, but no thanks, I have my own religion,” before quickly shutting it.

While slightly more polite, this attitude of disengagement or indifference is not going to result in Mormons coming to Christ. It may be that such Christians regard Mormonism as just another Christian denomination; or that they are wary of upsetting the relationship they have with a Mormon friend or colleague. But those who know Christ and want to make him known will resist an attitude of indifference or ignorance. Instead we’ll seek to engage with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3 v 15-16) and yet in truth and love (Ephesians 4 v 15).

This book will equip you to take a more fruitful approach than either “bash” or “dash.” We won’t spend much, if any, time explaining non-essential doctrinal aspects of the Mormon religion that you may have heard about (such as not drinking coffee, wearing special underwear, or symbols on the Temple). Instead we’ll respectfully consider the Mormon essential theological beliefs that we need to know in order to effectively reach them in relatively simple and enjoyable conversation. We’ll learn how to ask thought-provoking questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying assumptions. We see this same approach employed by the apostle Paul and Jesus in their use of argument and questions. It requires that we know or learn something

about our audience—including its core theology—for persuasive communication honoring to God.

All that said, if you're looking for ironclad rules of universal logic with which to combat false belief, you won't find them. For one thing, Mormons don't always use logic when it comes to religion. There is also a wide variety in Mormon belief and practice—find five different Mormons and you may get six different opinions (this includes LDS leaders).

Most people don't join the Mormon Church for intellectual or doctrinal reasons—often they have more emotional reasons, or the attraction of the security and community that the church offers. That isn't to say that we shouldn't use reason, but it is to say that we need to discover why a particular person is a Mormon: what attracts her to this and how deeply rooted is her commitment? We need to witness to a person as a whole person, being mindful of the fact that everyone that we meet brings to the conversation their own culture, personal history, and a complex web of fears, hopes, joys, and struggles. Sometimes an individual may need an argument or a reason to believe, but other times they may need a hug or a shoulder to cry on. It is imperative that we be prepared for this (1 Peter 3 v 15-16).

As one pastor and ex-Mormon in Utah put it, “When we limit our engagement with Mormonism to comparing truth claims, we ignore much of what matters to Mormons themselves.”<sup>5</sup> So let's start by looking at Mormon culture.

## *Glossary of useful terms*

**Apostle:** One of the LDS Church's 12 living apostles (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) who govern the LDS Church under the president. When an apostle dies, another man is called to replace him.

**Book of Mormon:** One of the four books making up the Mormon scriptures. Joseph Smith claimed that he discovered the text of the Book of Mormon in 1827, written on gold plates, and subsequently translated it. It purports to tell the history of the ancient Americas and how Jesus established his church there.

**Brigham Young:** The second president of the LDS Church (1847-1877), and the founder of Salt Lake City. Brigham Young University (BYU) is named after him.

**Celestial glory/celestial kingdom:** The highest level of heaven in LDS theology. Mormons believe that after final judgment, people will be assigned to either the telestial, terrestrial or celestial kingdom. (Only a small number will be cast out to the "outer darkness" with Satan.)

**Doctrine and Covenants (D&C):** One of the four Mormon holy books, mainly containing beliefs and commandments that Mormons seek to abide by.

**Great Apostasy:** The belief that, after the time of Jesus' first apostles in the first century, there was a great falling-away; the true faith was lost and corrupted for centuries, until it was restored by Joseph Smith.

**Heavenly Father:** The title that Mormons use for the God who rules our world.

**Joseph Smith:** The founder and first president of the LDS Church (1805-1844).

**Nephites and Lamanites:** Two people groups that the Book of Mormon claims lived in the ancient Americas.

**Pearl of Great Price:** One of the four Mormon holy books, containing various teaching by Joseph Smith and writings purportedly by Abraham.

**Prophet:** Another title for the president of the LDS Church; believed to be God's spokesman on earth and exclusively able to receive authoritative revelation from him.

**Sacred Grove:** The place where Joseph Smith was said to have had his "First Vision" after praying about which church was right to join. Smith claimed that God told him that all the churches had become corrupt, but that he would provide a restoration plan through Joseph Smith. As such, this is a foundational event in Mormonism.

**Saints:** LDS believers.

**Temple:** A place of worship where Mormons perform special ceremonies and ordinances. The 160+ temples around the world are considered to be very sacred and only members of the Mormon Church can enter. Regular Sabbath worship takes place in meetinghouses/chapels, which are open to non-members.

**Testimony:** A Mormon person's sincere conviction that the key beliefs of Mormonism are true. It will usually include claims that Jesus is the Son of God and carried out the atonement; that Joseph Smith is a true prophet; that the LDS Church is the true church; and that its president is God's living prophet today.