

Constructive Conversations on Faith & Doubt

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Emigration Stake
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Introduction

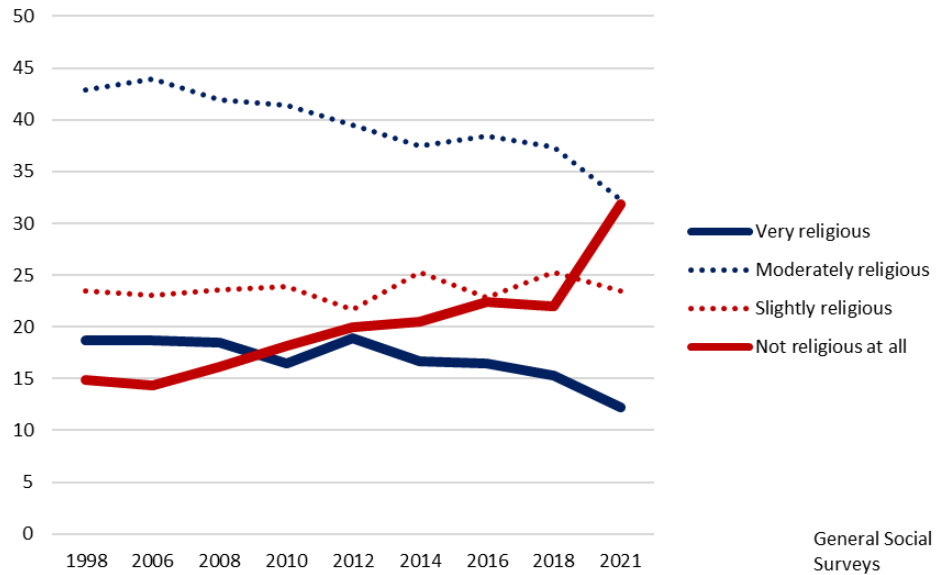
“There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. . . . One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty.”

-Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Oct. 2013 General Conference



How Religious Americans Consider Themselves To Be



-Center for Study of Religion and American Culture at IUPUI

General Decline in Religiosity in the U.S

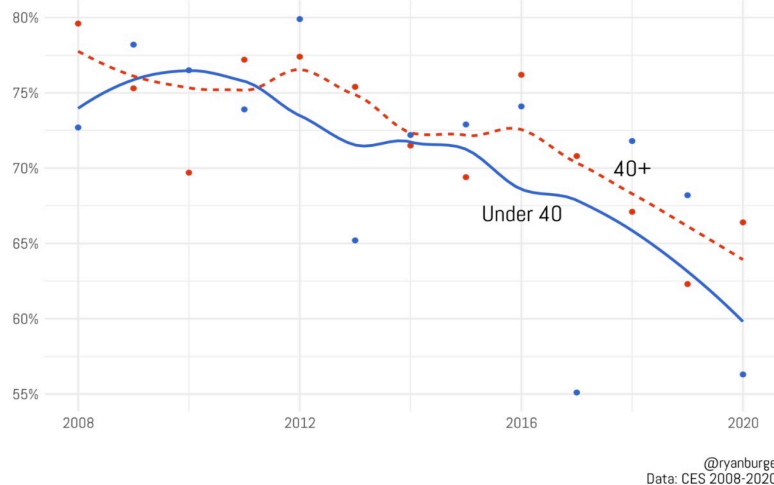
“Family influence is still, hands down, the No. 1 factor in transmitting religious faith in an enduring way. But in our current religious climate, it’s often not enough. That’s not the fault of parents. It’s not even the fault of the young people who leave, though it may seem like they made this choice all on their own. Humans are very, very social creatures. Most of us do what the people around us are doing. And right now, the fastest growing religion in America is ‘no religion.’” -Jana Riess, LDS Researcher

General Increase in Polarization & Contentious Rhetoric

“Venomous contention . . . infects our civic dialogue and too many personal relationships today. Civility and decency seem to have disappeared during this era of polarization and passionate disagreements.”

-President Russell M. Nelson
April 2023 General Conference

Share Saying Religion is Very Important Among Latter-day Saints



CES data analyzed by Ryan Burge, Eastern Illinois University

Clarify Conversational Aims

Scenario #1:

Person A has questions or doubts and is asking Person B for insights or direction.

Aim: Finding answers or understanding

Scenario #2:

Person A has left the church and is in conflict about that decision with Person B, who remains a committed member.

Aim: Reducing contention and healing the relationship



Scenario #1: Finding Answers or Understanding



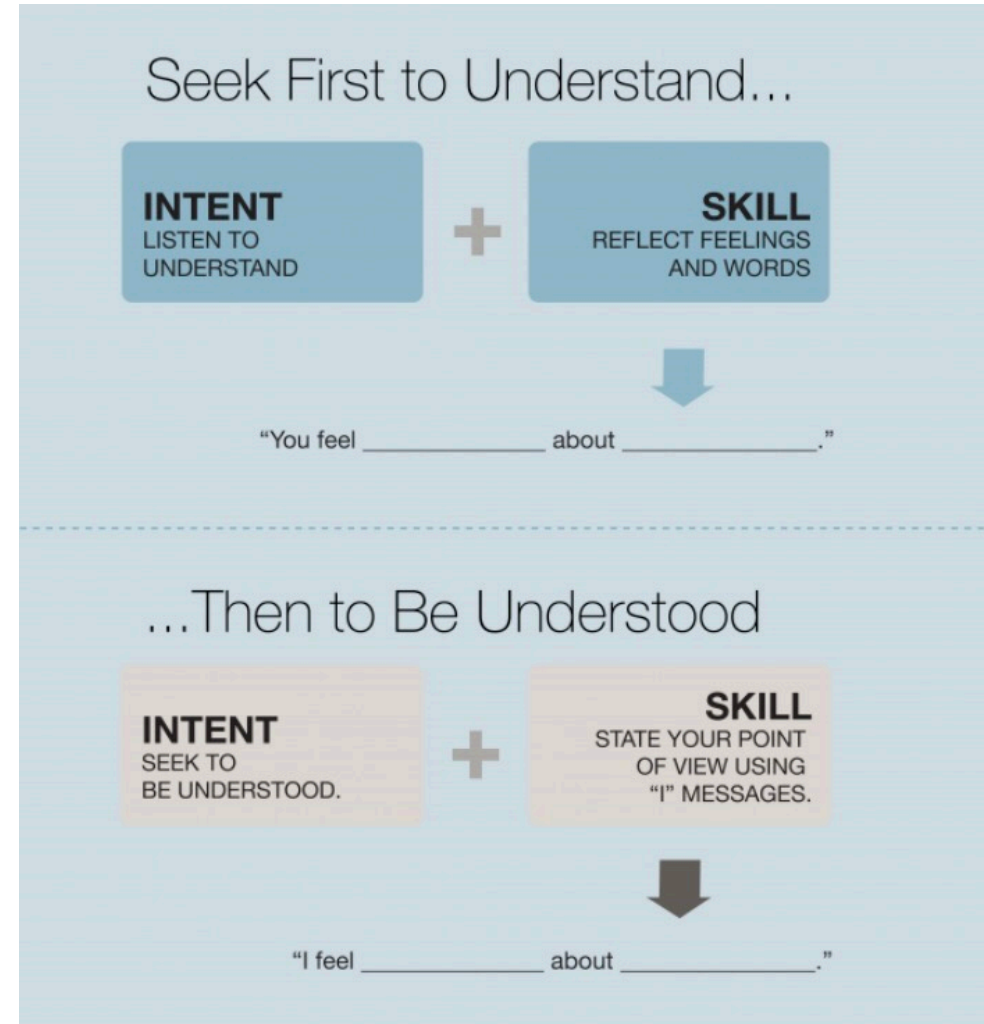
“Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and a teacher responded, ‘Don’t worry about it!’ Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue.”

-President M. Russell Ballard,
December 2016 *Ensign*

Seek First to Understand

“Perhaps even more important than speaking is listening. ... If we listen with love, we won’t need to wonder what to say. It will be given to us—by the Spirit.”

-Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Witness Unto Me,” May 2001



Turn to Good Sources

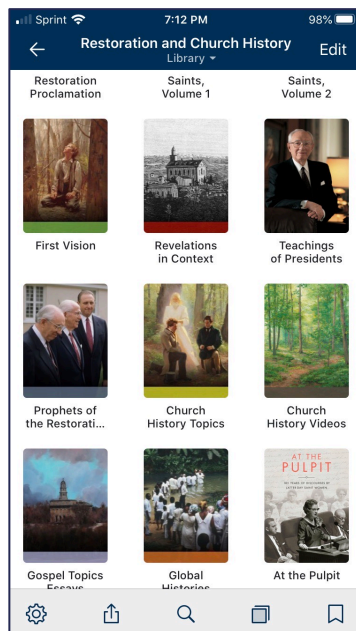
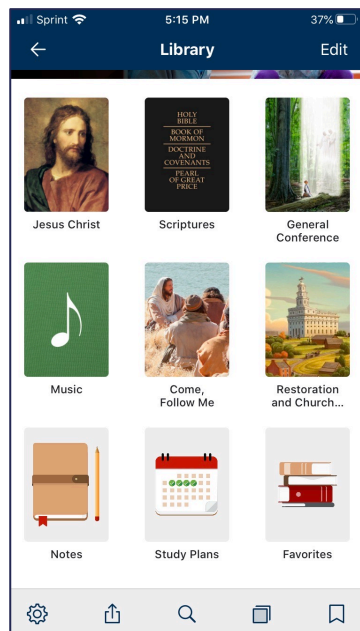
Official Church Sources:

Saints: A four-volume narrative history of the Church (three volumes currently published)

Gospel Topics Essays: In-depth scholarly essays on complex or controversial topics

Church History Topics: Short, encyclopedic entries on events and issues in Church history

Joseph Smith Papers: A collection of documents/commentary related to Joseph Smith



BOOKS

-Terryl and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest of Faith*, Deseret Book, 2014.

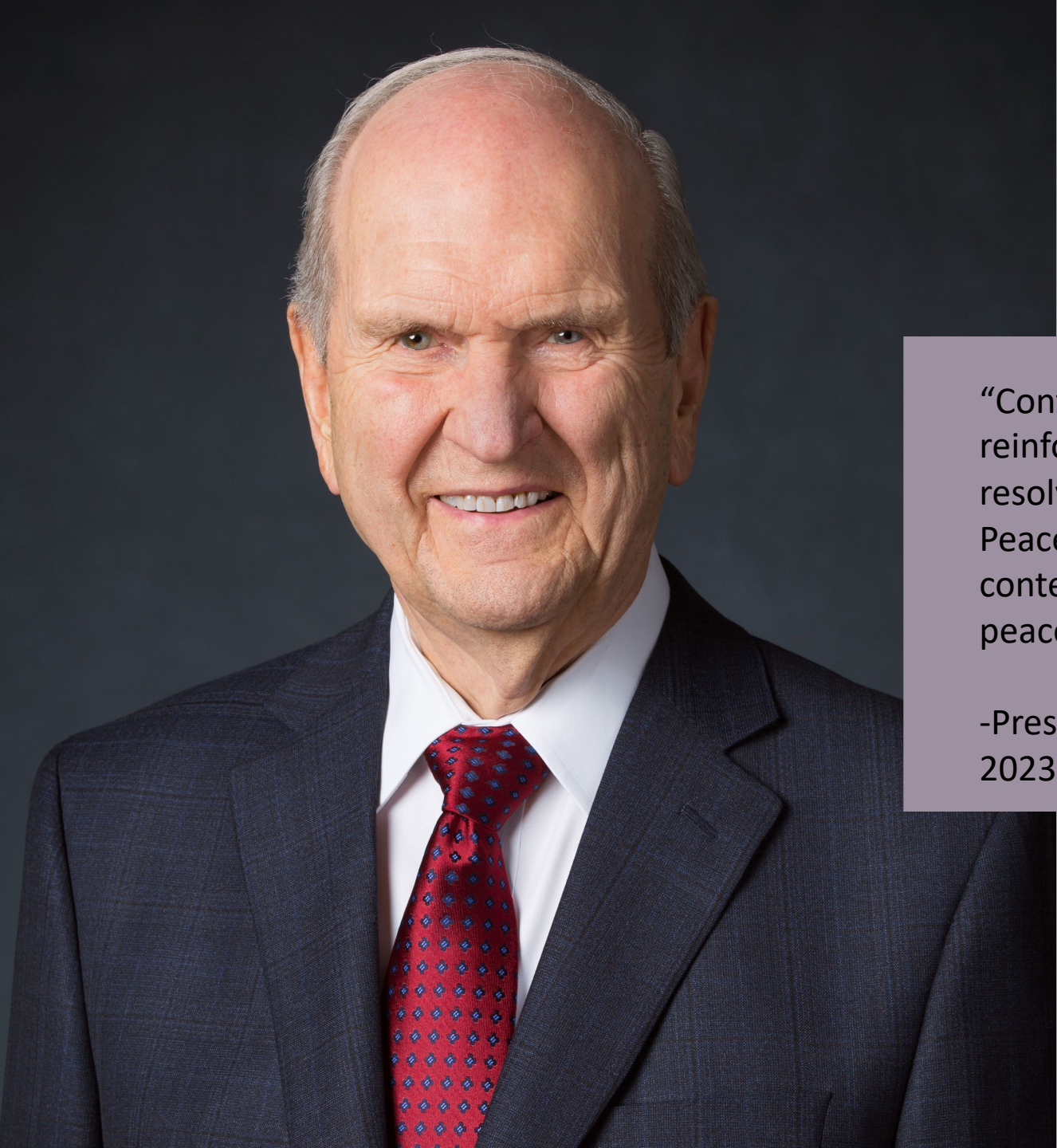
-Patrick Q. Mason, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt*, Deseret Book 2015.

-Bruce and Marie Hafen, *Faith is Not Blind*, Deseret Book, 2018.

-Adam Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon*, Deseret Book, 2018.

-David B. Ostler, *Bridges: Ministering to Those Who Question*, Greg Kofford Books, 2019.

-Anthony Sweat, *Seekers Wanted: The Skills You Need for the Faith You Want*, Deseret Book, 2019.



Scenario #2: Reducing Contention and Healing Relationships

“Contention drives away the Spirit—every time. Contention reinforces the false notion that confrontation is the way to resolve differences; but it never is. Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or **reconciliation**. I urge you to *choose* to be a peacemaker, now and always.”

-President Russel M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” April 2023 General Conference

Acknowledge Different Values

- “Showing others that you can be generous with them regardless of their values . . . can make them more likely to consider your point of view.”

-Arthur C. Brooks, “A Gentler, Better Way to Change Minds,” based on Jonathan Haidt’s work on Moral Foundations Theory

Moral Foundations Theory – there are six key foundations



CARE/HARM



FAIRNESS/CHEATING



LOYALTY/BETRAYAL



AUTHORITY/SUBVERSION



PURITY/DEGRADATION



LIBERTY/OPPRESSION

These foundations form the basis of our moral intuitions and judgements.

Don't "Other" Others

"Go out of your way to welcome those who disagree with you as valued voices, worthy of respect and attention. There is no 'them,' only 'us.'"

- Arthur C. Brooks



Don't Take Rejection Personally

- “Because we all establish our identities, in part, around our values, when someone dismisses your beliefs, that can feel like they are dismissing *you*.”

-Arthur C. Brooks





Parent/Child Conversations

- “. . . The spiritual impression came, unbidden: ‘The time for fasting and grief is over now. It is time to stop grieving for the son you lost and time to start rejoicing in the son you have.’ She did not feel any rebuke in this notion—rather a validation that while our prayers of desperation and fear are heard by God, there is a time to replace them with prayers of gratitude and trust. There is a time to stop grieving for what is wrong and start rejoicing in what is yet right and strong and good in our children, in us, and – even when all else fails—in God’s great plan of salvation and happiness.”
- -Wendy Ulrich, PhD *Forgiving Ourselves*, Deseret Book 2008



Avoiding Alienating Behaviors

- Preaching
- Judging
- Manipulating

From *Bridges: Ministering to Those Who Question* by David B. Ostler

“Please do not preach to them! Your family members or friends already know the Church’s teachings. They don’t need another lecture! What they need—what we all need—is love and understanding, not judging. Share your positive experiences of living the gospel. The most powerful thing you can do is share your spiritual experiences with family and friends. Also, be genuinely interested in their lives, their successes, and their challenges. Always be warm, gentle, loving, and kind.”

-M. Russell Ballard, 2017 BYU Devotional

Creating a Loving Relationship

- Expressing empathy
- Validating
- Practicing acceptance
- Building positivity



“As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be examples of how to interact with others—*especially* when we have differences of opinion. One of the easiest ways to identify a true follower of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people. . . . The Savior’s message is clear: His *true* disciples build, lift, encourage, persuade, and inspire—no matter how difficult the situation. True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers.”

-President Russell M. Nelson
April 2023 General Conference

