



Speaking the Truth in Love to the Latter-day Saints

Paul Carden

“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Prov. 16:19).

Do you believe in “divine appointments?”

I thought it was only an errand. While driving back to the CFAR office after picking up some envelopes from the printer I noticed two Mormon missionaries standing on a sidewalk preparing to go out on their proselytizing calls. It was an opportunity I couldn’t pass up.

I pulled over, got a copy of the tract “New Light on Joseph Smith’s First Vision” from my glove compartment, walked up to the young men, and greeted them. One was from Utah, the other from Idaho; one of them had been “on the field” for only a week. After getting to know them a bit, I offered them the tract, telling them that it had been written by someone who had done careful firsthand research on Mormon prophet Joseph Smith’s claim to have been visited by God the Father and Jesus in a grove near his home in upstate New York.



When our curbside conversation ended half an hour later, I marveled at how God had guided the encounter—easily the most positive and productive in my more than 20 years of witnessing to Mormons!

As I drove back to the office and replayed the exchange in my mind, several points stood out. I’d like to share them with you in the hope that you’ll be better prepared when your next divine appointment comes:

First, build a bridge. When cult missionaries come to your door, get to know something about them personally—their names, where they’re from, how long they’ve been in the group, and even how (and why) they joined. Then, begin by talking about something of mutual interest, like a point of doctrine especially dear to them. (This reflects the approach that the apostle Paul modeled for us in Acts 17.)

Second, stick to the point. Even though the conversation covered a lot of ground, the Lord graciously enabled me to keep steering it back to two key issues: What is your hope? and How can we know what is true? The Joseph Smith story outlined in the tract was relevant because, as persistent questioning confirmed, the missionaries’ hope rests on him—on his personal integrity, his credibility as a prophet of God, his interpretation of Scripture, and even his personal permission to enter eternal life! Admittedly, there are many controversial (and even devastating) points to discuss about Mormonism; however, I knew my time was short and that I might not get another opportunity to lovingly present the truth to them.

Sticking to the main issue of their hope and how we know truth naturally opened the way to share from God’s Word, our final and authoritative standard. Using a technique

developed by Mark Cares in his book *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, I took them first to Matthew 5:48 (“Be ye therefore perfect”), then to Hebrews 10:10–18 (“For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified”), asking them to read each passage aloud from their own copies of the King James Version. (While Mormons often question the credibility of Scripture verses that conflict with their teachings, none will reject these two.) And by contrasting Matthew 7:15–16 (“Ye shall know them [i.e., false prophets] by their fruits”) with the clear tests for prophets given in Deuteronomy 13 and 18 I was able to help the missionaries see that Joseph Smith’s claims must be judged by God’s Word.

Third, offer a clear alternative. Too many Christians “share” about Mormonism by ruthlessly tearing down the missionaries’ cherished beliefs without offering them any hope in return. Remember that every Mormon missionary has a “testimony”—usually about the Mormon church, the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith. Be ready to tell of what Jesus has done for you personally and to back up your hope with Scripture (e.g., Galatians 2:8–9, Titus 3:5, 1 John 5:10–13).

Fourth, end on a positive note. Don’t get emotional or let your frustration with the missionaries’ words or attitudes get the better of you! Believe it or not, this has been my downfall on more than one occasion, as my dear wife can attest. Don’t think you’ve accomplished anything unless you’ve treated them with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15), and don’t casually ridicule their beliefs. Bear in mind that, if you’ve done your job well, you’ve left two young people weighed heavily with the possibility that they’re devoting two precious years of their lives to spreading a lie. Remember, too, that the messenger (you) can be just as important as the message in these situations; by parting as friends you can counteract the stereotypes Mormons often nurture about being willfully misunderstood or persecuted.

Fifth, have something good for them to take home. This isn’t always possible, but it almost always helps. Even after I said goodbye, that tract was still in the senior missionary’s hand; and God willing, it would be read later that day and its references checked for accuracy. These “paper missionaries” keep working even after you’ve bidden the cultist farewell. (For a great selection of tracts for Mormon missionaries and friends, contact our partner ministry, the Institute for Religious Research, at www.irr.org.)

Finally, pray for them. Bring them daily before the “throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16) and trust God to continue working, by His Spirit, through His Word and your witness!

*There are many fine materials contrasting Mormonism and biblical Christianity; contact us for a list of recommended resources. One of the best books I’ve seen on practical evangelism among Mormon friends, neighbors, loved ones, and missionaries is Pastor Mark Cares’ book *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, which has an excellent companion video. Also see these web sites on Mormonism:*

www.mit.irr.org | www.mrm.org | www.utlm.org | www.apologeticsindex.org