

## 9. How do Latter-day Saints believe they should live their lives?

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“We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men.” Joseph Smith wrote this in 1842 in response to a journalist’s inquiry concerning the beliefs of Latter-day Saints. “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (Articles of Faith 1:13). Latter-day Saints do not claim that they are all virtuous, without exception, nor that others do not display great virtue. Latter-day Saints do, however, feel strongly that their religious beliefs must be translated into daily living, and so they “seek after” those qualities of goodness.

### **An Obligation and Covenant**

The charge to seek after virtue, goodness, honor, and all praiseworthy things is an obligation that flows from love for and devotion to God. Jesus declared, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Later in his ministry, Jesus further declared that loving God and loving our fellowmen are the two great commandments upon which “hang all the law and the prophets” (see Matthew 22:37–40). Latter-day Saints take these commandments very seriously, for love is the essence of true religion (see James 1:27). “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,” the apostle Paul wrote, “and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–2; see Moroni 7:44–48). Latter-day Saints embrace the teachings of both ancient and modern scriptures that one’s love for God must also be manifested in love for one’s fellowmen.

People enter the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through baptism and take upon themselves a sacred covenant to love God with all their heart, might, mind, and strength and “serve him and keep his commandments” (Mosiah 18:10). They accept the obligation to try not only to keep the Lord’s commandments, but also to become more like him—with hearts and lives more filled with purity, kindness, compassion, and mercy. Under this baptismal covenant, Latter-day Saints promise to show love for Christ by being “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light,” “to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9). It is this kind of concern for others and compassionate service that characterizes true discipleship (see John 13:34–35).

The extensive welfare system of the LDS Church and its humanitarian service throughout the world, as well as the acts of kindness and generosity exhibited by individual church members, are all byproducts of a sincere effort to love their fellowmen as the Savior admonished. This Christian service and compassion is not restricted to fellow believers or members of the LDS Church; it has no regard to race, religion, or nationality. “Respecting how much a man shall give annually,” Joseph Smith declared, “we have no special instructions to give; he is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Results**

Social scientists have observed that Latter-day Saints who devoutly espouse the teachings of their church, when compared to society in general, are:

- **more likely to be happy in their marriages and satisfied with their family life and less likely to divorce.**<sup>37</sup>
- **less likely to engage in premarital or extramarital sexual behavior.**<sup>38</sup>
- **less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.**<sup>39</sup>
- **more likely to enjoy strong mental health and experience less depression.**<sup>40</sup>
- **less likely to be involved in delinquent, deviant, or antisocial behaviors.**<sup>41</sup>

Numerous other studies and many more sources could be cited to further highlight the positive nature of the Latter-day Saint way of life. The mountain of empirical evidence, however, can only describe; it cannot adequately explain why Latter-day Saints generally are happy, well-adjusted, and caring people. What, then, is the answer? “Little children, let no man deceive you,” the apostle John wrote; “he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7). The fruits of righteousness found in the lives of faithful Latter-day Saints come through striving to be true to their Christian covenants. While they faithfully and earnestly “seek after” those things that are “lovely, praiseworthy, or of good report,” they recognize that these “fruits” come to them—blessing their own lives and enabling them to bless the lives of others—through the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

Latter-day Saints believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit an individual who has accepted Christ through faith and obedience is “born again” and becomes a “new creature” in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24–32; Mosiah 27:23–26). This spiritual transformation brings with it charity—the “pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47)—a love for Christ and also a love for others as Christ loves. The fruit of this spiritual rebirth includes goodness and righteousness, love, joy, peace, gentleness, and meekness (see Ephesians 5:9; Galatians 5:22–26). The newness of life that comes to one through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ affects not only what one does outwardly but also what one is inwardly.

The Savior taught that things should be judged by their fruits (see Matthew 7:15–20). Prophets and churches should be judged by the product of their ministry and teachings. An individual’s commitment to be a follower of Christ should be judged—if judged at all by mortals—by the quality of character and actions that commitment produces. Evil trees cannot bring forth good fruit, so good fruit is a sign of the goodness of the tree. Members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ believe that the fruits of the teachings of that church are obvious in their lives. They live their religion joyfully, peaceably, and with whole-souled devotion, seeking to pattern their lives after the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Their motivation for doing so comes from their love for the Lord and the sure testimony of the Spirit that burns in their hearts and inspires their minds. They are grateful beyond expression that the Savior accepts their commitment to him, forgives their transgressions, and blesses them with the good fruits of their devotion.

## Notes

36. *Times and Seasons* 3 (15 March 1842): 732.

37. See Melvin L. Wilkinson and William C. Tanner III, “The Influence of Family Size, Interaction, and Religiosity on Family Affection in a Mormon Sample,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 42/2 (1980): 297–304.

38. See Brent C. Miller and Terrance D. Olson, “Sexual Attitudes and Behavior of High School Students in Relation to Background and Contextual Factors,” *Journal of Sex Research* 24 (1988): 194–200.

39. See Ricky D. Hawks and Steven J. Bahr, "Religion and Drug Use," *Journal of Drug Education* 22/1 (1992): 1–8.

40. See Allen E. Bergin et al., "Religion and Mental Health: Mormons and Other Groups," in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 138–58.

41. See Bruce A. Chadwick and Brent L. Top, "Religiosity and Delinquency among LDS Adolescents," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32/1 (1993): 51–67.