

When Loved Ones Leave – Gospel principles for having meaningful conversations and relationships with those who have chosen to step away from the church

The Book of Mormon contains multiple descriptions of individuals in crisis and families with children who struggle with their faith. Some have drifted away while others actively disdain the gospel. Those parts could have left out of the scriptures but instead, they described them for us.

When spiritual journeys diverge, it's common to feel a multitude of emotions. Some experience anger, confusion, betrayal, grief, fear, guilt and disappointment. We may ask, "What will this mean for my family?" "Did I do something wrong?" We want to help our loved ones, but we may also want our uncomfortable emotions to go away.

Today we will learn how to anchor ourselves to a sure foundation, how to love abundantly and durably, and how to seek unity.

Anchor to a Sure Foundation

You are a beloved child of God. He loves all His children.

God is wise, patient, and loving. He gave each of us our agency. He knew that we would all have challenges and trials. He provided a Savior who has the power to draw us back to Him.

"When you know and understand how completely you are loved as a child of God, it changes everything. It changes the way you feel about yourself when you make mistakes. It changes how you feel when difficult things happen. It changes your view of God's commandments. It changes your view of others and of your capacity to make a difference." (Susan H. Porter, "God's Love: The Most Joyous to the Soul", Liahona, Nov. 2021.)

"I plead with you to take charge of your testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. Feed it truth. Don't pollute it with the false philosophies of unbelieving men and women and then wonder why your testimony is waning. Engage in daily, earnest, humble prayer. Nourish yourself in the words of ancient and modern prophets. Ask the Lord to teach you how to hear Him better. Spend more time in the temple and in family history work. As you make your testimony your highest priority, watch for miracles to happen in your life." (Russell M. Nelson, "Choices for Eternity," Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, May 2022.)

Agency is necessary for every individual

"One of the most important gifts God gave His children was moral agency. This power and privilege—and responsibility—to act for ourselves is essential to realizing our full potential as children of God. It is central to our progression on the covenant path. God's plan, as you know, was not to do everything for us but to provide a structure that allowed us to make our own choices to grow individually." (D. Todd Christofferson, "Lifelong Disciples of Jesus Christ," Church Educational System Religious Educators Conference, June 2025.)

The key is to not just believe in Christ but to believe Christ. Believe Him when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Believe Him when He says, "Fear not: for I am with thee." Believe Him when He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." He means it. With Him, we can change our weaknesses into strengths, trauma into hope, fears into confidence, and pain into growth.

"He's not waiting for us to be perfect. Perfect people don't need a Savior. He came to save his people in their imperfections. He is the Lord of the living, and the living make mistakes. He's not embarrassed by us, angry at

us, or shocked. He wants us in our brokenness, in our unhappiness, in our guilt and our grief.” (Chieko N. Okazaki, *Lighten Up*, p. 174)

What I can control and what I can't

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“In this church that honors personal agency so strongly, that was restored by a young man who asked questions and sought answers, we respect those who honestly search for truth. It may break our hearts when their journey takes them away from the church we love and the truth we have found, but we honor their right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience, just as we claim that privilege for ourselves.” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," Liahona, Nov. 2013)

“If I have to be like you, I fit in. But if I get to be myself, I belong.”

(Aliah Hall, "Being Whole and Belonging," Clinical Counselor at BYU, Referencing Brené Brown)

Prepare yourself to love abundantly and durably

In a world that often confuses acceptance with affirmation, we can practice a more durable love—one that doesn't require us to yield our beliefs in order to maintain connection. We can build relationships where disagreement is not mistaken for personal rejection.

“[Charity] allows us to keep our hearts open without compromising our convictions. In practice, this means listening without needing to agree, showing up without needing to fix, and loving without needing to control. It means resisting the urge to “win” conversations instead of making space for relationships to breathe.” (Tyler Andersen, "When Loved Ones Leave the Church: Holding to Faith in a Fractured Family," Public Square Magazine, August 19, 2025)

The \$20 example – Imagine you only have \$20 left to your name. How are you going to care for yourself let alone your loved ones? Now imagine that your \$20 is stolen. How do you feel? Are you afraid, upset, or feel abandoned?

Now imagine that you have \$20 in your hand but twenty million in the bank. Now if your \$20 is stolen, how do you feel? It might be startling or frustrating but you are coming from a place of abundance. You can be confident and maybe curious about why someone would be so desperate to steal.

The difference between scarcity and abundance is significant.

Repeat this example but replace \$20 with a knowledge of your divine nature backed by a foundation in God's love for his children.

Ideas for personal growth

- Build a culture and a community where everyone, regardless of where they are on their faith journey, is welcome
- Communicate with humility, kindness, and sincerity
- Pray for perspective to see them as He does
- Choose to stay soft-hearted
- Be humble. Say sorry
- Understand God's love through prayer and by studying the scriptures and prophetic teachings
- Set a boundary, not to punish, but to protect your peace
- Look for ways to show compassion and kindness
- Find your own safe space and trusted people
- Create safe places where questions can be asked without emotional and judgmental baggage
- Express your love and commitment simply, sincerely, and repeatedly
- Remember what God has done for his people
- Practice, practice, practice

Boundaries are limits or rules that define how you want to be treated and what you're comfortable with. They act like invisible lines between you and others, helping you protect your time, energy, and well-being. Everyone has a right to boundaries.

I can love you and I can love me, at the same time.

Chocolate Pudding: a boundaries example

Imagine a small child with a bowl of chocolate pudding. They are not bad, they don't want to hurt anything. The child is cute; the pudding is yummy. But you choosing to allow them to walk on your carpet has inherent possible consequences. Do you accept the consequences or do you set boundaries? And if they pass those boundaries by their choice, do you remove the pudding, the child, the floor, or yourself?

DIFFICULT DAYS?

Practice Emotional Discipline

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1-minute stress relievers

Do one of these actions when you feel overwhelmed

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Try a grounding exercise



Take deep breaths



Message a loved one



Get some fresh air



Stretch your body



Drink water

Grow in Unity

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland recalled, “[President Russell M. Nelson] told me once that one of the first rules of medical inquiry is ‘Ask the patient where it hurts. The patient,’ he said, ‘will be your best guide to a correct diagnosis and eventual remedy.’” When a friend or family member reaches out to you with difficult questions or concerns about the Church, take time to listen. They are reaching out to you because they trust you. Reward that trust by seeking first to understand their needs.” (Topics: Helping Others with Their Questions)

Ask Better Questions to Receive Better Answers

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ADMIT WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW

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You won't always get everything right, but the effort still matters.

The Lord sees it, and He can consecrate even your imperfect attempts to build bridges.

"When we consecrate our meager but best effort, God magnifies it. When we sacrifice for Jesus Christ, He sanctifies us. This is the transformative power of God's grace." (Steven D. Shumway, "Participate to Prepare for Christ's Return," Liahona, May 2025)

Remember, the Savior walks with you. He knows what it is to be misunderstood, to be rejected, and to love without being loved in return. He won't force anyone to choose Him and neither can we. We can trust Him. He is mighty to save!

"Unity requires effort. It develops when we cultivate the love of God in our hearts and we focus on our eternal destiny. We are united by our common, primary identity as children of God and our commitment to the truths of the restored gospel. In turn, our love of God and our discipleship of Jesus Christ generate genuine concern for others. We value the kaleidoscope of others' characteristics, perspectives, and talents. If we are unable to place our discipleship to Jesus Christ above personal interests and viewpoints, we should reexamine our priorities and change." (Dale G. Renlund, "The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity," Liahona, Nov. 2021, 83–85)

Small and simple steps to build unity

- A good goal may be just to keep the conversation going
- Listen with humility. Active listening and making a genuine connection make a difference for someone who is being vulnerable
- The best place to start is by seeking to understand their point of view rather than trying to change it
- Remember that everyone's experiences are different

- Avoid being dismissive or judgmental
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage others to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. They don't necessarily have a right or wrong answer. For example: "Can you tell me more?" "How do you feel about that?" "Can you help me understand?" "What can I do to help?" Asking good questions shows that you care and will help you avoid misunderstanding.
- Invite the Lord into the process. Pray that the Lord will help you minister.
- Trust the Lord's timing
- It is okay to not have answers
- Learn, unlearn, and relearn many things
- Remember times you have experienced peace, joy, love, and clarity. Your past spiritual experiences can serve as a source of strength and protection from doubt and fear
- Continue cultivating your testimony
- Establish healthy boundaries (learn more through study and prayer if you are unsure how to do this)
- Allow every voice to be heard and respected. Honor agency
- Cultivate your time together in fulfilling ways. Explore something new. Find ways to do good together

ACTIONS COUNT MORE THAN WORDS

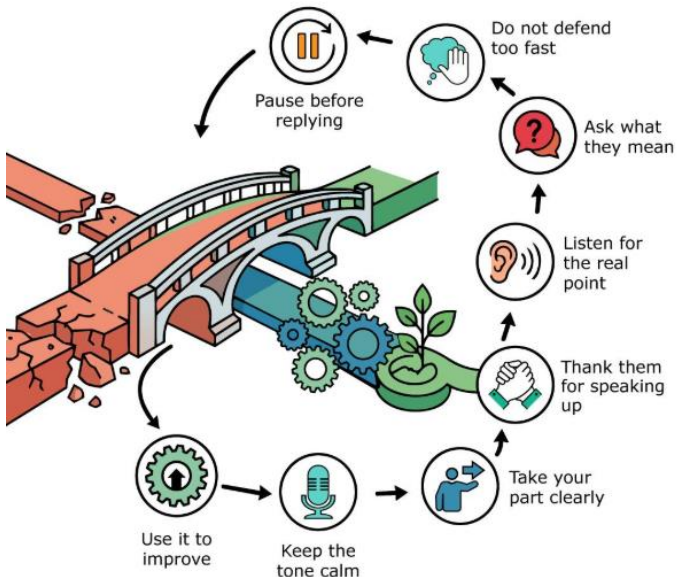
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A Criticism Can Break Trust or Build It

When people feel heard, even hard feedback can bring them closer.

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HOW TO SAY "I DISAGREE" THE SMART WAY

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Listen Before You Respond

Take a moment to truly hear what others mean, not just what they say.



Focus on the Idea, Not the Person

Disagree with opinions, not with people. Keep respect at the center.



Use Calm and Clear Words

Choose language that invites dialogue, not defense.



Explain Your Point of View

Share your reasoning with honesty and openness — not to win, but to connect.



Look for Common Ground

Find the part you both agree on and build from there.



End with Appreciation

Thank the other person for sharing their thoughts — respect always strengthens relationships.

Trust in the Lord

Jesus Christ's last recorded words to his disciples were, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20)

"Be still and know that I am God" (Doctrine Covenants 101:16).

Regardless of their choices, your relationship can remain an influence for good in their lives.

"Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them." (3 Nephi 18: 32)

If you are asked, "Why do you continue to stay in the church?", share your hope in Christ. Answer honestly, without pride or a desire to manipulate, and allow the spirit to testify in a way they can hear.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear [reverence/awe]." (1 Peter 3:15)

"My dear brothers and sisters, the best is yet to come for those who spend their lives building up others. Today I invite you to examine your discipleship within the context of the way you treat others. I bless you to make any adjustments that may be needed so that your behavior is ennobling, respectful, and representative of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

I bless you to replace belligerence with beseeching, animosity with understanding, and contention with peace. God lives! Jesus is the Christ. He stands at the head of this Church. We are His servants. He will help us to become His peacemakers." (Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," Liahona, May 2023, 98–101)

Additional Study

Topics and Questions: Helping Others with Their Questions

Topics and Questions: Seeking Answers to Your Questions

Gerrit W. Gong, “[Room in the Inn](#),” *Liahona*, May 2021, 24–27
Russell M. Nelson, “[Peacemakers Needed](#),” *Liahona*, May 2023, 98–101
Emily Belle Freeman, “[Best Days and Worst Days](#),” *Liahona*, May 2026
Dale G. Renlund, “[The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity](#),” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 83–85
Tamara W. Runia, “[Seeing God’s Family through the Overview Lens](#),” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 62, 68–69.
“[Five Things Good Listeners Do](#),” *Ensign*, June 2018, 6–9
“[Developing the Empathy to Minister](#),” *Ensign*, Feb. 2019, 8–11

Growth and comfort do not coexist

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