

# UNDERSTANDING MORMON DISBELIEF

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*Why do some Mormons lose their testimony,  
and what happens to them when they do?*

## **March 2012**

Results from a 2011 online survey of >3000  
Mormons who at one time believed their  
Church was true, but no longer believe

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# Survey Background

This survey represents the first in a series that will explore the beliefs and practices of current and former Mormons (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). We recognize that there are many different decisions and experiences in the lives of Mormons. Our initial area of exploration relates to reasons that Mormons question their belief in the Church or experience a “crisis of faith.”

Many believing Mormons never experience a faith crisis, and many Mormons who do experience a crisis of faith do not ultimately lose their faith in that process. Some Mormons who leave the Church, especially some converts, end up leaving because they were never fully integrated either socially or spiritually to begin with. In future surveys we hope to explore some of those responses in more detail. However, our goal with this survey, “Understanding Mormon Disbelief,” is to increase understanding of issues relating to Mormons who, having once held firm belief in the Church, subsequently lose that belief in part or whole. Mormons sometimes refer to this process of losing belief or experiencing a faith crisis as “losing one’s testimony.” While the phenomenon of losing faith is common across all religions, there are certain truth claims and cultural factors specific to Mormonism. This survey aims to shed light on some of these unique contributors, as well as to provide further insight on the level of disclosure and perceived costs associated with disbelief within the Mormon community.

Although it is unclear exactly how many Mormons lose faith each year, our observation is that the number appears to be growing in developed countries (e.g. the United States, Europe). We also observe that many of these members were at one point highly dedicated. Whether or not the total number of disbelievers has reached a significant level, we believe that the “worth of souls is great,” and that each individual matters. We believe that there are individuals in faith crises who are suffering unnecessarily because of a lack of understanding and empathy. We have seen the pain and struggle in the lives of many of our friends – not just those who have been through a crisis of faith, but their loved ones and the overall Church community as well. We hope this survey provides a balanced voice to some of their concerns and feelings.

We also believe that many faithful, believing members of the Church may wish to better understand their fellow brothers and sisters who have struggled with or who are currently struggling with their faith. For those who wish to “mourn with those who mourn, and comfort those who stand in need of comfort,” we believe that an essential step is to understand the actual issues that are important to those who have doubts in the Church. Our goal is to create an awareness of these issues, and to facilitate the dialogue regarding how we can build compassion and understanding.

This survey has raised our awareness of the shortcomings of our own survey methodology; future surveys will address these shortcomings. Indeed, if we have learned one thing, it is that we still have much to learn. Nevertheless, we also feel that many of the insights from this survey will provide preliminary empirical evidence that can enable understanding of those struggling with faith in the Church. Some findings seem intuitive, while others may prove surprising.

# Survey Methodology and Disclaimers

## Notes on Survey Methodology

- This survey was fielded in the fall and winter of 2011. The survey addressed “people who once believed that the Church is ‘the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth’ (D&C 1:30), but who no longer believe that it is.” The survey questions can be found at <http://psychmeasures.org/index.php?sid=58166&newtest=Y&lang=en>
- A link to the survey was posted on several sites associated with the “Bloggernacle”, or LDS-themed blogs, as well as through social media.
- The survey generated 3388 respondents. 302 respondents were removed due to incomplete data or because they answered “yes” to still believing that the Church was “the only true and living church.” A total of 3086 respondents were included in the final analysis.
- One of the major limitations of our survey is that it assumes a binary yes/no answer to the screening criteria regarding disbelief in the truthfulness of the Church, without differentiating around the spectrum of belief (i.e. partial believers, partial disbelievers, etc.). In future surveys we plan to explore the spectrum of belief more fully. The respondents who were included in our survey were those on the disbelieving side of the spectrum.
- As the survey sample was not random, the we make no claim of representativeness or statistical significance in the sample. This survey reflects the views of these self-selected respondents only, although we feel that many points of this analysis reflect the experiences of many people in the Church who pass through a crisis of faith and adjust their beliefs.
- In addition to standard reporting of data, various statistical techniques and methodologies (multiple linear regression, factor analysis, etc.) were utilized to gain additional insights from the data.

## Who Took the Survey

- Gender: 58% male, 42% female
- Marital status: 70% married, 30% single
- Geography: 31% Utah, 60% non-Utah U.S.A., 9% International
- Education: 3% High School, 27% Some College, 39% College Grad, 21% Masters, 10% Doctorate
- Income: 24% <\$40K/year, 34% \$40-\$80K/year, 36% \$80-\$200K/year, 6% >\$200K/year
- Total respondents included = 3086

All respondents in the final analysis believed at one time that the Church was “the only true and living church” but no longer believed that at the time of taking this survey.

# 1. Church Involvement of Disbelievers

In general, many of the survey respondents were active and highly involved with the Church before losing belief, with many having served missions and/or having held leadership positions within the Church.

- 87% of the men and 77% of the women respondents had served in at least one calling
- 73% of the men and 17% of the women had served full-time missions for the Church
- More than 50% of the men and 40% of the women had served in various leadership positions of the Church
- Many remain active\* in the Church today

\* Active = attend church at least every other week

**Table: Prior Activity by Age Group**

Age Group	Median Years Active	Median Years Inactive / Resigned (for those no longer active)	% who still remain active* today
Teens	17	1	41%
20's	22	3	18%
30's	30	4	28%
40's	35	5	28%
50's	35	8	17%
60+	40	10	20%

**Table: Church Callings for Male Respondents (n = 1788)**

	# of respondents	% of respondents	% who still remain active* in church today
Missionary	1306	73%	33%
Elders Quorum Presidency	880	49%	37%
Young Men's Presidency	680	38%	33%
Ward Mission Leader	388	22%	39%
Bishopric	356	20%	38%
Temple Worker	204	11%	36%
High Priest Group Presidency	122	7%	41%
Stake High Council	92	5%	48%
Stake Auxiliary Presidency	70	4%	34%
Stake Presidency	20	1%	55%
Mission Presidency	5	0.3%	20%

**Table: Church Callings for Female Respondents (n = 1297)**

	# of respondents	% of respondents	% who still remain active* in church today
Young Women's Presidency	544	42%	24%
Relief Society Presidency	452	35%	26%
Primary Presidency	406	31%	27%
Missionary	215	17%	25%
Spouse of Bishopric Member	99	8%	34%
Temple Worker	60	5%	28%
Stake Auxiliary Presidency	71	5%	37%
Spouse of Stake Presidency	5	0.4%	20%

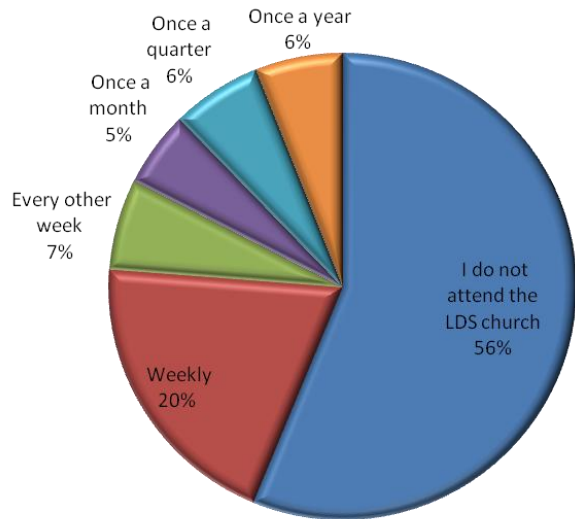
# 1. Church Involvement of Disbelievers (cont'd)

Although many of the disbelievers from the survey are no longer active participants in the Church, many still participate actively and regularly attend church meetings:

- 56% no longer attend the Church
- 20% attend weekly
- 7% attend every other week
- 17% attend less often

Many of those who do remain active express concerns about not feeling comfortable or welcome at church as a disbeliever or skeptic.

**Chart: Current Church Attendance of Respondents**



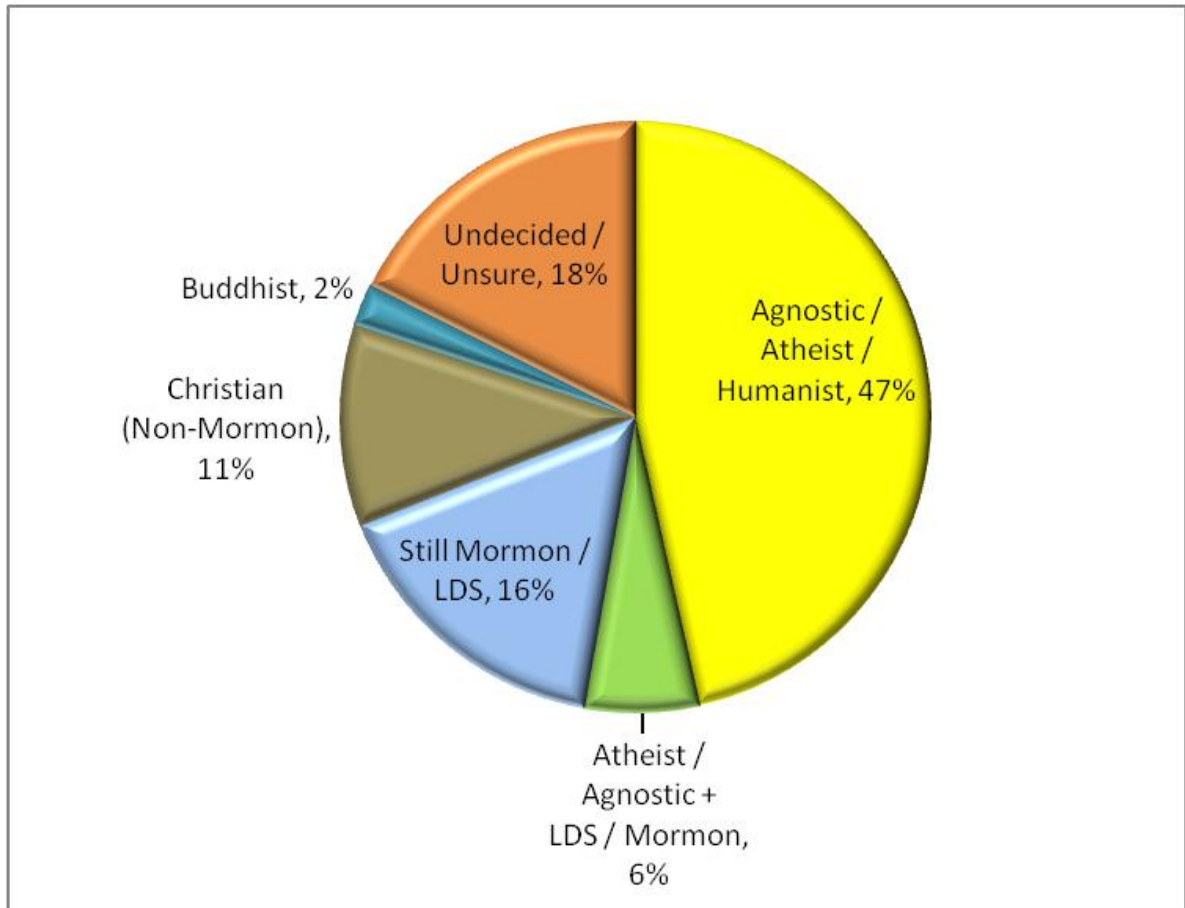
## Representative comments about “difficulty fitting in” as disbelievers

<b>Comment from Respondent 243 (Male):</b> Please allow members that are trying to believe as much as they can to attend the temple, baptize their children, etc. Please don't treat doubt as a sin.
<b>Comment from Respondent 135 (Male):</b> Welcome me as an equal in the community and culture, even if I can no longer testify that the church is the only true church on the face of the earth. Create and embrace forums for non-traditional Mormons like me, to allow for free and open discussion of ideas, and exploration of truth and happiness.
<b>Comment from Respondent 1803 (Male):</b> I feel that I am at a good place with my relationship with my Heavenly Father. I just want permission to remain, to belong. Just because I don't see things eye to eye with my brothers and sisters does not mean we aren't still family.
<b>Comment from Respondent 548 (Male):</b> Please make sure the Church encourages its believers to avoid ostracizing a fellow member for such member's disbelief.
<b>Comment from Respondent 1736 (Female):</b> The way that church leaders demonize people like me at conference is so upsetting. I try to participate so that our family can be together at church, but it is so hard when there is such a negative attitude towards people who have lost belief.
<b>Comment from Respondent 394 (Female):</b> Please create a place in the church for women like me. I love the gospel and desperately want it to be true, but I have a hard time believing in a church that rejects critical thinkers and feminists as "too willful" or "dangerously intellectual."... Thanks for all the good you do. I don't hate the church, and I truly believe that its leaders have the best of intentions... I'm just having a hard time seeing how I fit into it, and don't see how God could possibly create a church that doesn't have a place for all of his children.

## 2. Current Self-identification of Disbelievers

The majority (53%) of disbelievers now consider themselves Agnostic/Atheist/Humanist. 22% still consider themselves Mormon: 16% exclusively Mormon, and 6% consider themselves Mormon in addition to being Atheist/Agnostic. 11% consider themselves Christian of some other denomination, 2% considered themselves Buddhist, while the remainder consider themselves Unsure/Undecided (17%).

**Chart: Current Self-Identification of Respondents**



### 3. Understanding Issues that Contribute to Disbelief

Survey respondents were asked to rank a number of factors in terms of their relative impact on losing belief (0 = not a factor, 4 = strongest/primary factor). On average, survey respondents cited 15 major factors (with scores of 3 or 4) and 13 minor factors (scores of 1 or 2) as having an impact, indicating that there was not simply one or two issues that led to disbelief; on the contrary, many issues appeared to “stack up” until belief was lost.

The general factors that respondents self-rated the most significantly to disbelief were:

- Doctrinal/theological issues
- Historical issues
- Loss of faith in Joseph Smith
- Loss of faith in the Book of Mormon

<b>Major* Issues</b>		<b>% of Respondents</b>
Less than 5 Major Issues		12%
5-15 Major Issues		41%
More than 15 Major Issues		46%

The issues that scored the lowest in terms of self-rated impact were:

- Desire to sin
- Being offended

**Table: General Factors Contributing to Disbelief**

<i>General Factors Contributing to Disbelief</i>	<i>Average Score**</i>	<i>% Who Rated this as a Major* Factor</i>
I ceased to believe in the church's doctrine/theology	2.9	74%
I studied church history and lost my belief	2.8	70%
I lost faith in Joseph Smith	2.8	70%
I lost faith in the Book of Mormon	2.7	65%
I lost confidence in the general authorities	2.2	50%
Church's stance on women	2.1	47%
Church's stance on homosexuals / Prop 8	2.1	48%
Church's stance on race issues (blacks, native Americans, etc.)	2.1	43%
I did not feel spiritually edified at church	2.1	47%
Church's stance on science-related matters	1.9	40%
I became bothered by church culture (e.g. politics, etc.)	1.8	33%
I re-evaluated what it means to believe/know	1.7	38%
I lost confidence in my local church leadership	1.3	24%
I lost my faith in God	1.3	27%
I lost my faith in Jesus	1.3	26%
I did not receive the promised spiritual witness	1.2	21%
I received a spiritual witness to leave the church and go elsewhere	0.6	12%
Lack of meaningful friendships within the church	0.5	6%
I or someone I loved was abused by someone in the church.	0.4	7%
I wanted to engage in behaviors viewed as sinful by the church	0.3	4%
I was offended by someone in the church.	0.3	4%

\* Major issue = rated 3 or 4 on a 4 point scale ((0 = not a factor, 4 = strongest/primary factor).

\*\* Average score on 4 point scale



### 3. Understanding Issues that Contribute to Disbelief (cont'd)

The fact that many believing Mormons view “Desire to sin” and “Being offended” as primary factors is viewed by many of those struggling with a faith crisis as naïve, uninformed, and unhelpful.

#### Representative comments about misconceptions around common explanations for disbelief

<b>Respondent 1732 (Female):</b> Please help stop vilifying former members. Most of us are good, honest, ethical people just trying to live honest lives. We are not out to ruin anyone else's faith and we love our LDS friends and family and the last thing we want to do is cause them pain. I have not come out to my family, mostly because I do not want them to think I am some sort of vile sinner, being deceived by Satan. I also do not want them to be devastated by the news, and they would be. Maybe if the leaders of the church made sure to inform members that people leave for many legitimate reasons that have nothing to do with sinning or being offended, it would make it easier for people like me to be authentic with our families
<b>Respondent 2250 (Male):</b> Please find a way to educate the local leaders (bishops and stake presidents) that some members lose their faith in the church for various reasons which don't involve sinning, being offended by someone, or being influenced by demonic powers. Teach them to be respectful and to listen more. It is difficult to have a meaningful connection with them when they are so woefully ignorant of the problems.
<b>Respondent 3129 (Male):</b> Wake up and stop assuming people who leave do so because they are offended or want to sin. Look at church history and all it's inconsistencies and you will find the answer. I left the church. No one offended me. I enjoyed the ward members and still consider them my friend. I obey the law of chasity and WOW. I am faithful to my wife. It's the history and it's not just a single issue. They compound each other until you realize something is fundamentally wrong with the picture and the stories you have been fed and the emotions you have been feeling were all based on falsehoods.

Specific historical issues that were ranked as contributing most significantly to loss of belief were:

- Controversies around the Book of Abraham
- Polygamy / Polyandry
- Blacks and the Priesthood

**Table: Specific Historical Factors Contributing to Disbelief**

<i>Specific Historical Factors Contributing to Disbelief</i>	<i>Average Score**</i>	<i>% Who Rated this as a Major* Factor</i>
Polygamy/Polyandry	2.4	59%
Book of Abraham	2.4	59%
Blacks and the Priesthood	2.4	55%
DNA and the Book of Mormon	2.0	45%
Masonic influences in the temple ceremony	2.0	43%
Multiple, conflicting versions of the First Vision	2.0	42%
Anachronisms in the Book of Mormon (e.g. horses, steel, etc.)	2.0	42%
Women and the Priesthood	1.9	40%
Past church positions on science, age of the earth, evolution, etc.	1.9	38%
Issues with the authenticity or credibility of the priesthood restoration	1.8	40%
Joseph's use of peep stones in the translation of the Book of Mormon	1.8	36%
Changes in the temple ceremony	1.7	35%
Loss of Credibility of the Three Witnesses	1.7	33%
Blood atonement	1.6	31%
Joseph Smith's history of treasure digging	1.6	29%
Mountain meadows massacre	1.6	28%
Adam-god theory	1.5	27%
Kinderhook Plates	1.4	27%
Mark Hofmann scandal	1.3	21%
View of the Hebrews	1.2	20%




\* Major issue = rated 3 or 4 on a 4 point scale.

\*\* Average score on 4 point scale.

## 4. Understanding Issues that Contribute to Disbelief (cont'd)

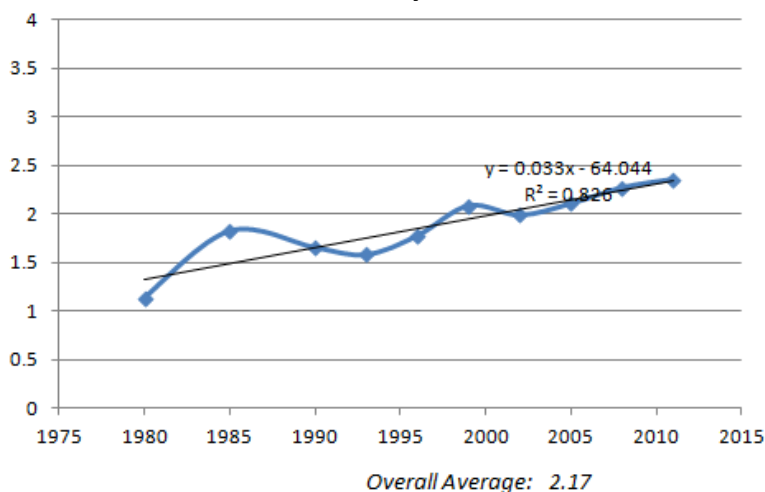
When analyzed over time,\* some issues appear to be rising in importance, while others are staying flat or decreasing. (see Appendix Table 1)

**Chart: Trends of Issues Contributing to Disbelief**

	Low Importance (Avg. Score <1.8)	Medium Importance (Avg. Score 1.8-2.0)	High Importance (Avg. Score >2.0)
 <b>Trending Up</b> (Becoming More Important)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinderhook Plates</li> <li>• Belief in Jesus</li> <li>• Belief in God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in temple ceremony</li> <li>• Past statements about Science</li> <li>• 3 Witnesses Credibility</li> <li>• Book of Mormon anachronisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of Homosexuals</li> <li>• Historical issues (in general)</li> <li>• Polygamy / Polyandry</li> <li>• DNA &amp; Book of Mormon</li> <li>• Book of Abraham</li> <li>• First Vision</li> <li>• Treatment of Women</li> <li>• Science</li> </ul>
 <b>Trending Flat</b> (Staying the Same in Importance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adam-God Theory</li> <li>• Spiritual witness to go elsewhere</li> <li>• No spiritual witness</li> <li>• View of the Hebrews</li> <li>• Mark Hoffman scandal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church culture</li> <li>• Masonic influences in temple</li> <li>• Peep stones</li> <li>• Treasure seeking</li> <li>• Women &amp; Priesthood</li> <li>• Mountain Meadows</li> <li>• Blood Atonement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General authorities</li> <li>• Blacks &amp; the Priesthood</li> <li>• Joseph Smith</li> <li>• Book of Mormon</li> <li>• Treatment of different races</li> <li>• Not edified in church</li> <li>• Doctrinal issues (general)</li> </ul>
 <b>Trending Down</b> (Becoming Less Important)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No friends</li> <li>• Abuse</li> <li>• Offended</li> <li>• Local leaders</li> <li>• Desire to sin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priesthood restoration</li> <li>• Reevaluation of what it means to have a testimony</li> </ul>	(NONE)

The three highest importance factors which are trending up are graphed below.

**Graph of 1<sup>st</sup> Fastest Rising Issue:  
Treatment of Homosexuality**



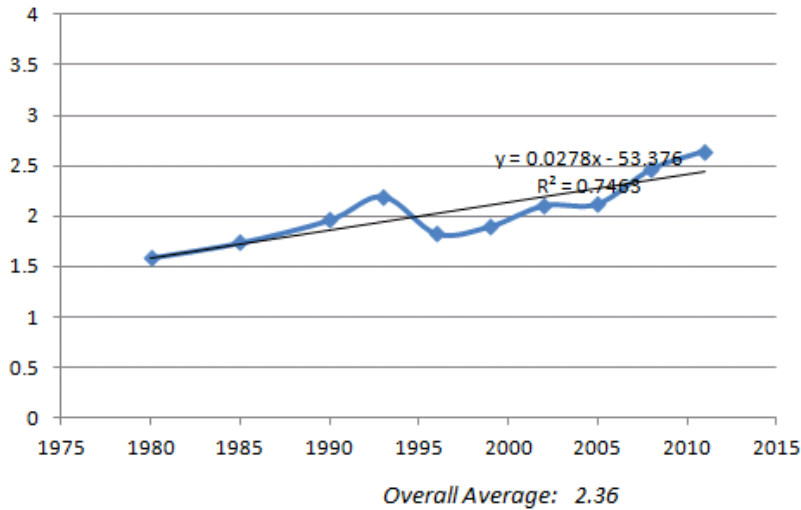
**Example:**

**Respondent 1770 (Male):**  
 “The last straw that broke my faith camel's back was the church's position on homosexuals.”

\* In order to analyze the time, the average factor score was assessed based on the “year of inactivity” of the respondent. An R-square and line of best fit was assessed to determine slope and certainty of trend. Note: this methodology has some limitations (namely: shifting memory patterns from respondents, lack of data for respondents who had not gone inactive, etc.) and should not be considered a perfect substitute for a true longitudinal study.

### 3. Understanding Issues that Contribute to Disbelief (cont'd)

**Graph of 2<sup>nd</sup> Fastest Rising Issue:  
Polygamy / Polyandry**

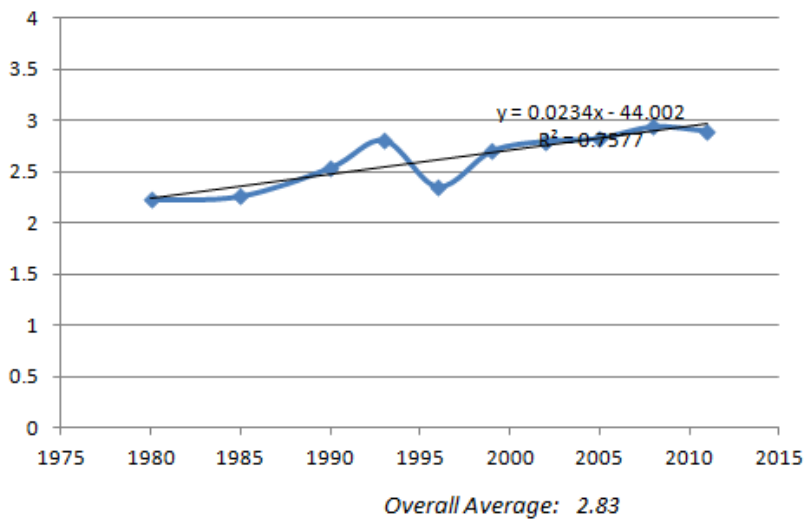


**Example:**

**Respondent #2084 (Female):**

“I never really could accept the doctrine of polygamy.”

**Graph of 3<sup>rd</sup> Fastest Rising Issue:  
Studying Church History (in General)**



**Example:**

**Respondent 783 (Male):**

“Even a cursory study of the church's history will bring up major issues, many of which strike at the heart of the church's doctrinal claims.”

## 4. Open Comments and Demographic-Related Issues

Survey respondents were asked in an open response to describe the reason for losing belief. Quantitative mapping of their written descriptions revealed several commonly repeated themes (some of which overlapped with the quantitative questions) across all demographic segments, including:

- **Studying history.** Example: “As I've gotten older I've been exposed to more of the history of the church, and what I found were that there were questions that there are just no answers to.”
- **Homosexuality.** Example: “I completely disagree with the Church's stance on homosexuality. It is NOT a choice, it is an inborn trait, and as such I do NOT believe it qualifies as a sin.”
- **Feeling judged.** Example: “Fearful, prideful and judgmental treatment towards other members and nonmembers who didn't conform, socially, financially or politically.”
- **“One true church” emphasis.** Example: “I decided that the Mormon paradigm of god operating through one true church did not conform to my personal beliefs about god and religion. The god I believe in does not operate through just one approved church that reaches only a miniscule percentage of humanity.”
- **Unrealistic expectations.** Example: “I was so tired of feeling guilty for all the things I wasn't doing ‘right.’ The pressure of having to be ‘perfect’ was too much.”
- **Church Finances.** Examples: “The fact that the church is funding a billion-dollar mall in SLC, while millions of Saints don't have clean water to drink, was/is sickening to me.” “Why a multi-billion dollar mall? Is it not the epitome of the ‘great an spacious building’? Why aren't the financial records of the church public?”

However, by far the most commonly repeated theme was an expression of concern and frustration that many historical issues within Mormonism were not part of an open, transparent dialogue.

### Representative comments about “Transparency of Undisclosed Historical Issues”:

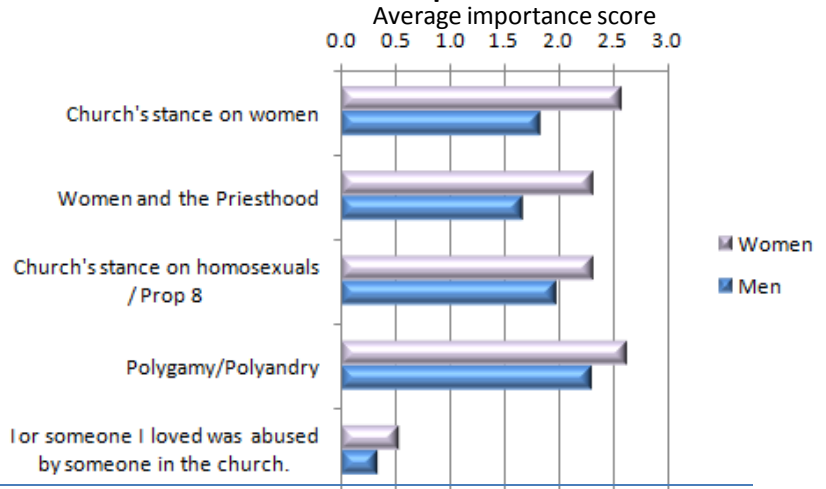
<b>Respondent #94:</b> I do not feel that the church has been honest and upfront about the founding narrative of Mormonism.
<b>Respondent #113:</b> As for history, in some cases, the fact that the church actively hides some elements of its history is worse than the actual events themselves.
<b>Respondent #118:</b> To sum it up, I felt like the church had lied to me by not actively teaching accurate church history and instead, teaching me a watered-down, sugar-coated history.
<b>Respondent #169:</b> A repeated and consistent record of the Church not telling the whole truth. Concealing and restricting access to objective history.
<b>Respondent #237:</b> Something wrong is happening within the church that is misinforming their members. Just because the early church was different, doesn't make it bad. If you want to understand where you are today, you HAVE to understand your TRUE history, not some vanilla form of it.
<b>Respondent #1857:</b> The problem was not so much the history of the Church - which is readily accessible in many good general history books. Rather, it is the discrepancy between what I was learning about Joseph Smith and Church history, and the sanitized version that I had been taught by LDS leaders my whole life. If LDS leaders had taught the truth about Joseph Smith from the very beginning, then I never would have left.

## 4. Open Comments and Demographic-Related Issues

Analysis of the factors by gender showed that some factors were significantly more important to **Women** respondents.

- Church's stance on women
- Women and the Priesthood
- Church's stance on homosexuals
- Polygamy/polyandry
- Abuse

Chart: Factors more important to Women



Further analysis of the open comments submitted by **female respondents** showed some common themes:

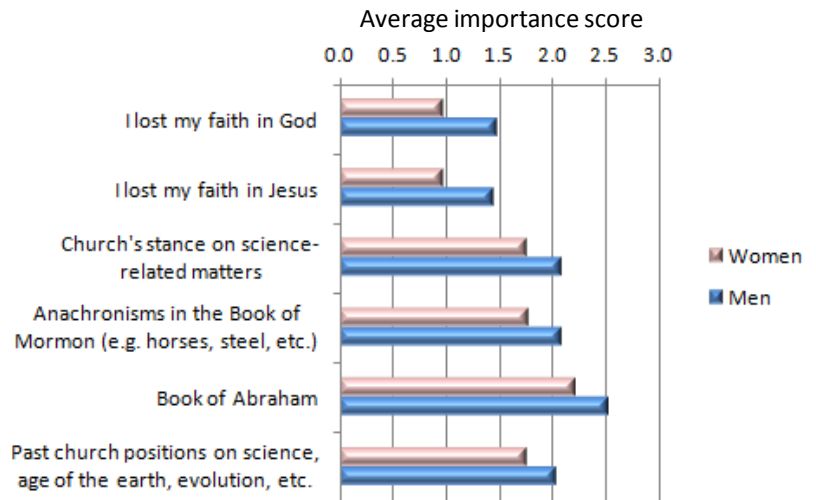
- **Men presiding over/ making decisions for women.** Examples: "I also could no longer support an organization that believes men have the divine right to preside over women." "I truly wish you could feel the pain I feel as a woman in the church. I know my potential and worth, and to have it limited to the role of "presidee" in all areas discredits me as a daughter of God."
- **General inequality towards women.** Examples: "The status of women in the church is totally depressing. I have a Ph.D. and am a full-time professor at a 4-yr. university. I am also married and have 3 children. My career is deeply satisfying to me. The ONLY place in my life where I am treated as a lesser human being is at church." "At church I was not valued for my talents or contributions in the same way, nor treated equally as men (a 12 year old boy had more authority from God than I did)."
- **Women and the Priesthood.** Examples: "Give women the priesthood." "Why am I reading accounts of Joseph Smith giving the Priesthood to Women. What happened? What is the real story, and when are we going to start teaching it?"
- **Roles limited to wives and mothers.** Example: "Why do you indoctrinate young women to only become wives and mothers? It is extremely detrimental to our psyches to not expect anything more of ourselves and to "squash" any desires we have for personal fulfillment outside of the home."
- **Heavenly Mother and eternal gender roles.** Examples: "In the proclamation there is talk of heavenly parents, but in the pre mortal realm we worshipped God as our eternal father. Where is heavenly Mother? Do women have a role at all in the next realm other than to abandon our children?" "Why aren't we allowed to even talk to our mother? I would hope that other issues would be resolved once Mom gets in the picture."
- **Doctrine of polygamy.** Examples: "I want to know what justifies polygamy (I have to share my husband but he doesn't have to share me)." "The continuation of the doctrine of polygamy (men continue to be able to be sealed to multiple women for eternity)." "Polygamy is said to be a choice and that if it ever shows it's ugly head again that women will have the choice whether or not their husbands will participate. Yet, it was shoved down Emma Smiths throat and she was not given a choice. On that same note....Joseph practiced polygamy before Emma was told."

## 4. Open Comments and Demographic-Related Issues

Further analysis showed that some factors scored more significantly for **men**:

- Losing faith in God / Jesus
- Science
- Anachronisms in the Book of Mormon
- Book of Abraham

**Chart: Factors more important to Men**



Further analysis of the open comments submitted by **male respondents** emphasized some common themes:

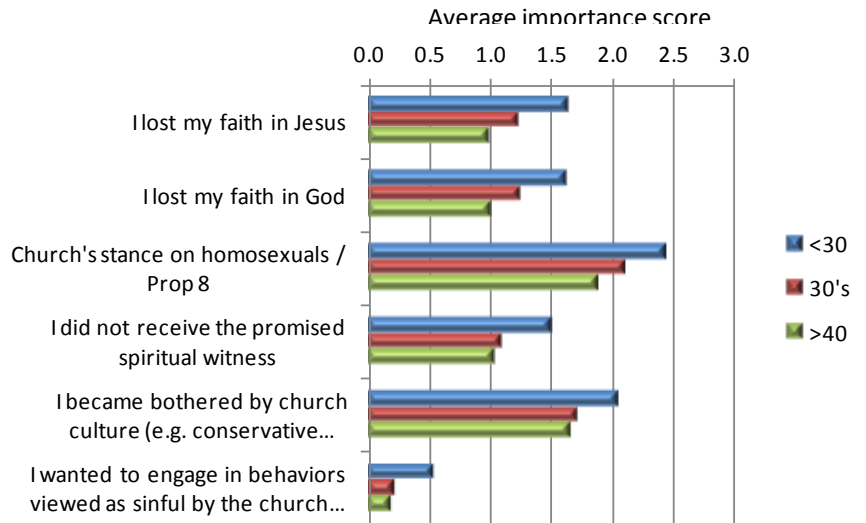
- **Science disproving previously-held beliefs.** Examples: “With advances in science, a belief that the earth is 6,000 and that Adam and Eve were in Jackson County, were white, and a world-wide flood, and the tower of Babel are shown to be fables and not true.” “The Bible and Book of Mormon cannot be “correlated” with logic and science. The flood never happened. Adam was not the first man. Evolution is a near-certain fact. The tower of babel never happened (and therefore, the Jaredites are fictional as well). Abraham and Moses are mythical figures (possibly real people, but made into myths through folktales).”
- **Weighing or looking for evidence.** Examples: “I applied the Carl Sagan rule. ‘Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.’ I never saw that evidence.”
- **Philosophical/theological doubts about God.** Examples: “Seriously how can you justify the evil in the world? The only rational explanation for evil is that we are the result of a great cosmic coincidence.” “Upon reviewing the reasons I believed in God, I found them to be inadequate, and that belief in God was not justified.”
- **Book of Abraham.** Example: “The real nail in the coffin was the Book of Abraham. It's really the clearest evidence that the church is not what it claims.”

## 4. Open Comments and Demographic-Related Issues

Some factors scored as more significant to the **younger generations** (under 30):

- Losing faith in Jesus / God
- Church's stance on homosexuals
- Not receiving a spiritual witness
- Bothered by Church culture
- Desire to "sin"

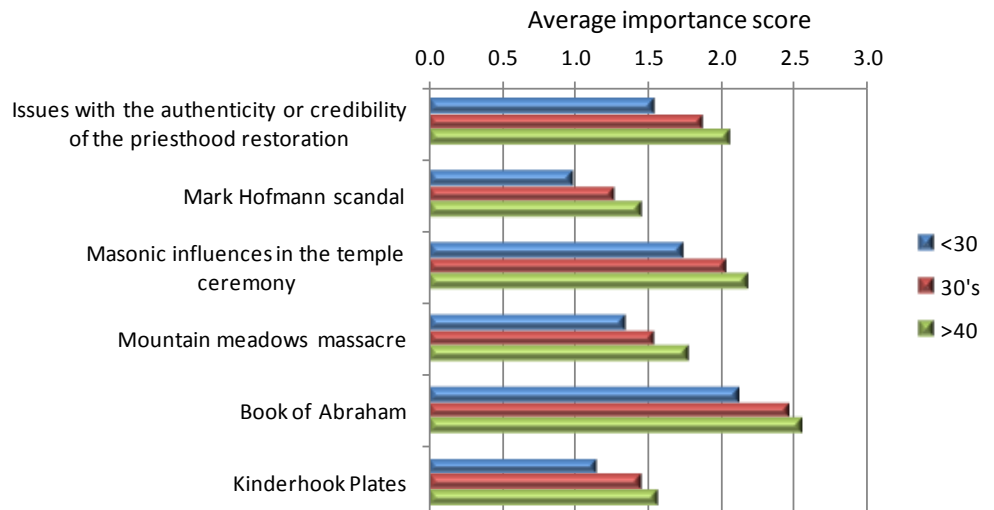
**Chart: Factors more important to Younger Generation**



Other factors scored as more significant to the **older generations** (over 40):

- Priesthood restoration
- Mark Hofmann scandal
- Masonic influences in temple
- Mountain meadows massacre
- Book of Abraham
- Kinderhook plates

**Chart: Factors more important to Older Generation**



## 5. Why Some Disbelievers Leave the Church, and Why Some Stay

Disbelieving in the Church and leaving the Church can be two altogether different decisions. As previously discussed, although the slight majority of the respondents to the survey had left the Church completely, many remained highly active. What factors differentiated those who left from those who stayed? To answer this question, multiple linear regression and beta weight analysis was utilized to determine which factors correlated to church activity for disbelievers. Although we still have much to learn in this area\*, the results were revealing and in some cases very surprising.

**Table: Demographic factors' impact on whether or not disbeliever is likely to still be active**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Max impact</b>	<b>Avg Impact</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Beta Weight</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Years Active (more prior years active = more likely still active)	61%	23%	<.001	0.008	After factoring out age, for every year of prior activity the disbeliever is 0.8% more likely to remain active. A 76-year-old disbeliever with 76 years of church activity is 61% more likely to be active than a 76-year-old disbeliever with less than a year of prior activity.
Age (younger = more likely active)	-40%	-22%	<.001	-0.067	After factoring out "years of activity," the younger disbeliever is more likely to still be active than the older disbeliever. Each age group decade adds about 6.7% to the likelihood of inactivity, such that if they have the same number of years active (for instance, 15 years of church activity), a disbelieving teenager is 40% more likely to still be active than a disbeliever in their 60's.
Education (higher education = more likely active)	21%	14%	<.001	0.034	For every level of education, a disbeliever is 3.4% more likely to still be active. A disbeliever with the highest education level (doctorate) is 21% more likely to still be active than a high school dropout.
Number of Leadership Callings (more callings = more likely active)	20%	4%	<.001	0.024	For every additional prior church leadership calling, the disbeliever is 2.4% more likely to still be active. Someone with 8 leadership callings is 20% more likely to remain active than someone without leadership callings.
Marital Status (Married = more likely active)	12%	12%	<.001	0.123	Disbelievers who are married are 12% more likely to still be active than those who are single
Gender (Male = more likely active)	8%	8%	<.001	0.075	Males who lose belief are 8% more likely to still be active than females
Income (more income = less likely active)	-7%	-4%	0.014	-0.011	For every income level (on a scale of 7 levels of income), the disbeliever is 1.1% more likely to be inactive/resigned. Someone in the highest income bracket (level 7, >\$200K/year) is 7% more likely to be inactive than someone at the lowest level of income (level 1, <\$20K/year).
Serving a full time mission (not significant)	N/A	N/A	0.199	N/A	Not a significant factor (after factoring out years active and other leadership callings, etc.)

\* Our highest R-squared value was .24, meaning that we only understand about 24% of the variability in decisions to leave/stay from this survey data. Future surveys will be needed to understand these issues more fully.



## 5. Why Some Disbelievers Leave the Church, and Why Some Stay (cont'd)

**Table: Factors that are negatively correlated to church activity**

(i.e. if a disbeliever scored these factors as higher than others, they are more likely to be inactive/resigned)

	<i>Max impact</i>	<i>Avg Impact</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Beta Weight</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Overall number/scoring of "negative" factors	-26%	-14%	<.001	-0.098	A disbeliever who has a lot of negative issues (primary factors) - regardless of which issues - is 26% more likely to be inactive than a disbeliever with few issues
Stopped believing doctrine	-24%	-17%	<.001	-0.059	A disbeliever for whom "doctrinal differences" are a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 24% more likely to be inactive or resigned
DNA and Book of Mormon	-10%	-5%	<.001	-0.025	A disbeliever for whom "DNA and the Book of Mormon" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 10% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Mountain Meadows Massacre	-10%	-4%	<.001	-0.025	A disbeliever for whom the "Mountain Meadows Massacre" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 10% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Felt spirit to go elsewhere	-10%	-1%	<.001	-0.024	A disbeliever for whom "feeling the spirit to go elsewhere" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 10% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Temple changes	-8%	-4%	0.001	-0.021	A disbeliever for whom "changes in the temple ceremony" are a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 8% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Desire to sin	-8%	-1%	0.019	-0.020	A disbeliever for whom "desire to sin" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 8% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Joseph Smith: Treasure Seeking	-7%	-3%	0.019	-0.017	A disbeliever for whom "Joseph Smith: Treasure Seeking" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 7% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Book of Mormon	-6%	-4%	0.036	-0.014	A disbeliever for whom "losing faith in the Book of Mormon" is a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 6% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Past statement about science	-6%	-3%	0.027	-0.014	A disbeliever for whom "past church statements about science" are a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 6% more likely to be inactive or resigned
Kinderhook plates	-6%	-2%	0.031	-0.014	A disbeliever for whom the "Kinderhook plates" are a strong factor (relative to others) in losing belief is about 6% more likely to be inactive or resigned

## 5. Why Some Disbelievers Leave the Church, and Why Some Stay (cont'd)

**Table: Factors that are not statistically significant (i.e. whether a disbeliever scored these issues as high had no significant correlation to church activity)**

	<i>P-value</i>
Women and the Priesthood	0.057
View of the Hebrews	0.057
Losing faith in God	0.067
Mark Hofman scandal	0.077
General Authorities	0.082
First Vision	0.087
No friends	0.097
Losing faith in Jesus	0.112
Current statements about science	0.115
Loss of credibility in 3 Witnesses	0.125
Joseph Smith: Peep stones	0.139
Race issues	0.165
Adam-God theory	0.183
Abuse	0.208
Local leaders	0.290
Reevaluated what testimony means	0.342
Masonic influence in temple	0.381
Treatment of homosexuals	0.491
Treatment of women	0.530
Blood atonement	0.597
Book of Abraham	0.626
Anachronisms in Book of Mormon	0.721
Losing faith in Joseph Smith	0.837
Feeling offended	0.974

Some factors seem to correlate to activity while others do not. With some factors, there are apparent explanations for this. Examples:

- Number of leadership callings and years of activity are (not surprisingly) correlated to higher likelihood of current activity, as we might expect someone with more investment to decide to remain.
- Married disbelievers are more likely to still be active compared to singles, possibly because they are more connected to the Church through their spouse, children, etc.
- The “total number of negative factors” correlates with an overall level of negativity towards the Church, and it is easy to see how someone highly critical of the Church would be likely to leave.
- Disbelieving in the “doctrine” of the Church is a somewhat ambiguous terminology, but it is not difficult to see how someone who scored this as relatively higher reason for disbelieving may feel distanced from the Church as a whole, and therefore more likely to leave.

Other factors are less clear, and perhaps surprising, in their significance. For instance:

- Disbelieving men are significantly more likely to be active than disbelieving women. Is this because men receive more benefits (social, prestige, etc.) from church attendance than women?
- The Mountain Meadows Massacre shows up as a highly negative correlation to activity, despite the fact that most disbelievers do not usually ranked this as a highly significant factor. Is this because a disbeliever who does rank this as high sees this as a sign that the Church/religion can make people justify committing bad actions? (And if so, would they therefore be more likely to remove themselves from the situation?)
- Treatment of women and homosexuals are both insignificant in correlation to church activity. Is there an offsetting factor, such that some may feel some desire to leave (because they’re not comfortable with how people are treated) but also feel a desire to stay (so that they can make a difference, and help people feel more appreciated/welcome)?

It is possible that there are some of these or other hidden factors that our survey did not measure, which are related to these factors actually measured.

## 5. Why Some Disbelievers Leave the Church, and Why Some Stay (cont’)

**Table: Factors that are positively correlated to church activity**

(i.e. if a disbeliever scored these factors as higher than others, they are actually more likely to still be active)

	<i>Max impact</i>	<i>Avg Impact</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Beta Weight</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Polygamy/Polyandry	21%	13%	<.001	0.053	A disbeliever for whom "polygamy/polyandry" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 21% more likely to still be active
Studying History	10%	7%	<.001	0.025	A disbeliever for whom "studying history" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 10% more likely to still be active
Blacks & the Priesthood	10%	6%	0.001	0.024	A disbeliever for whom "blacks & the priesthood" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 10% more likely to still be active
Priesthood Restoration	8%	3%	0.003	0.019	A disbeliever for whom the "priesthood restoration" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 8% more likely to still be active
Church culture	6%	3%	0.004	0.015	A disbeliever for whom "church culture" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 6% more likely to still be active
Not feeling the Spirit	6%	2%	0.004	0.015	A disbeliever for whom "not feeling the spirit" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 6% more likely to still be active
Not edified in church	5%	3%	0.009	0.013	A disbeliever for whom "not being edified in church" is a strong factor (relative to other factors) in losing belief is about 5% more likely to still be active

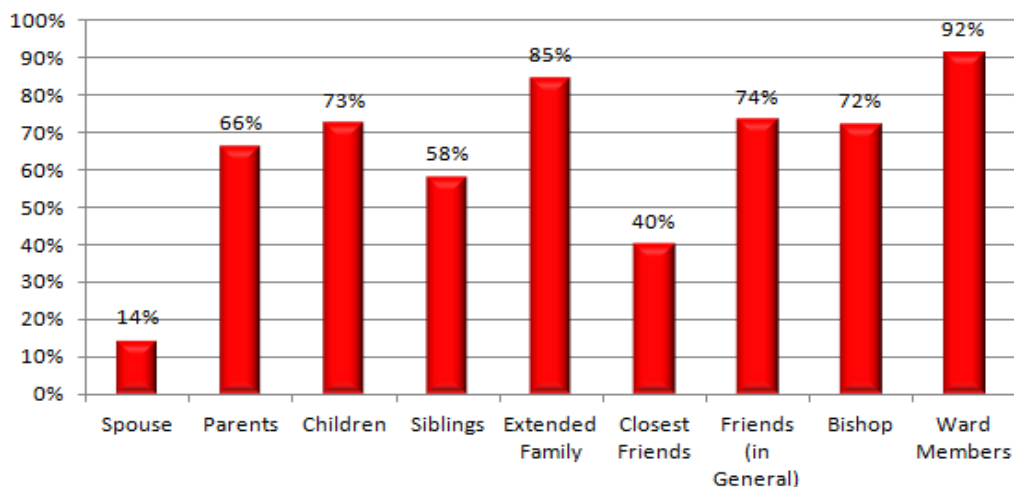
The fact that some “factors for disbelief” are actually correlated positively to activity is at first counter-intuitive. Why would losing belief over certain issues actually correlate to higher activity in the Church? (Keep in mind that our study did not include a comparison with believers, and so these factors are only the ones which were positive relative to the other factors among disbelievers.) We can only hypothesize at this point about the specifics, but there are some possible likely explanations for at least a few of the factors. For instance, two of the three highest factors are “polygamy/polyandry,” and “blacks and the priesthood.” These are both issues where the Church has made major doctrinal/policy changes during its history. Although these issues may have contributed to a respondent losing belief, it is possible that the respondent actually sees these issues as areas where the Church is “moving in the right direction,” and therefore they may contribute to positive feelings toward the Church (and therefore more likelihood to stay with the Church). Similarly, “studying history” may uncover things in the past which cause disbelief, but which do not change the positive feelings that the (now disbelieving) Mormon has to the Church.

We invite and encourage debate around these factors, and plan to incorporate feedback and ideas into our future surveys.

## 6. Openness: Understanding Who Doubters Tell

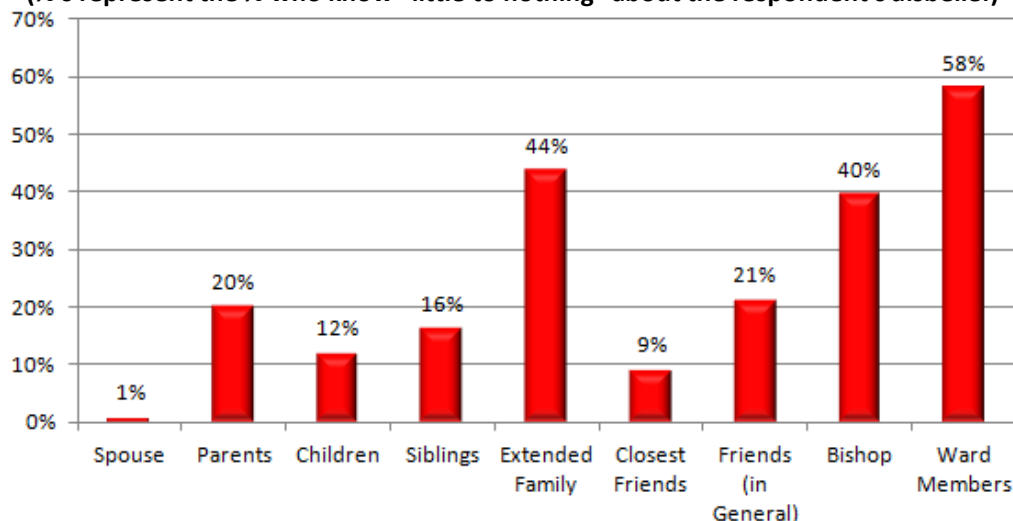
Disbelievers must make decisions about how “open” to be about their disbelief. As might be expected, those who leave the Church (i.e. resign or become inactive) are much more likely to be open about their disbelief than those who remain active. In fact, the majority of respondents who remain active in the Church do not share their disbelief widely except with their spouse and closest friends. 72% of Bishops and 92% of Ward Members were told little to nothing of disbelief by respondents who were still active. Although 86% of spouses were informed, fully 14% of spouses were told “little to nothing” about the level of disbelief of active disbelievers.

**Chart: Level of “Openness” for Disbelievers who still remain Active in the Church**  
(%’s represent the % who know “little to nothing” about the respondent’s disbelief)



On the other hand, disbelievers who become inactive or resign from the Church are much more open about their disbelief. Only 1% of the spouses of inactive/resigned disbelievers know “little to nothing,” and the majority of family members and friends are also informed.

**Chart: Level of “Openness” for Disbelievers who are Inactive / Resigned from the Church**  
(%’s represent the % who know “little to nothing” about the respondent’s disbelief)



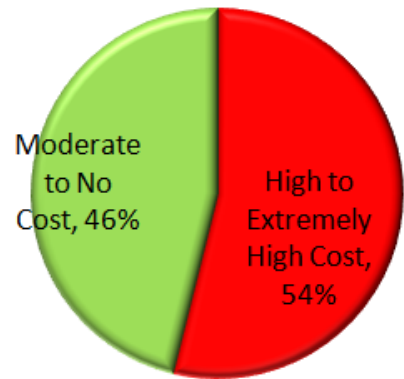
## 7. Understanding the Costs of Disbelief

Survey respondents were asked to self-rate the costs that disbelief and openness had on various aspects of their life... to their spiritual and mental health, to their relationships, to their job, etc. About 54% rated at least one cost as “high” or “extremely high” (3 or 4 on a 4 point scale), while 46% did not have any costs that scored as high or extremely high.

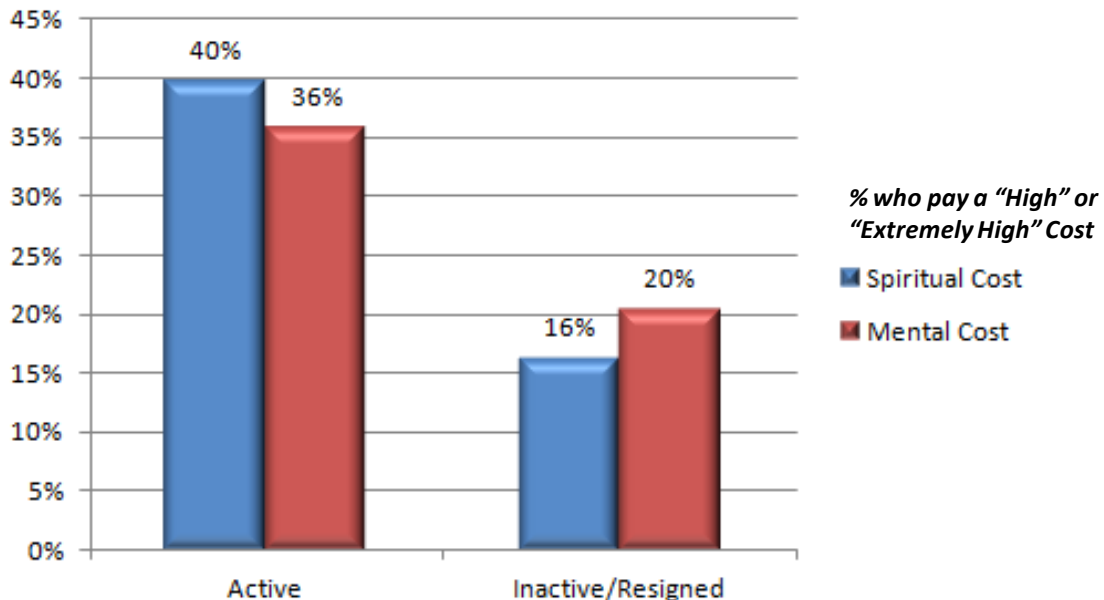
Some costs received about the same scores regardless of whether or not the disbeliever remained active in the Church, while other costs varied according to activity level in the Church.

Disbelievers who remain active in the Church scored significantly higher mental and spiritual cost than those who go inactive or resign from the Church.

**Chart: Costs of Disbelief**  
% of Respondents who self-rated...



**Chart: Mental and Spiritual Costs of Disbelief**

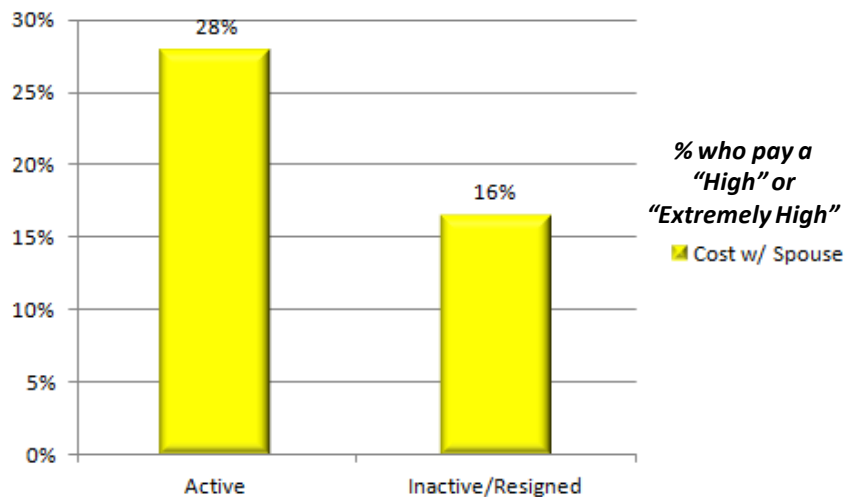


## 7. Understanding the costs of disbelief

Somewhat surprisingly, more disbelievers who remain active also tend to rate a higher cost with their spouse.

Although the survey did not measure the reasons quantitatively, some comments mentioned the tension experienced by spouses who tried to remain active, especially those who no longer were able to participate in ordinances.

Chart: Cost of Disbelief to "Relationship with Spouse"



**Respondent 1080 (Male):** "I wish that the church allowed me to participate as a non-believer. As I experience it now, unless I pay tithing, have a temple recommend, etc, I can't participate in the rituals/ordinances that are so important to my believing family -- baptism, priesthood ordinances, temple marriages. I think simply allowing unbelievers to participate in these types of events would make a huge difference in my family relationships. Right now, they are just a painful reminder to my family, so I just end up not attending these events at all. From my perspective, the church is dividing my family, not bringing us closer together."

**Respondent #438 (Male):** "Stop hurting marriages by driving a wedge between spouses on this issue. I have gone through hell and back and nearly divorced. We desperately need a General Conference address telling spouses to not divorce an otherwise good spouse over non-belief. I have several friends who have been divorced over primarily this issue, and my own marriage is still on the rocks due to it, even though I am fully active."

In some cases, both spouses lost belief and left the Church together.

**Respondent 807 (Male):** "It almost cost me my marriage. Eventually, my wife saw my sincere search and has joined me in apostasy."

In a few instances, the Church was blamed by the respondents for leading directly to their divorce.

**Respondent 2092 (Male):** "My wife divorced me because she held the church above our marriage. Being truthful in how I think the facts are about science and fairness destroyed my marriage. The church really does hold families hostage!"

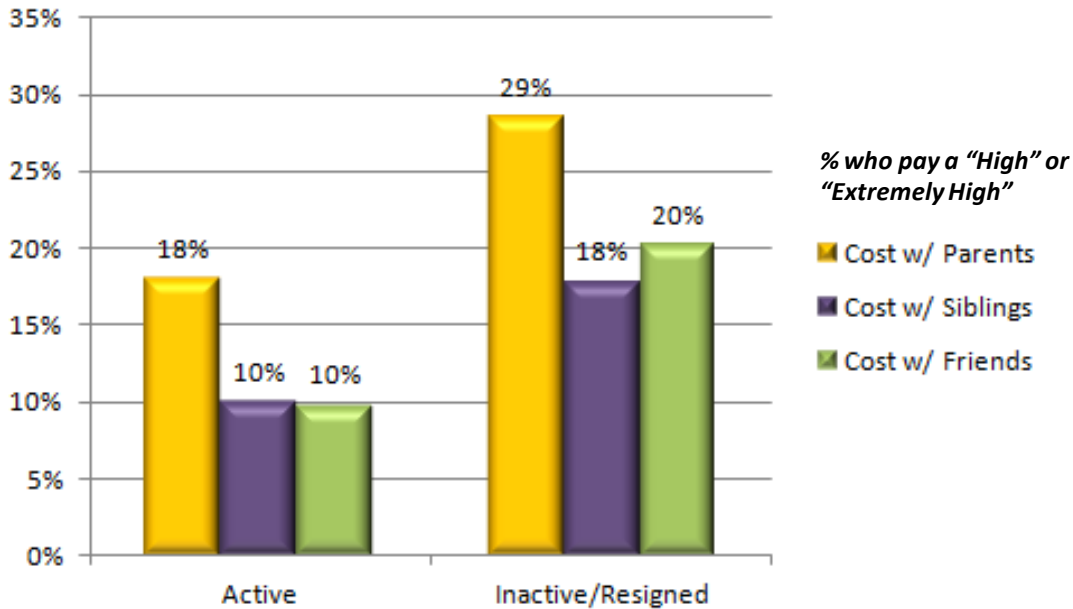
**Respondent 3076 (Male):** "My wife divorced me because I had critical doubts over the church's divine leadership on the issue of homosexuality. The brethren's attempt to protect the "sanctity of marriage" from homosexuals has, to some degree, resulted in the dissolution of my temple sealing."

**Respondent # 691 (Female):** "Tell your bishops and leaders to tell their members to NOT divorce their spouse when they leave the LDS church. My husband was advised by his bishop to divorce me. We had 10 children. It was awful. The church that says families are the most important -- you should be ashamed of yourselves."

## 7. Understanding the Costs of Disbelief

Disbelievers who go inactive or resign rate a significantly higher cost in their other relationships (i.e. with parents, siblings, friends).

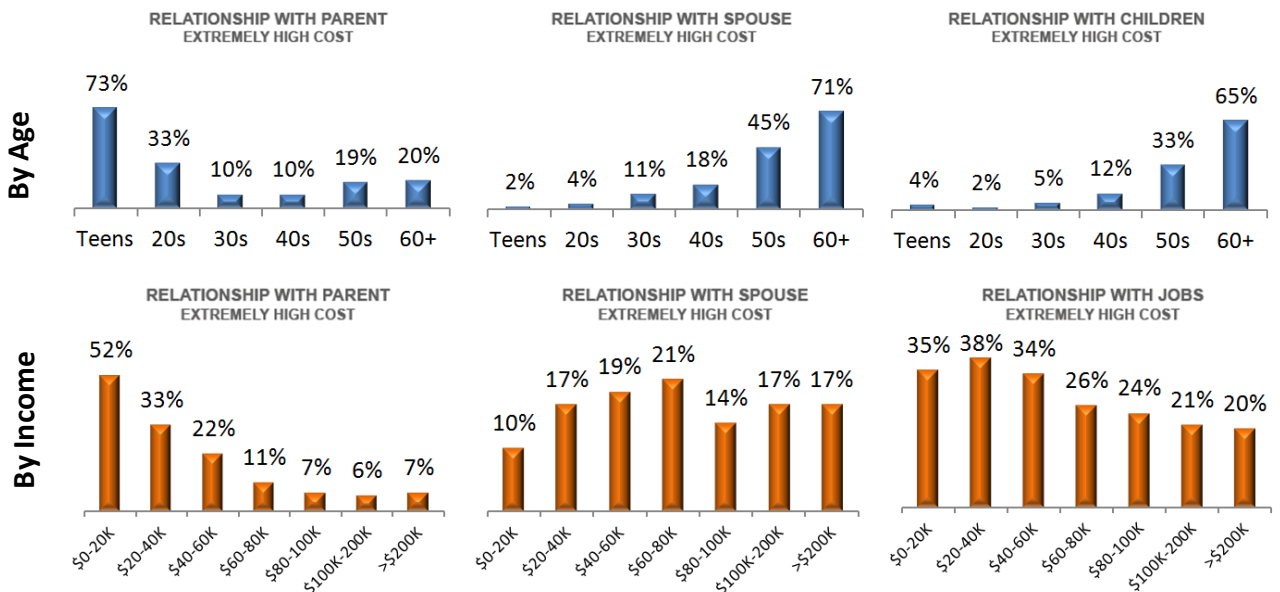
**Chart: Cost of Disbelief to “Other Relationships”**



Cost ratings also varied by demographics:

- Young people were more likely to rate a higher cost with their parents.
- Older respondents were more likely to rate a much higher cost with their spouses and children.
- Lower income respondents were more likely to score a higher cost with their parents, in their jobs, and mentally and spiritually.

**Charts: Cost of Disbelief by Demographic Segments**



## 8. Understanding What Would Bring Disbelievers Back

Respondents were asked whether or not they would ever consider returning to the Church. About 24% of those respondents who had left the Church (either semi-active or completely inactive/resigned) responded “yes” that they would be willing to come back under certain circumstances. However, when asked to describe what would bring them back, more than ½ of those respondents included an impossible or intentionally clever comment (i.e. a “snarky” comment) that would indicate that in reality they would likely not be open to returning. Examples of “snarky” answers to the question “What would it take to bring you back”:

- *“Become a secular community.”*
- *“Absolutely... if they would claim the Book of Mormon is false and you cannot become a God. If they admit to false doctrine made by a con man and vow to follow the Christ as per the Bible.”*
- *“Renounce all church dogma including the BOM, the Pearl of Great Price, the D&C and all miracles in the Bible. Admit there are no prophets or Priesthoods. Transition to a open model Unitarian Church welcoming all wholesome beliefs.”*
- *“I would go back if my participation were limited to playing basketball in the cultural hall.”*
- *“Admit that it is all a lie.”*

However, of the remaining comments, there were several common themes that may provide useful guidance for those who are actually looking to help individuals like these return to the Church. Within each theme, the requests ranged from those that may be accomplished within the existing Church framework (e.g. “Be more compassionate towards homosexuals”) to some that would require major changes in Church policy or even doctrine (e.g. “Allow homosexuals to marry in the temple”). The four most common factors that would cause respondents to consider returning were:

### **1. Greater openness and acceptance towards those with doubts and/or non-literal beliefs.**

Examples:

- *“Need to create an environment where people that believe in some, but not all points of doctrine will be accepted and not stigmatized.”*
- *“Create spaces for alternative thought within the church and push church culture to be more accepting of difference. Just because you believe the church is true doesn't mean you have to have a narrow construction of what that truth implies, but if the traditional mindset of literal interpretation or strict adherence to the exact words (rather than the "spirit") is the norm, than everything else is marginalized.”*
- *“I might come back if I didn't feel the atmosphere was so hostile towards those who disbelieve.”*
- *“I put yes, because if the church allowed for more freedom of belief (i.e. did not classify one as a heretic/apostate for thinking different doctrinally), there are many things I enjoy about the LDS people.”*
- *“I would return if I felt more latitude to participate in a non-orthodox way. Currently, I feel too much pressure to hide my true feelings and beliefs, resulting in feelings of deep inauthenticity and moral dishonesty when I do attend.”*
- *“The church would need to make a way for secular thinkers, skeptics, and anyone else, to be involved with the central traditions of the church, mainly family traditions, marriages, etc.”*



## 8. Understanding What Would Bring Disbelievers Back (cont'd)

### 2. More transparency and upfront information about historical issues and controversies.

Examples:

- “The church needs to be honest about its history. I am a professional historian, and although I appreciate the desire not to dwell on some of the trickier parts of LDS history, the official materials produced by the church are so whitewashed as to appear disingenuous at best. I want us to be comfortable with our history, not in denial about it.”
- “Openness and honesty regarding its checkered past. No more deifying our past leaders but honest, intelligent and uplifting conversations regarding these remarkable people, warts and all.”
- “Be more open about Church history, even the difficult aspects. I'm uncomfortable with the lack of transparency related to "warts" in Church history.”

### 3. More acceptance and equal treatment of homosexuals. Examples:

- “Stop treating gays like they choose to be like this.”
- “Let go of hate speech towards LGBT.”
- “Stop spreading misinformation about gays and lesbians - and stop the personal and political persecution of these individuals.”
- “Significant changes in the treatment, acknowledgment, and compassion toward LGBT people. As it stands now, there is NO place for these people in your houses of worship. None. Some may believe to the contrary, but I've looked, gone, suffered, and tried. There is no place for gay people in the LDS church. The supposed "options" aren't options at all.”
- “Gays would need full equality and inclusion.”

### 4. More respect, sensitivity, and equality for women. Examples:

- “I would request that they begin offering a female representative for those women who wish to repent/ discuss sexual sins. It is disturbing and unnerving to speak with a male bishop about these matters.”
- “I absolutely love the gospel, but the poor treatment of women makes it painful for me to come. I feel like something in my soul breaks when I hear women belittled from the pulpit and in their callings. It seems that this treatment is not what church leaders would condone, and I wish that there were a way to communicate some of these problems to church headquarters so they could be resolved.”
- “Change the young women's program. Stop telling young women that their value is based on marriage. Treat women equally.”
- “Talk about HEAVENLY MOTHER. Children need a relationship with both of their parents don't they?”
- “Give women the priesthood and renounce strict gender roles. “
- “Give women true leadership callings.”
- “I believe in FULL equality for all -- which means that women would be in decision making positions in the upper echelons of church leadership (prophets, apostles, seventies, etc).”

# APPENDIX

# Appendix

**Table 1: Trending of Issues – Statistical Scores**

<b>High Importance: Trending Up</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Treatment of Homosexuality	2.17	0.033	0.820
Historical issues (in general)	2.83	0.020	0.757
Polygamy	2.36	0.028	0.747
DNA / Book of Mormon	2.10	0.018	0.460
Book of Abraham	2.40	0.018	0.541
First Vision	2.03	0.015	0.564
Treatment of Women	2.20	0.011	0.210
Science	2.01	0.006	0.276
<b>High Importance: Trending Flat</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
General authorities	2.24	0.008	0.175
Blacks and the Priesthood	2.40	0.004	0.139
Joseph Smith	2.85	0.003	0.111
Book of Mormon	2.74	0.002	0.043
Treatment of Different Races	2.12	-0.001	0.009
Not edified	2.12	-0.002	0.027
Doctrine	3.05	-0.006	0.103
<b>Medium Importance: Trending Up</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Changes in Temple Ceremony	1.80	0.020	0.661
Past statements about Science	1.99	0.014	0.663
3 Witnesses Credibility	1.74	0.013	0.396
Anachronisms in Book of Mormon	1.97	0.010	0.324
<b>Medium Importance: Trending Flat</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Culture	1.82	0.009	0.149
Masonic Influence	2.00	0.004	0.081
Peep stones	1.83	0.002	0.019
Treasure Seeking	1.67	0.001	0.008
Women and the Priesthood	1.96	-0.001	0.002
Mountain Meadows Massacre	1.62	-0.002	0.019
Blood Atonement	1.67	-0.005	0.091
<b>Medium Importance: Trending Down</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Priesthood Restoration	1.86	-0.006	0.187
Reevaluation	1.82	-0.012	0.329
<b>Low Importance: Trending Up</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Kinderhook Plates	1.43	0.010	0.311
Belief in Jesus	1.36	0.017	0.589
Belief in God	1.37	0.018	0.536
<b>Low Importance: Trending Flat</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
Adam-God Theory	1.49	-0.004	0.041
Spiritual witness to go elsewhere	0.65	-0.002	0.011
No spiritual witness	1.21	-0.001	0.003
View of the Hebrews	1.26	0.000	0.000
Mark Hoffman scandal	1.28	0.004	0.031
<b>Low Importance: Trending Down</b>	Avg Score	Slope	R2
No friends	0.5	-0.013	0.582
Abuse	0.45	-0.012	0.305
Offended	0.33	-0.011	0.560
Local leaders	1.38	-0.010	0.173
Sin	0.36	-0.007	0.555