

New Survey Highlights Causes, Costs of Mormon Faith Crises

A survey conducted by the Open Stories Foundation and Mormon Stories Podcast finds that members are leaving the faith for a myriad of doctrinal and historical reasons, and that those who remain active experience significant hardship to their family relationships and mental well-being.

1/30/2012 – A new survey conducted by the Open Stories Foundation (producers of the Mormon Stories podcast) sheds light on the reasons that some members are losing their faith in the core teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Additionally, it highlights some of the costs of questioning the faith or leaving the fold. The Open Stories Foundation hopes that this information will lead to more understanding and empathy of members of the LDS faith who suffer through faith crises.

As an organization, the Open Stories Foundation is most concerned about the impact that these issues are having on LDS families as illustrated in the quotes below:

If you could speak with a top church leader, what would you ask or tell him?

Respondent # 156: “Some of the issues with church history would never have been an issue if they had been presented truthfully the first time. The more upsetting part is that I feel like the church was making an attempt to hide its history. If something is worth hiding it makes it look more false. Plus it hurts to be lied to.”

Respondent # 701: “Church needs to be honest with history and contradictions. If they were honest then it would mean a great deal. Instead they make us who have discovered the facts look like the evil ones. I am shunned in my family. They think I am the liar (sic) and deciever (sic) when it is the church and general athorities (sic).”

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.”

(Note: These data are preliminary. Check back for updated versions as the refinement and analysis continue.)

Notes on Survey Methodology

- This survey was fielded in the fall and winter 2011. The survey was addressed to “people who once believed that the LDS 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 for a total of 3086 respondents included in the analysis.
- As the survey sample was not random, the Open Stories Foundation makes no claim of representativeness or statistical significance in the sample. This survey is representative of the respondents only, although we feel that many points of this analysis are indicative of the experiences of many people in the Church who pass through a crisis of faith.
- This release contains an initial summary of results. A more complete analysis will be released, along with the survey data, in the coming weeks.
- The Open Stories Foundation anticipates fielding and analyzing additional surveys in the future to further identify the causes and costs of disaffection and disaffiliation within the LDS Church.

Who Took the Survey

- 58% male, 42% female
- 70% married, 30% single
- 31% Utah, 60% non-Utah US, 9% International
- 27% “Some College”, 39% College Grad, 21% Masters, 10% Doctorate
- 56% no longer attend the LDS church, 20% attend weekly, 24% attend less often.

Reasons why People Lose Faith

| <i>If you no longer believe that the LDS church is the true church (and once did), which of the following were factors in your loss of belief:</i> | Moderate to Strong Factor | Primary Factor |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| I lost faith in Joseph Smith | 81% | 39% |
| I studied church history and lost my belief | 84% | 39% |
| I ceased to believe in the church's doctrine/theology | 87% | 38% |
| I lost faith in the Book of Mormon | 79% | 35% |
| I re-evaluted what it means to believe/know, and realized that I never really believed. | 52% | 18% |
| I lost confidence in the general authorities | 71% | 18% |
| Church's stance on homosexuals / Prop 8 | 68% | 15% |
| I did not feel spiritually edified at church | 67% | 15% |
| Church's stance on women | 70% | 14% |
| I became bothered by church culture (e.g. conservative politics, etc.) | 57% | 11% |
| I lost my faith in God | 39% | 11% |
| Church's stance on science-related matters | 64% | 9% |
| I lost my faith in Jesus | 39% | 8% |
| I lost confidence in my local church leadership | 41% | 8% |
| Church's stance on race issues (blacks, native Americans, etc.) | 72% | 7% |
| I did not receive the promised spiritual witness | 37% | 6% |
| I received a spiritual witness to leave the church and go elsewhere | 18% | 5% |
| I or someone I loved was abused by someone in the church. | 12% | 3% |
| I wanted to engage in behaviors viewed as sinful by the church (e.g. alcohol, extra-marital sex) | 8% | 1% |
| I was offended by someone in the church. | 8% | 1% |
| Lack of meaningful friendships within the church | 13% | 1% |

- The top three reasons why survey respondents stated that they lost their faith are highly related: “I lost faith in Joseph Smith”, “I studied church history and lost my belief”, “I ceased to believe in the church's doctrine/theology”
- The three lowest ranked reasons include reasons that some members and leaders have pointed to as reasons some lose their faith: “I wanted to engage in behaviors viewed as sinful by the church (e.g. alcohol, extra-marital sex)”, “I was offended by someone in the church”, “Lack of meaningful friendships within the church”

| <i>If historical issues negatively affected your belief, which of the following contributed:</i> | Moderate to Strong Factor | Primary Factor |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Book of Abraham | 81% | 26% |
| Polygamy/Polyandry | 84% | 26% |
| Blacks and the Priesthood | 87% | 17% |
| DNA and the Book of Mormon | 79% | 15% |
| Masonic influences in the temple ceremony | 52% | 15% |
| Multiple, conflicting versions of the First Vision | 71% | 13% |
| Women and the Priesthood | 68% | 13% |
| Anachronisms in the Book of Mormon (e.g. horses, steel, etc.) | 67% | 12% |
| Past church positions on science, age of the earth, evolution, etc. | 70% | 12% |
| Changes in the temple ceremony | 57% | 12% |
| Issues with the authenticity or credibility of the priesthood restoration | 39% | 12% |
| Blood atonement | 64% | 11% |
| Joseph's use of peep stones in the translation of the Book of Mormon | 39% | 11% |
| Adam-god theory | 41% | 10% |
| Mountain meadows massacre | 72% | 9% |
| Loss of Credibility of the Three Witnesses | 37% | 8% |
| Kinderhook Plates | 18% | 7% |
| Joseph Smith's history of treasure digging | 12% | 7% |
| Mark Hofmann scandal | 8% | 7% |
| View of the Hebrews | 8% | 6% |

- Among those for whom historical issues “negatively affected your belief”, the Book of Abraham and Polygamy were the two primary issues
- Most respondents cited multiple primary/strong factors in losing their belief (average number of “major factors” listed was 15.1). This may challenge conventional wisdom that some who lose their faith do so because of single-issue hang-ups.
- Many respondents made the case that it wasn’t necessarily the historical issue per se that led to their disbelief, but rather a sense of betrayal at what was often viewed as a dishonest approach to the church’s history:

Respondent # 701: “Church needs to be honest with history and contradictions. If they were honest then it would mean a great deal. Instead they make us who have discovered the facts look like the evil ones. I am shunned in my family. They think I am the liar (sic) and deciever (sic) when it is the church and general athorities (sic).”

Respondent #381: “I never questioned the church until I realized that things were said at the pulpit in General Conference that were verifiably not true. If a prophet or apostle can lie over the pulpit, they cannot be ordained of God. This prompted me to search for the real truth, and here I discovered the true history of the church, and that it was in conflict with the history the church itself taught. Had the church never lied about its own history, or anything else for that matter, I would probably still be a Mormon today.”

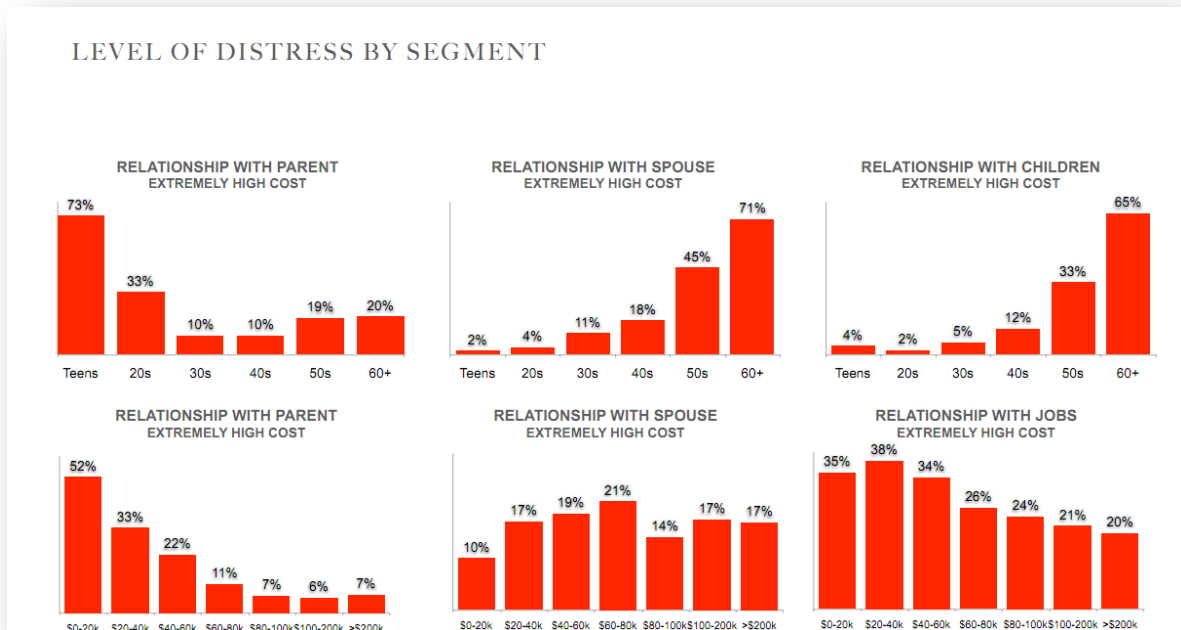
Respondent # 156: “Some of the issues with church history would never have been an issue if they had been presented truthfully the first time. The more upsetting part is that I feel like the church was making an attempt to hide its history. If something is worth hiding it makes it look more false. Plus it hurts to be lied to.”

Disclosure of Faith Issues:

| To what extent are you open with family and friends about your disbelief in the church? (Check all that apply) | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | ...know(s) nothing of my disbelief. | ...know(s) little of my disbelief. | ...know(s) a moderate amount about my disbelief. | ...know(s) most everything about my disbelief. |
| My spouse/significant other: | 1% | 4% | 9% | 86% |
| My father: | 16% | 21% | 27% | 37% |
| My mother: | 15% | 20% | 27% | 38% |
| My siblings: | 12% | 18% | 31% | 39% |
| My extended family: | 27% | 32% | 21% | 20% |
| My closest friends: | 7% | 12% | 22% | 59% |
| In general, my friends: | 15% | 24% | 29% | 33% |
| My children: | 19% | 15% | 20% | 46% |
| My bishop: | 33% | 20% | 20% | 26% |
| My fellow ward members: | 41% | 32% | 14% | 13% |

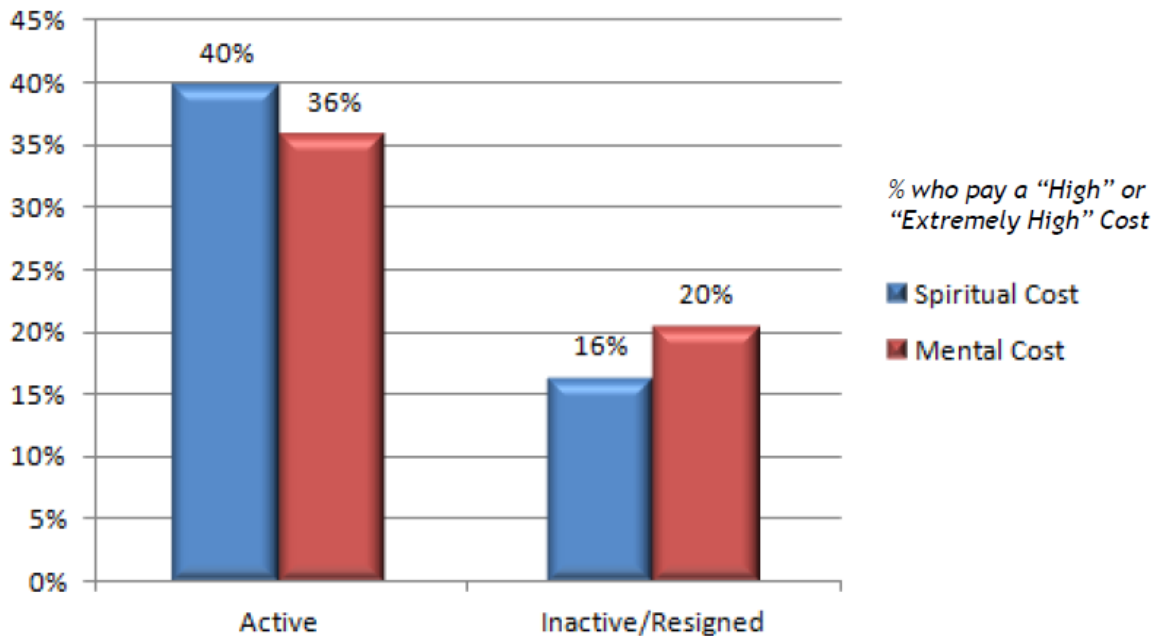
- Most married respondents have told their spouse about their faith crisis, while fewer than half of the respondents tell their parents or siblings
- Respondents are less likely to tell their closest friends about a faith crisis than an extended family member
- Among all demographics, the Bishop is very seldom told by a person of their faith crisis

Cost of a Faith Crisis

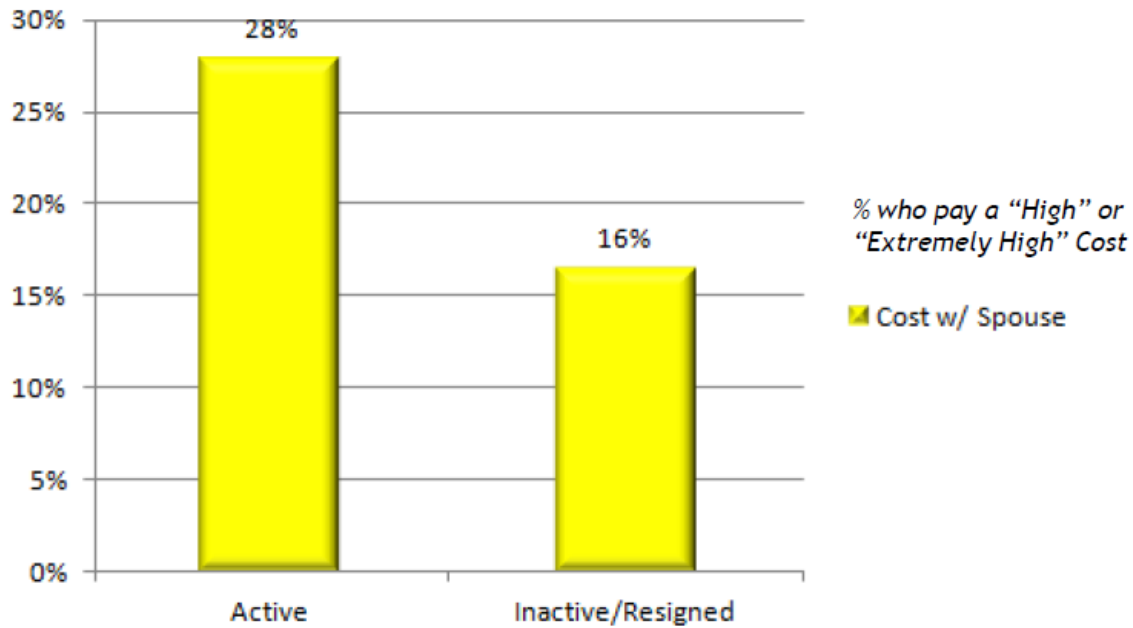


- Costs of a faith crisis vary significantly by their relationship and income dynamics
- Disbelieving members who stay active pay a significantly higher mental and spiritual cost... providing high incentive for them to stop attending church.

Disbelieving members who remain active pay a significantly higher mental and spiritual cost.



Disbelieving members who remain active pay a higher cost with their spouse.



Disbelieving members who resign or become inactive pay a higher cost with their other relationships.

