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Other Concerns

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Chapter 15 Other Concerns

82) *The Brigham Young Sunday School Manual doesn't even mention that he had multiple wives.*

Answer: The Sunday School manuals compile quotes and stories to help members improve their relationship with our Father as well as their relationships with fellow brothers and sisters. Each quote or story is selected based on its ability to speak to the generation and circumstances of the target audience. Stories of plural marriage might not have bearing on strengthening the faith of modern LDS audiences.

83) *Church finances aren't made public.*

Answer: While critics would like another stick with which to beat the Mormon Church, there is no obligation to make finances public. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said,

Church members will live in this wheat-and-tares situation until the Millennium. Some real tares even masquerade as wheat, including the few eager individuals who lecture the rest of us about Church doctrines in which they no longer believe. They criticize the use of Church resources to which they no longer contribute. They condescendingly seek to counsel the Brethren whom they no longer sustain. Confrontive, except of themselves, of course, they leave the Church, but they cannot leave the Church alone....³⁹

84) *Would a loving, kind, empathetic God really place parents in the horrible position of having to choose whether to feed their children or pay what little they have to tithing?*

Answer: Tithing is a sacrifice based upon faith. Local Church leaders regularly help financially struggling members who have food and housing needs. The Lord asks that we pay tithes and that we trust that he will provide. The Church has programs so that the faithful will be assisted with their needs.

85) *The name of the Church changed in the early years of the Restoration.*

Answer: The name changed a few times until revelation was given for the current and full name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the early days there were competing churches that operated under the name, "Church of Christ" (the original name of the LDS faith). To avoid confusion, the official name was changed temporarily (until revelation directed otherwise) to the Church of the Latter Day Saints while still going under the name "Church of Christ" as the unofficial title.

86) *The Church is anti-intellectual. Boyd Packer said that “some things that are true are not very useful.”*

Answer: Unfortunately, Elder Packer’s statement is true—as any husband knows when his wife asks, “Does this dress make me look fat?” Seriously, though, how is it helpful to anyone to share *everything*? Is it good for your relationship with your spouse if you tell all your co-workers about his or her weaknesses, faults, missteps, sins, or struggles? I know some people who do this and it always makes me cringe.

I see marriage as a commitment of trust. We all put on our best faces in public but we all fall short—extremely short—in our private lives. In a marriage, spouses should be able to trust that those short comings remain at home (unless, for some reason, they need to be discussed with a counselor or church leader). A home should be a safe harbor where family members are allowed to be themselves—in all their shortcomings—knowing that they are still loved, forgiven, and judged by their full being, not just by a few snippets taken out of the overall context.

I’m not suggesting lying, but there is objective reality and subjective reality. Objective reality is “there’s a rock in my garden.” Subjective reality is “there is a little rock (or big rock) in my garden.” Little and big are subjective descriptions and can mean different things to different people. While we can engage in objective reality we can’t escape subjective reality during those engagements. It’s impossible to get out of our own heads (and it’s just as impossible to fully get inside someone else’s head).

When we communicate we cannot escape painting pictures with our subjective reality. Yes, my spouse yelled at the kids this morning. Sharing this with others can influence their subjective reality—they might think my spouse is a mean parent. The yelling is true, the mean parent is not.

I’m all in favor of accurate history and I believe that the institutional Church is moving in a direction (and has made remarkable advances) of greater transparency about our Mormon history.

When Elder Boyd K. Packer made this comment he was addressing religious educators in the Church—whose primary job should be, as with other areas within the Church curriculum, to improve the faith of those who participate in these programs. Packer wanted to make sure those religious educators realized that lessons were taught that included discussion of the spiritual powers that attended historical events. The bare bones history without a discussion of those spiritual influences is a bit like movie popcorn without the butter (it just doesn’t taste as good).

I’m a big fan of inoculation and the need to teach all of the potentially troubling topics to Church members. It’s a fact that for many people the source and tone in which troubling information is presented has an influence on how that information is received. Members will either learn this stuff in a faithful setting or on an anti-Mormon blog on the Internet.

So my personal thoughts on Elder Packer’s comments are *subjective*. I agree that some truths aren’t useful, and I believe we have to be careful not to teach difficult topics in a way that paint a caricature of reality (focusing on the ugly warts rather than the beautiful eyes)—or to

disclose difficult topics for their shock-value instead of using the information as a real teaching moment. I do believe, however, that we *need to teach* the painful truths because they become less painful if first served as inoculation--compared to first exposure as a deadly virus.

87) *Dallin Oaks said it's wrong to criticize Church leaders even if those criticisms are true.*

Answer: Satan means “the accuser.” Criticizing leaders can lead to discord, to contention in one’s heart and eventually to apostasy—or a separation from those who can help in our journey to eternal happiness. This doesn’t mean that we can’t voice an opinion. We can, but we should make sure that our disagreements are tempered by humility and the fact that *we don’t know everything*. We should bear in mind that we might disagree, but we might also be wrong.

88) *LDS leaders warn members to stay away from the scary Internet.*

Answer: “The Internet? Is that thing still around,” (Homer Simpson). As noted above, it’s a fact that the source of information can affect not only one’s estimation of its accuracy but how the information is received. In reality, the LDS Church has embraced the Internet with gusto and has asked members to use the Internet to spread the Gospel. Leaders correctly warn, however, that much of what is posted on-line can be deceptive, inaccurate, and blatantly false. Because some Internet sites masquerade as wolves in sheep’s clothing, the Church is simply warning members of the possible dangers.

89) *The Church goes after members who question.*

Answer: The Church doesn’t go after questioning members. Those who produce material that rejects official Church doctrine, and those who organize in attempt to force the Church into changing doctrine or practice, will often be called upon to discuss their actions and motivations with their local leaders.

90) *The Strengthening the Church Members Committee is a secret organization that hunts down and exposes intellectuals.*

Answer: Rubbish. It’s an unfortunate fact that there will always be some who will try to hurt others. We have locks on the doors of our homes, and bars on the windows of our businesses. We see shootings at malls and movie theaters, and suicide bombings at sidewalk cafes. Not all threats, however, are physical. Some would like to destroy testimonies. One anti-Mormon website, for example, recommended that their followers put anti-Mormon place cards on the pews in their wards. The Church has an obligation to protect its members from spiritual harm—whether in the form of wolves, sincere but mistaken insurgents, or spiritual terrorists.

91) *Mormons believe that when the prophet speaks, the debate is over.*

Answer: This is not a teaching of the Church and the anti-Mormon quote that seems to

support it was made by an unknown scribe in a single issue of a Church magazine. It stands in contrast to dozens (if not hundreds) of other statements by Church leaders which claim that prophets are not infallible and that each member should gain their own testimony of those things which are taught.