

## BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

# “WHERE WERE YOU TWO DURING THE SACK RACE?”

By D. Jeff Burton

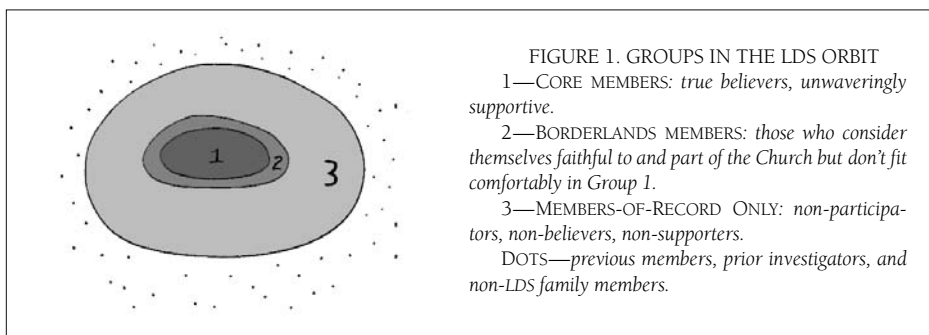


FIGURE 1. GROUPS IN THE LDS ORBIT  
 1—CORE MEMBERS: *true believers, unwaveringly supportive.*  
 2—BORDERLANDS MEMBERS: *those who consider themselves faithful to and part of the Church but don't fit comfortably in Group 1.*  
 3—MEMBERS-OF-RECORD ONLY: *non-participants, non-believers, non-supporters.*  
 DOTS—*previous members, prior investigators, and non-LDS family members.*

**I**N THIS THIRD column of this series, I thought it would be fun to further develop our understanding of LDS Borderlanders by listing some of their behaviors and characteristic attitudes. So I have assembled by traditional church topic a number of thoughts and types of conduct you might see in Borderlanders. Many are “tongue in cheek,” but all are based on my own and others’ experiences and study. To save space, each item uses gender-specific language, but most entries could easily apply to both men and women.

How well do these observations capture your experience in the Borderlands? What Borderland behaviors and thought patterns have I left out? (Email me at the address shown below. I’ll try to include them in a future column.)

## CHURCH RESPONSIBILITIES

- Allows (may even encourage) his home teacher to take credit for home teaching after a chance encounter at the grocery store. Might herself take credit for a teaching visit should she chance upon one of her visiting teaching sisters (and talk about something church-related).

- Privately and humbly asks bishop or stake president to “prayerfully consider” her for a particular calling “sometime in the fu-

ture, when and if appropriate.” (This usually results in her receiving a calling the very next weekend or, in a very few instances, no calling, *ever.*)

- May gently decline a proposed calling if it is obviously a wrong fit (or is simply something he doesn’t want to do . . . again). If the bishop begins the conversation by saying, “the Lord is calling you to . . .”, he refrains from replying: “We both know the Lord had nothing to do with this call.”

- Because of his sometimes meager Church callings and responsibilities, he has and gives more time to his wife and children.

- Is sometimes thankful for Church callings that exempt him from regular three-hour block meetings (e.g., high council, bishopric, or nursing home service callings.)

- Privately admits most Church meetings can be boring, repetitive, stultifying, and do little to enhance daily Christlike behavior.

- During a crowded stake conference meeting, refrains from sudden movements to avoid startling and waking the sleepers on both sides. Wears glasses painted with “open-eyes” on high council Sunday.

- Often contributes to charities outside the Church. May occasionally even think of “paying tithing” to non-LDS charities as a better use of his money but doesn’t succumb to the temptation.

- Finds some temple recommend ques-

tions too gray to answer with a “yes” or “no.” Fortunately, long explanations of personal but Church-compatible approaches usually convince the interviewer that this is a member with faith and a good heart.

## WORD OF WISDOM

- Although not imbibing, is not afraid to have an occasional dinner in a pub or tavern with non-LDS friends. She’ll even raise her head and say hello if someone she knows walks by the table.

- Eats meat sparingly. May even cite the Word of Wisdom to justify personal vegetarianism. Tells LDS neighbors about his belief at the ward dinner as they devour their chicken.

- Preaches “moderation in all things” as scripture even though it is not specifically mentioned in the Word of Wisdom.

- Will buy wine for her boss. When buying beer for hair shampoo purposes, she specifically tells the cashier what she plans to use it for.

## RELIGIOUS LIFESTYLE

- Is actually able to refer to herself as “Christian” when asked what religion she is affiliated with. She usually follows with the qualifier that hers is the “LDS version,” but not always.

- She doesn’t think God is up there just waiting for her to make a mistake nor that God is anxiously engaged in a lot of punishing. Is content to allow God to take revenge, as warranted.

- Doesn’t believe religion is primarily a formula (“three good behaviors commit God to issue three blessings,” or “two sins will result in two curses or penalties”). Still wonders about karma, though, and likes the idea when contemplating the future of the mean and arrogantly rich.

- Would consider a non-temple marriage okay (with a follow up “solemnizing” temple sealing as soon as possible) if the prospective in-laws are non-LDS and really want (the gall of some people!) to be present at their child’s wedding.

- Doesn’t feel the need to say a blessing on the food at restaurants. Understands blessings on food are rituals important for us as individuals, reminding us to be grateful for our lives and sustenance, rather than functioning to remove any “curse” from the food.

- Constantly asks, “How would Christ handle this situation?” Tries to follow the resulting answer and wishes others would do likewise.

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a member of the Sunstone Board of Trustees.

FAITH, BELIEF, AND TESTIMONY

- Sometimes admits he doesn't know everything. Thinks that curiosity and searching is sometimes better than sure-knowledge. (Knows it is definitely more fun.) Admits he is still "building" a testimony but doesn't really expect to ever have one like the member who gets up every month to declares his absolutes.
- Has actually admitted to others that she "doesn't know for sure" whether or not Joseph Smith, say, "located the Garden of Eden," or "had direct inspiration to institute polygamy." She is fairly accepting of LDS doctrine and principles of salvation, but she is definitely sold on Christ's teachings for how to live a happy life.
- Is more attracted to Richard Poll's "Liahona" approach to the gospel than to the "Iron Rod" temperament.
- Suspects the final judgment could be based on how we actually treat others while driving on the freeway. Believes the final judgment will examine motivations for behavior as well as the behavior itself.
- Sometimes finds teachings and practices in other religions worthwhile and useful in his own spiritual journey.

MISSIONARY WORK

- Has the missionaries over frequently to eat dinner but not as often to consume non-member friends.
- Never says (nor believes) "the Church must be true or the missionaries would have wrecked it long ago."
- Blatantly requests (in the top margin of the missionary forms), a desired country or mission for her son or daughter. [AUTHOR'S NOTE: This actually worked for me. I was granted my penciled-in request for a mission to Japan.]

FAMILY AND SEX

- Is perhaps disappointed, but doesn't disown or condemn his child if she marries outside the Church.
- Restrains her children from meaningless "testifying" during fast and testimony meeting.
- Has once made love in a

remote forested area during a ward outing and then lied when asked, "Where were you two during the sack race?"

- Supports and has actually used family planning methods. This has resulted in a sub-standard, three-child family. Does not really question whether or not there are twelve spirit children waiting on the other side to be born into their family.
- During slow moments in meetings, secretly grades the attractiveness of members of the opposite sex.
- Watches HBO's *Sex in the City* without guilt. Sometimes heads to bed shortly thereafter. Tells teenage son who is still up, "We're very tired," which is true, but only part of the truth, and this leads to a short-felt guilty feeling.
- Recognizes the theological difficulties created by the fact that some people have both male and female sexual characteristics and is willing to face the challenges directly. Understands some Latter-day Saints may be homosexual, not by choice, but does not add to the problem. Prays that better understanding will come soon.

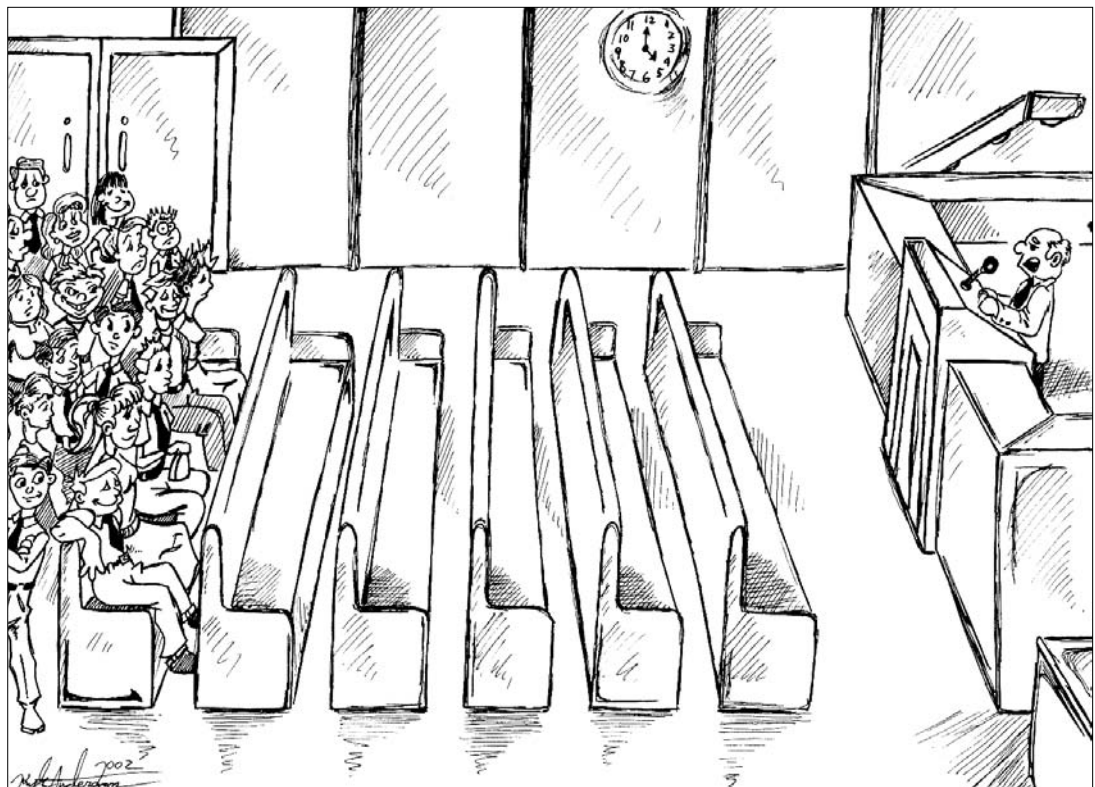
PERSONAL LIVES

- Actually discusses his private life with people other than his therapist.

- Occasionally lets others in the ward see behind her closed front door. Amazingly, there isn't much to be ashamed of.
- As is prudent, keeps "her differences to herself" in conversation with LDS true-believers.
- Has close non-LDS friends. Is not necessarily "fellowshipping" non-LDS friends as a prime motivation for the friendship.
- Allows her children to play with non-LDS neighbor kids. Sees no harm in his children learning about the religions of others.
- Regularly communicates with spouse; negotiates and compromises; forgives when necessary.
- Contrary to popular church wisdom, is actually pretty happy and fulfilled, even though Borderland living can be stressful at times. Wouldn't likely ever trade with true-believer. ☹

Please send me any of your tales from life in the Borderlands.

D. Jeff Burton  
2974 So. Oakwood Dr.  
Bountiful, Utah 84010  
<jeffburton@digitalpla.net>



Can everyone in the back hear me OK?