

## BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

# GROUP MEMBERSHIP: A SELF-ASSESSMENT

By D. Jeff Burton

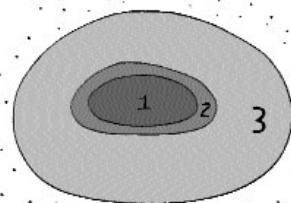


FIGURE 1. GROUPS IN THE LDS ORBIT

1—CORE MEMBERS: *true believers, unwaveringly supportive, the acceptable.*

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.*

from school politics to church to Sunstone to my professional life, I am in the group near the core, but not part of it. Eventually I find too many characteristics of the core group that I don't accept completely, an inability to manage all that core membership means, and I inevitably choose to become a "borderlands" member.

**RUSS:** Perhaps Jeff's categories of "core," "borderland" and "other" also apply to Sunstone. I sense there is a group of "core" SUNSTONE subscribers who get together and share ideas and know each other and work hard to keep the "community" together. Then there are borderland SUNSTONE subscribers, like me, who want the information coming from SUNSTONE and who contribute financial support but don't know any other SUNSTONE subscribers except casually, don't participate in the symposiums, and aren't committed to the success of the "community."

**KIM:** I have often thought that if the Church were really the "True Church," there would be no weaknesses in the organization, no doctrines to question, and no reasons for me to not accept everything with all my heart. But perhaps it isn't about these issues. Perhaps it is more about me and my personality, and how I respond, criticize, justify and fit into groups. Wow, this may be an interesting insight into my sense of self!

**S**INCE THE DEBUT of this column, I've received many comments and queries related to group membership: "Who qualifies as a Borderlander?" "Where do I fit?" "Where do you draw the line between groups?" The following paragraphs represent some of the comments and exchanges that have taken place. (I've edited for conciseness and changed names and a few details to protect identities, except for mine: "Jeff.")

**GARY:** *I think the borders between groups are quite fuzzy and there is, of course, diversity within each group. I put myself in Group 1, but I don't believe (or don't even care about) some "doctrines" most people in that group believe are essential to their testimony and membership.*

**JEFF:** Although categorization is a common human trait, it must be carefully monitored so it doesn't get out of hand. I'm glad you feel comfortable assigning yourself to Group 1 even though your circumstances would make others feel like a Borderlander. Either your ward is very accepting of diversity, or you have kept the "don't believe/don't care" parts of your gospel life to yourself.

**LARRY:** *Some of my LDS friends and family live in the borderlands or beyond. I appreciate your attention to this group. I have contact and interaction with them. As a Group 1 member, however, I miss them. (And, by and large, I like*

*them more than some people in my group). Sometimes I think of myself as an honorary member of the borderlands community. I dabble in Group 2 every chance I get. My personal goal, rather than persuading people to switch groups, is to eliminate the barriers between them.*

**JEFF:** That would be the ideal and is my long-term hope, also.

**SAM:** *I am a straight, white male with a wonderful wife and three great kids. I have, in general, the respect of my peers, both inside and outside the Church. You could put a picture of my family on the cover of the Ensign and send it all over the world as another bit of Church public relations. However, if that picture could talk, it would tell a very different story than the one conveyed by our "image." And this difference is true for many Group 1 members I have known.*

*Members in all three groups face the same challenges. They are human beings. They are good; they are bad. They help people; they hurt people. They love; they hate. They sin and are in desperate need of redemption. If we could all understand this, there would be less "group envy" or group ridicule.*

**KIM:** *I wonder, do certain personality types tend to fall into similar groups in each of the organizations in which they participate? I feel like a "borderland" participant in most of what I do. I seldom lead out as a core member. In everything*

**T**HESE reader insights suggest the setting of borders between groups must be an individual determination. You are what you perceive yourself to be. Some of us will set quite narrow borders; others, broad. As an exercise in self-reflection and to help you see where you might fit, I have prepared a questionnaire I hope you will find (mostly) fun and (perhaps) informative or helpful. If nothing else, perhaps it may help you examine aspects of your gospel life you might not have thought about in a while, and it may shed some light on where you might fit in this column's general grouping scheme, at least for one set of concerns.

The questionnaire is intended to probe activity and personal beliefs as they relate to a person's church life. As such, it is only one glimpse into a person's spirituality and possible "borderland" traits. The questionnaire asks you to own up to private thoughts and feelings. It touches on things that are normally confidential and sensitive in our culture. (Only you will see your results, but I welcome your reactions and thoughts.)

As you try this exercise, please remember it has not been scientifically developed or tested. In addition, it may not function well for the elderly, teenagers, the infirm or handicapped, the ill, the poor, or those not living in close proximity to an active LDS community. Take this quiz with a pinch of salt.

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

## SECTION ONE. PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVITY IN WARD AND CHURCH PROGRAMS

THE following questions are designed to roughly measure your activity and participation in traditional ward and Church programs.

1. If you were to receive a Church calling from your bishop, you would:

- 0 Never accept
- 1 Rarely accept
- 2 Accept only if convenient and desirable for me
- 3 Accept if certain conditions are met
- 4 Accept after discussion and prayer
- 5 Always accept without question

2. Describe your attendance at regular meetings (Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society, or sacrament meeting, as applicable)

- 0 Never attend
- 1 Rarely attend
- 2 Occasionally (less than 40%)
- 3 Quite often (40–75%)
- 4 Regularly (more than 75%)
- 5 Never miss any meetings

3. During an average week, how many hours do you spend in Church-related activities? (Attendance at all meetings, socials, lesson preparation, home/visiting teaching, etc.)

- 0
- 1
- 2–3
- 4–5
- 6–7
- 8 or more

4. Describe your actual financial donations to the Church during the past few years.

- 0 No donations to Church
- 1 Irregular donations and only if asked
- 2 Occasional donations
- 3 Part-tithe payer plus occasional other donations
- 4 Usually full-tithe payer plus other offerings
- 5 Full-tithe payer plus all other offerings

5. Describe your feelings of "belonging" or "acceptance" in Church settings or activities.

- 0 I never feel I belong with others in Church settings; I never feel other members accept

me as I am.

1 I rarely feel I belong; I rarely feel accepted as I am.

2 I occasionally feel I belong; I sometimes feel accepted as I am.

3 I often feel I belong; I often feel accepted as I am.

4 I usually feel I belong; I usually feel accepted as I am.

5 I always feel I belong; I always feel accepted as I am.

6. Describe your close personal friendships with Church members. (Define this kind of friend as someone you confide in and who confides in you.)

0 None of my close personal friends are ward (or stake) members.

1 One or two of my close friends....

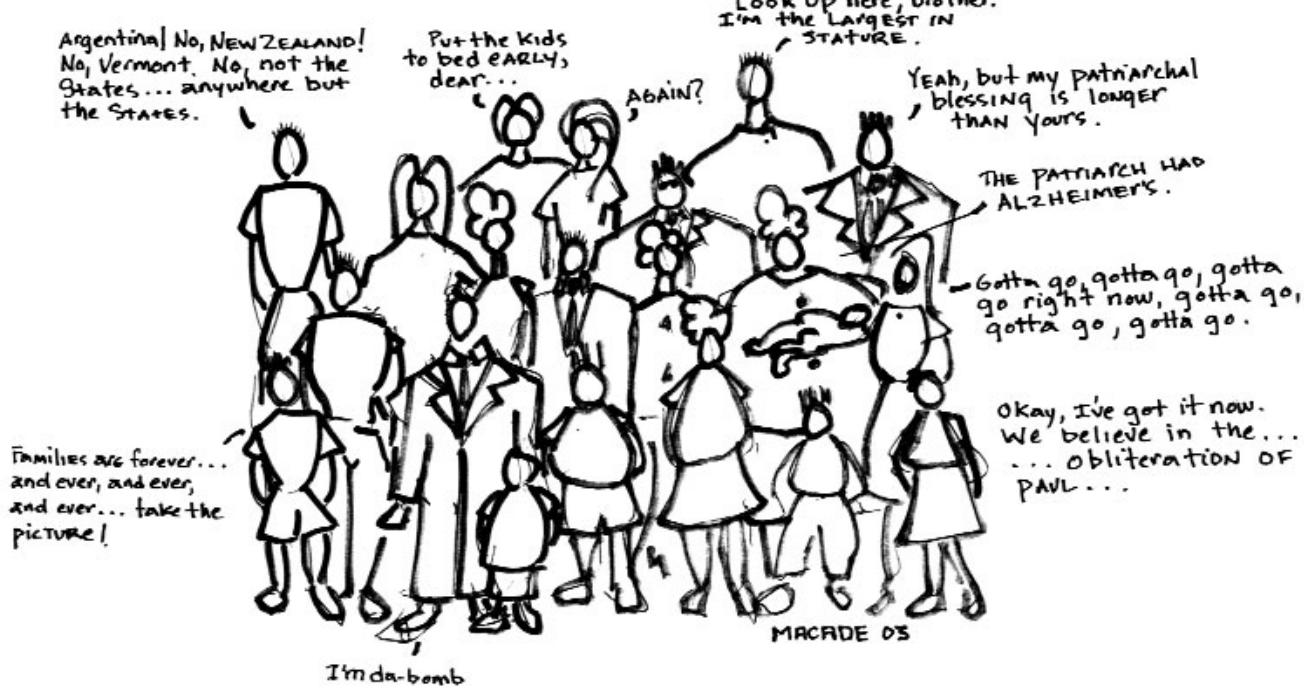
2 A few of my close friends are....

3 Some of my close friends....

4 Most of my close friends....

5 All of my close friends....

7. Describe the role the Church plays in your social life.



**IF FAMILY Pictures could TALK**

- 0 ( ) None of my socializing is at the ward or with ward members.  
 1 ( ) Very little of my socializing....  
 2 ( ) A little of my socializing....  
 3 ( ) Some of my socializing....  
 4 ( ) Most of my socializing....  
 5 ( ) All of my socializing....

#### 8. Church callings

- 0 ( ) I never have a Church calling.  
 1 ( ) I don't usually have a Church calling.  
 2 ( ) I have a relatively easy (non-demanding) calling most of the time.  
 3 ( ) I have a calling in the Church almost all the time.  
 4 ( ) I often have a pretty demanding calling or two easier ones.  
 5 ( ) I always have demanding callings.

#### 9. How often do you attend the temple?

(Use this first set of choices if you live near a temple, i.e., within a two-hour drive.)

- 0 ( ) Never have had a temple recommend.  
 1 ( ) No temple recommend now; no attendance in last two years.  
 2 ( ) Have temple recommend, but little attendance.  
 3 ( ) 3–4 times per year.  
 4 ( ) 5–10 times per year.  
 5 ( ) Once per month, or more.

(Use this set of choices if you live far from a temple—more than a two-hour drive.)

- 0 ( ) No temple recommend.  
 1 ( ) No temple recommend now but had one last year.  
 2 ( ) Once per year.  
 3 ( ) Once or twice per year.  
 4 ( ) Two times per year.  
 5 ( ) Three or more times per year.

#### 10. How much of the Word of Wisdom do you follow?

- 0 ( ) I ignore the Word of Wisdom.  
 1 ( ) Not very much.  
 2 ( ) I abstain from alcohol and tobacco most of the time.  
 3 ( ) I abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea almost always.  
 4 ( ) I always abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea.  
 5 ( ) I always abstain from all of the above plus caffeine drinks,

chocolate, or meat (except in winter).

**SCORING.** Add up the scores associated with your answers. The following results are not definitive but suggest trends:

38–50 Very active; high participation

25–37 Moderately active

13–24 Moderately inactive

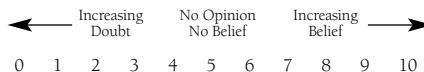
0–12 Very inactive; little participation

We will use these results in Section Three. If you scored 25 or higher, consider yourself "Active." If you scored 24 or lower, consider yourself "Inactive."

## SECTION TWO. MEASURES OF BELIEF IN UNIQUE CHURCH DOCTRINES AND TEACHINGS

THIS section asks you to describe your thoughts and conclusions about the statements below.

Answer honestly, not as you think you should. Please see the scale below.



Zero ("0") represents negative knowledge—"I know the statement isn't correct; I know it isn't true." Numbers four to one represent increasing skepticism and doubt—"I don't know for sure, but I doubt it is correct," or, "I don't think the statement is true."

A score of five ("5") represents lack of information and lack of belief one way or the other—"I don't know," "I have no opinion" or "I have no thoughts one way or the other." Ten ("10") represents positive knowledge—"I know the statement is correct," or, "I know it is true beyond any doubt." Numbers between six and nine represent increasingly strong belief—"I don't know for sure, but I believe the statement is true," or "I think it is correct."

Examples:

(10)  $2 + 2 = 4$

(3) A Democrat will be elected president in the 2004 election

(5) Patrick Quentin O'Toole is a farmer in Santaquin, Utah.

The following statements represent doctrines, precepts, and teachings which set the Church apart from other religious organizations. Please indicate your level of belief in the following statements. (Remember, record

what you truly think, not what you believe you're supposed to think, and not what you are willing to accept on faith.)

1. ( ) The Father and the Son came to a grove of trees in which Joseph Smith was praying, and they spoke to him.

2. ( ) The Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates which the angel Moroni gave to Joseph Smith.

3. ( ) LDS scriptures (e.g., the Book of Mormon) are the word of God.

4. ( ) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church on the face of the earth.

5. ( ) It is God's wish that we avoid alcohol and tobacco.

6. ( ) God directs leaders in their Church work.

7. ( ) The temple ceremony was written under the inspiration of God, and it is important that we attend the temple regularly.

8. ( ) Christ's gospel is being correctly taught by the Church.

9. ( ) The afterlife consists of three kingdoms of glory (celestial, terrestrial, and telestial) and "outer darkness."

10. ( ) It is important to gain a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

**SCORING.** Add and score your answers as follows:

75–100 points—Strong belief and acceptance of the Church's unique teachings

50–75 points—Moderate belief and acceptance

25–49 points—More doubt and skepticism than belief

0–25 points—Serious doubts and skepticism about unique teachings

These results will be used in Section Three. Count yourself a "Believer in Unique Church Teachings" if you scored 50–100 points. Count yourself a "Skeptic in Unique Church Teachings" if you scored fewer than 50 points.

### SECTION THREE. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

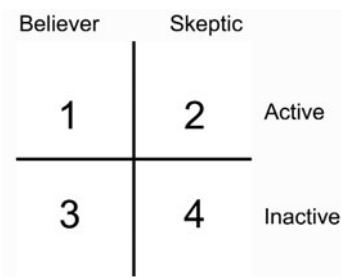
BASED on the above exercises, you will find yourself in one each of the following sections. (Check one box in each section.)

Section One: Active . . . . .()

Inactive . . . . .()

Section Two: Believer . . . . .()

Skeptic . . . . .()



The figure above is a 2x2 matrix. Your results in the foregoing sections will place you in one of the squares in the matrix.

For example, if you are "Active" in Section One and a "Believer in Unique Church Teachings" in Section Two, place yourself in block 1.

#### ANALYSIS

IT is difficult to measure something as complex as personal belief. It is certainly difficult to interpret any such results accurately. Therefore, take the following interpretations (and any personal conclusions) with a pinch of salt. If the outcome disturbs you, you might want to discuss it with your bishop or another trusted person.

Block	Possible Interpretation
1	This block represents both strong belief and strong activity—the predominant situation found among core members. This person would likely be in Group 1 in the figure at the beginning of this column.
2	This block indicates activity accompanied by disbelief or skepticism toward the Church's unique teachings and doctrines. This person might be characterized as an "active skeptic," "faithful doubter," or "closet doubter." Such persons remain active for any number of reasons. They would likely be borderland members—Group 2.

3 This block indicates a belief in unique Church doctrines and teachings but little activity in ward or other Church programs. There could be any number of reasons: poor health, estrangement, feelings of rejection, habits, and so forth. Such members could consider themselves to be in any or none of the groups.

4 This block indicates weak activity plus disbelief in Church teachings, something common among inactive and former Mormons. This person would likely be a member of Group 3 or even further removed from the LDS orbit.

**A**S I have administered a similar questionnaire during firesides, at quorum meetings, and in other settings, I have observed mostly positive levels of both belief and activity among those who participated—with exceptions, of course. I

have also noticed the ever-present problem of defining terms. Many people simply cannot separate faith and intellectual belief. This works to the benefit of some (those who live by faith) and to the detriment of others (those who see lack of belief as lack of faith).

Finally, this little exercise is not universal in scope or application. You may have other reasons for being a Borderlander: personality differences with other ward members, strong political leanings that seem out of step with those of many other Church members, homosexual orientation, and so forth. We will explore these in future columns.

Please send me any of your thoughts, experiences, or tales from life in the Borderlands.

D. Jeff Burton  
2974 So. Oakwood Dr.  
Bountiful, Utah 84010  
[<jeffburton@digitalpla.net>](mailto:<jeffburton@digitalpla.net>)



#### KNEADING

when you were little there would sometimes come a snow day and we would have the time to make bread mix great bowls of dough and cover with towels by the radiator while we raced outside and built snowwomen and forts and made snowballs to freeze until next summer then knead together punch and fold and go out and catch snowflakes on dark wool to test uniqueness under glass and knead again taste snow on our tongues and steam wet mittens on the radiator while bread baked and I was the best mother in the world because I was home and given time I never expected it all to be taken away I have never baked bread alone.

—KELLEY JEAN WHITE