Fruits of Faith

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During his public ministry, Jesus taught many things that angered Jewish leaders. New ideas, new doctrines, and a new way of thinking challenged the Pharisees and others. They were required to consider their beliefs in ways that were uncomfortable. Jesus knew such a process and challenge would continue long after his ascension. To make sure all of God's children would now the truth he gave some very simple counsel: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matthew 7:20).

Because it's much harder to "walk the walk" than to "talk the talk," Jesus Christ offers this counsel to look at the fruits of the individual to know them. The works and life examples of a person are likened to grapes (fruit) that grows naturally from the grape vine. Look to the fruit He warns, to know the source of that fruit.

What are the Fruits of Faith?

Christ's counsel is useful in considering a Christian church, including the doctrines and people that make up that church. What are the fruits of that church and its people? If the works and examples of the Christian people in a particular church are positive, then, preliminarily at least, the Christian church itself can be considered positive. The same can be spoken of in the reverse.

One can compare the fruits of youth and adults in various Christian sects in order to understand how each church is doing in shepherding God's children on earth. What kind of a tree has each church built? If "by their fruits ye shall know them," then such a comparison can perhaps reveal, or at least suggest, the effectiveness of doctrines, practices, principles, culture, and leadership of each church.

Comparing the Fruits of Christian Churches

Identifying fruits for comparison is challenging. Any comparison needs to be as much "apples-to-apples" as possible, using meaningful spiritual metrics—if one can conceive of such a thing for faith and religion. Complicating this search is the fact that faith and religion are spiritually qualitative in their essence.

Acknowledging these serious limitations, but lacking any better tools, the Foundation will attempt to apply available quantitative data in a way that might yield, or at least suggest, some qualitative answers. Having confidence in the Lord's counsel, by observing its fruits, we can know something of the tree.

Comparison of Youth Fruits

The youth, ages 13 to 17 years, make up the future generation of adults who will be the forthcoming leaders of the Lord's Church. Understanding the attitudes and behaviors of a particular church's youth will provide a glimpse into what the future may hold for that church.

The book, *Soul Searching*, by Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton provides an illuminating glimpse into the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers. In reading the book one will become familiar with a remarkable study called the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), the results of which constitute an excellent data set for the comparison of youth among various Christian churches.

The table on the following page is a robust selection of attributes that were tested in the NSYR study. The table provides the results of the study (in percentages) for a number of Christian religions, along with the result of the study for the United States youth population in general:

LEGEND: Total US Youth Universe (US), Conservative Protestant (CP), Mainline Protestant (MP), Black Protestant (BP), Roman Catholic (RC), Mormon/Latter-day Saint (LDS); All numbers are in percentages.

Attributes Tested	US	CP	MP	BP	RC	LDS
Attending religious service once a week or more	40	55	44	41	40	71
Would attend if totally up to the youth (once a week or more)	45	63	47	48	40	69
Importance of religious faith shaping daily life (extremely important)	20	29	20	31	10	43
Importance of faith shaping major life decisions (extremely important)	20	28	19	31	11	52
View of God as a personal being involved in the lives of people today	65	77	69	74	64	76
Believes there is life after death (definitely)	49	62	51	50	45	76
Believes in the existence of demons or evil spirits (definitely)	41	58	37	48	28	69
Has ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful	51	70	64	59	37	76
Has ever experienced a definite answer to prayer or guidance from God	50	65	53	61	42	67
Taught a Sunday School or religious education class	20	28	26	22	15	42
Fasted or denied self something as spiritual discipline	24	22	25	20	29	68
Been a part of any other scripture study or prayer group	27	42	31	35	17	50
Spoke publicly about own faith in a religious service or meeting	30	42	33	34	20	65
Tried to practice a weekly day or rest or Sabbath	31	40	27	35	30	67
Shared own religious faith with someone not of faith	43	56	51	41	37	72
Frequency of teen praying alone (one or more times a day)	38	49	32	55	33	57
Currently involved in a religious youth group	38	56	55	38	24	72
Youth group participation rate	52	64	64	44	32	75
Congregation has a full-time, part-time, or volunteer youth minister	59	60	66	73	55	94
Frequency of youth group attendance (one or more times per week)	26	43	35	23	13	57
Teen is a leader in the youth group	13	19	19	15	5	36
Frequency of religious Sunday School attendance (one or more times per week)	25	36	25	27	19	62
Family talks about God, the scriptures, prayer, or other religious or spiritual things together (once a week or more)	45	60	34	68	34	80
Teen prays out loud or silently with one or both parents, other than at mealtimes or religious services	41	53	35	56	36	79
Feel pressured or made fun of because of their religious beliefs and practices (a lot or some)	9	12	5	6	5	24
Teens have adults in congregation, other than family members, who they enjoy talking with and who give lots of encouragement	79	84	84	78	68	90
Most adults in congregation for getting to know are very easy or somewhat easy to talk with	79	82	80	80	72	91
Religious environment usually makes teens think about important things	62	70	58	63	52	81
Religious environment is usually a warm and welcoming place	75	80	82	74	66	85
Good experience in talking with adult youth minister or religious youth leader about a personal question or problem	19	30	32	16	9	48
Congregation is a very good place for talking about serious issues, problems, and troubles	45	52	38	48	33	65
Congregation has done an excellent job of helping to better understand own sexuality and sexual morality	30	35	22	35	18	66

Source: The National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR), 2002-2003 - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

While numbers from the NSYR reveal significantly more positive results for some Christian churches over others, equally revealing was the weakness of certain Christian churches against the national average. You can read more about the NSYR study by visiting the website: http://www.youthandreligion.org/resources/surveys.html

If, as Jesus said, we can know Christian youth by their fruits [modified wording from "them" to "Christian youth"], the data from the NSYR study reveals differences in the amount of fruit being generated from the various trees of Christian churches in the form of solid religious attitudes and behaviors from the youth.

Comparison of Adult Fruits

One can glean a great deal about the adults of a church by reviewing the results from the NSYR. Where there is strong youth, there are likely involved and faithful adults. Though such results are revealing, they are not comprehensive as to the attitudes and "fruits" of adults.

Fortunately, there is an excellent study by The Barna Research Group, Ltd., an independent marketing research company located in southern California. This outstanding study can be used to examine the attitudes and spiritual fruit of adults. The study was conducted from January 2000 to June 2001 and included telephone interviews with a nationwide random sample of 6,038 adults.

The following are a few of the notable results from the study, which are broken down by Christian Denomination, with row one being a composite of all adults who participated in the study. All numbers are in percentages:

	Attend Church	Read Bible	Pray to God	Attend Sunday School	Small Group	Church Volunteer	Donate Money	Share Faith
All Adults	43	38	82	16	15	16	18	24
Adventist	47	49	79	18	27	16	16	26
Assembly of God	69	66	93	35	29	30	22	61
Baptist (any type)	50	55	92	30	22	19	20	43
Catholics	48	23	88	6	8	12	13	10
Church of Christ	58	53	92	37	28	22	29	35
Episcopal	30	30	85	11	13	19	17	14
Lutheran (any type)	43	32	84	13	13	19	21	21
Methodist (any type)	49	43	90	18	15	19	23	20
Mormon/Latter-day Saints	71	67	95	62	27	40	24	26
Christian non-denominational	61	66	94	21	32	22	26	57
Pentecostal/Foursquare	66	75	97	36	37	25	27	61
Presbyterian (any)	49	48	89	17	18	26	17	23

	Bible is totally Accurate	Must tell faith to others	Religion/ Faith is important	Satan is real	Christ was sinless	God – all powerful Creator
All Adults	41	32	68	27	40	69
Adventist	64	42	73	37	45	76
Assembly of God	77	61	86	56	70	96
Baptist (any type)	66	51	81	34	55	85
Catholics	26	17	68	17	33	70
Church of Christ	57	51	81	36	54	80
Episcopal	22	12	60	20	28	59
Lutheran (any type)	34	27	63	21	33	72
Methodist (any type)	38	28	74	18	33	73
Mormon/Latter-day Saints	29	55	90	59	70	84
Christian non-denominational	70	59	86	48	63	89
Pentecostal/Foursquare	81	73	94	47	73	90
Presbyterian (any)	40	33	71	22	45	76

Source: Barna Group study in 2000/2001 probed theological beliefs among adults in the U.S. http://www.barna.org

NOTE: the low percentage attributed to the Mormon/Latter-day Saints response to "Bible is totally Accurate" should be qualified against the 8th Article of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints which states: *We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God*. Had the question been structured as "do you believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly?" the response would have likely been significantly higher.

As with the youth statistics, the adult responses reveal strong beliefs and practices among some Christian churches, while others appear less committed or perhaps have a more liberal belief system. These statistics are excellent leading indicators of the "fruits of faith" among adults.

What's With the Mormons (Latter-day Saints)?

In reviewing the youth and adult numbers from the two studies, there appears to be a pattern of exceptionally high numbers among Latter-day Saints for activity, participation, and consistent belief systems when compared to other Christian sects. This pattern is repeated in an array of other national statistics including the following for the state of Utah, which is primarily a Mormon demographic (although steadily decreasing according to current statistics):

Lowest Nationwide Abortion and Teen Pregnancy Rate: Data from the U.S. Census Bureau lists Utah as the state with the lowest teen pregnancy and abortion rate in the United States (Statistical Abstract of the United States 1997: National Data Book. Washington, D.C.: Census Bureau, U.S. Dept. of Commerce (1997)).

Fewer Children out of Wedlock: The latest federal health figures from 1997 rank Utah as having the fewest births to unwed mothers (U-S Department of Health and Human Services, October 13, 2005, http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=118054)

Lowest Divorce Rate: National demographic studies indicate that couples in which both partners are Latter-day Saints (and who marry in the temple) have the lowest divorce rate among all U.S. social and religious groups studied (Daniel K. Judd. Religion, Mental Health and the Latter-day Saint, Bookcraft, 1999)

Dramatically Fewer Suicides: The national suicide rate among 20- to 34-year-old males was 2.5 to 3 times higher than among active Latter-day Saints of the same age. Suicide risk was also 3 to 6 times higher among non-Latter-day saints in comparison to active Latter-day Saints. (American Journal of Epidemiology 2002; 155:413-419. Write-up in: "High Religious Commitment Linked to Less Suicide", by Charnicia E. Huggins (Reuters Health), Daily News, 6 March 2002)

Child Friendly Environment: Utah was ranked as one of the top ten states in which to raise children in the 1996 rankings by the Children's Right's Council (Testimony of Cynthia L. Ewing, Senior Policy Analyst, Children's Rights Council before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, February 6, 1995; http://www.peak.org/~jedwards/crc.htm)

Most Charitable: Citizens of Utah rank first among all U.S. states in the proportion of income given to charity by the wealthy (households with annual gross income of more than $200,000) (Kent Allen. "Philanthropy: Give and Take: Individual Potential in Relative Terms" in Washington Post (3 January 1999), A17).

Dedicated to Education: Utah has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the nation (U.S. Bureau of Census data released April 2000). Utah "spends a larger percentage of state dollars on education" than any other state (Graduation Rates in the United States, National Center for Education Statistics).

Most Self-Reliant: Utah spends much less of its budget on public welfare than the other states according to the US Bureau of Census data released April 2000. "On average, other states spend 22.4 percent of their budgets on public welfare…Utah spends 14 percent."

Healthiest: James E. Enstrom of the UCLA medical school, following a large study of Latter-day Saint adults, reports that Latter-day Saints have a much lower rate of mortality than other Americans for all cancers, all cardiovascular diseases, and for all causes of death. The National Institute of Mental Health ranked Utah as the second-lowest U.S. state in new inpatient admissions to state mental hospitals and ranked Utah as having the lowest per-capita alcohol consumption. (Mayrav Saar, "Many faith-based dietary restrictions can benefit body, spirit," Orange County Register, July 27, 2001) In 2000 *Self Magazine* ranked Provo, Utah, as the healthiest city in the United States for women.

Conclusion

Whether we're considering youth or adults, even an entire population who are predominantly Mormon, the aforementioned data and statistics provide a consistent view for Latter-day Saints as being dedicated Christians who are bearing good fruit in a number of ways as compared to most other Christian religions.

Life is not a contest, but rather a short time in our eternal journey where we are tested and are able to gain experiences. Jesus Christ meant his Church to be a guiding force in the children of God's lives to point the way down narrow path and provide support in staying the course. Jesus Christ told his disciples "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). These numbers truly speak for themselves when considering the fruits of faith.

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The Foundation for Christian Studies (FCS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study, teaching, and practice of Christianity in a way that inspires all people, regardless of theological differences, to come together in support of essential Christian values and compassionate service to God's children across the globe. The FCS accomplishes this by providing rich scriptural course study and spiritual commentary, interactive web forums for thoughtful discussion, an online store offering inspirational Christian media, and a charitable giving program that emphasizes individual and community self-reliance.

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