

(Disclaimer/credit: I can't remember who the original author of this was, but it wasn't me. All I do remember is that it was full of so much awesomeness that I saved it in my "swipe file" for later reference. So to whomever was the original author, thank you for sharing your words.)

10 Things You Should Know When a Spouse Loses Faith

I've lost my faith. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I know this isn't what you or I planned, but I'm confident we can still make things work, because I love you. Here are some things I want you to know.

These are mainly directed toward my spouse who still believes in the Church, but they apply to all the people I have known and interacted with and loved—and still do—within the Church. I don't want to lose you. I just want to be understood. I know you might feel awkward around me and not know how to talk about Church stuff anymore. Please read this, and it'll help us both out.

1. First, why I left. Or, more specifically, why I didn't leave. I didn't leave because I just wanted to sin. I didn't leave because I sought out and read anti-Mormon literature. I didn't leave because I stopped reading my scriptures and saying my prayers and thus lost my testimony—the reverse, actually. The actual reasons I left don't need to be discussed here. What I want you to understand is this. Doubt is not a sin. Having questions and not understanding doesn't make me a bad person, nor does trying to resolve those conflicts. The entire premise of faith is that we can't know everything. We are taught to seek learning and light and truth and knowledge. That's what I tried to do. I just tried to gain a greater understanding, and unfortunately, my path took me to a different place than yours did. I wish it hadn't happened that way.

2. You are the most important thing to me. Maybe you don't want to hear that it's not God and the Church, but please take comfort in the fact that I am just as—or even more so now—committed to you as ever. When you threaten to leave me because of our differences in faith, it breaks my heart. I believe we are perfect for each other and I love you, and while I know our common faith very obviously played a role in our choosing to marry each other, it was not the sole factor upon which we fell in love and got married. The Church's ultimate goal is to unite families together forever, and that hasn't changed for me. I believe a marriage that matters can be successful regardless of faith and that we are strong enough to work through this and whatever other differences. Please don't give up on me.

3. I am and still want to be a good person. I didn't leave the Church because I wanted to sin. True, I may not believe drinking coffee or wearing a tank top affects whether I am a good person or not, but I am still seeking to choose and do the right. That might just look a little bit different from how you do so. But regardless of those superficial rules and actions, my underlying motivations are pure and I am still a moral and good person. Please don't judge me just because I have a coffee maker on my counter now. In most ways, I am still the same person you married. Please don't villainize me. If you think back to all the reasons you fell in love with me, most of them are still there. Disbelief doesn't equal being a horrible person.

4. I'm willing to talk about why my beliefs have changed if you're willing to actually listen. Please don't be afraid to come talk to me and ask questions if you sincerely want to know and are willing to listen. More than anything, I want to still be loved and accepted, and right now I'm on a very lonely path and feel alienated from all I have believed and unable to share my thoughts with anyone. I would welcome the opportunity to connect. Don't be surprised, though, if I'm hesitant to open up at first. I've been burned many times before. I'm scared to tell you what I think because it might be painful or uncomfortable for you to hear.

If you're only listening to look for openings to tell me why I'm wrong, this isn't going to work. If I share with you some of my questions and concerns, don't immediately try to explain them away, and especially don't make up answers. Just because you haven't experienced or felt what I have doesn't make my concerns less valid. If you don't have an explanation, don't give a response. I've probably done a lot more research on the topic than you have as I've tried to reconcile conflicting ideas and beliefs in my mind. Don't try to argue it out. Don't go into all the logical reasons I am obviously wrong. Don't try to explain away my problems unless you are willing to *completely* dive into all my issues. Arrogance and condescension just make you a jerk, and at best will end the conversation and at worst hurt my feelings and damage our relationship.

5. I do not need nor desire to be rescued. Please respect my decision. Don't tell me I've been deceived by the devil or am under the influence of Satan. Don't try to call me to repentance and preach to me, or I'll stop talking to you. It's hurtful and unfair. I've been trying to make things work for a long time, and I've concluded after much study and thought that this is the best place for me to be, and one or two discussions with you isn't going to suddenly make me come to my senses. The eleventh article of faith states that we will allow others to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. Please afford me that privilege and I will do the same for you. I'll continue to respect your beliefs, and I just want the same in return.

6. That being said, it's okay to still talk about the Church around me. No, it's not okay to try to bear testimony all the time that it's true and that if I just read my scriptures more or prayed harder I'd come back. It's also not okay to assume and behave as if we all hold to the exact same religious ideals. But it is okay to talk about your life—and a large part of that is the Church. I still want to be friends with you. I still care about you. Tell me about the Relief Society activity you were in charge of that had everything go wrong, or how adorable your Primary kids are and the cute things they say, or all about Girls' Camp last week. I still want to be involved in your life, and you are just as welcome to share those things with me as you would your highs and lows of training for a marathon or the ins and outs of knitting, even though I share neither of those pastimes with you.

7. This has been the most painful and difficult process of my entire life. I know it's been hard for you, too, but I didn't choose this and I'm not inflicting it on you for fun. I didn't want to lose my faith—on the contrary, I clung to it as fiercely as I could for as long as I could, trying to stay in. But gradually I came to the conclusion it wasn't true, and trying to simultaneously believe two diametrically opposing things became too much to handle. If I could undo all of this, I would. It happened on accident. Please don't blame me. I can't begin to emphasize how hard it was for me to even just think the thoughts, "Maybe I don't believe anymore."

Losing one's faith can be equivalent to getting a divorce or dealing with the death of a loved one—it means experiencing massive amounts of mental and emotional anguish beyond anything I've ever experienced. I'm going to be hurt and angry, and sometimes I might lash out—and I'm sorry. Sometimes I may come across as angry and belligerent, but really it's just because I'm hurting so much and scared—terrified at times. The pain and confusion I have dealt with—and am dealing with—can be almost crippling. My world has been completely shaken. My entire worldview, every thought and action, was based on something I no longer believe in. I no longer have a foundation to stand on and I'm reeling as I try to redefine what it is I do believe in. I've cried and cried and had panic attacks in strings and more. Please be gentle with me. I know you're hurt and upset, but I am too. Please have compassion on me.

8. I don't want to destroy your faith. I know how much it means to you. It gives you hope, joy, peace, and purpose. I don't want to take that from you. That's part of what makes this so hard for me, actually—I want you to understand what I'm going through and I want us to be able to be in the same place so we don't have this divide anymore, but I also don't want to cause you any pain. But keeping things to myself is lonely, and then I feel like I'm sneaking around and keeping secrets from you.

9. Please be discreet in whom you share this with. I know this is hard for you, and if you need to talk to people to help you work through this, I understand. I feel that same need. But please be careful in your choice of whom you talk to. I'm terrified your parents and family will hate me and automatically assume I'm a bad person. In fact, if you talk to them, show them this article. Specifically point out item #3.

10. Please just love me. My greatest fear is of losing you. I feel crushing guilt every day that I've "ruined" things by losing my testimony, and I'm overwhelmed and devastated by the idea that I'll never be able to be good enough for you and be what you want now. That thought haunts me and is what hurts most of all. It plagues me. This journey has been lonely and difficult, and I just want someone to understand and accept me—and you're the one who matters most to me. Never underestimate the power that comes from being understood and accepted. You don't have to agree with me, but you *can* not judge me and acknowledge and accept me as I am.

This applies too to any of the other LDS friends and family I have. I still love you and want to be your friend. Just because we don't see each other at Church anymore doesn't mean we can't be friend anymore, either. Don't make a big show of saying how much you've missed me when we see each other at our kids' soccer practice. You can call me, text me, email me. Visit me, even—I've not moved. If you are my friend, please stay my friend. If not, don't act like we were best friends at church and tell me how wonderful it is to see me, and don't suddenly act like my friend just to try to get me to come back. It's fake, it's rude, and it's hurtful. If you're unsure how to interact with me now, see #3 about my being the same person I've always been. Think about all the reasons we became friends once the Church connected us, and let's still be friends. If you don't know how to talk to me without talking about the Church sometimes, see #6. And remember, I'm a little scared of being judged and uncertain how to talk to you, too.

But regardless of whether you're my spouse, a family member, or a friend, I still want to maintain or even strengthen those relationships. You are important to me, and I hope I am still important to you. We may believe differently now, but we still have a lot in common and a lot worth sharing.