

THINK BEFORE YOU INK

**VANDALIZING YOUR
TEMPLE ISN'T COOL.**

*"Ye shall not make any cuttings in
your flesh . . . nor print any marks
upon you" (Leviticus 19:28).*

FACTS ABOUT TATTOOS

- Tattoo machines' needles puncture the skin between 50 and 3,000 times per minute, leaving a drop of ink in the skin each time.
- Tattoo ink is placed about a millimeter deep—below the epidermis in the dermis, where the cells are more stable, so the ink will stay there permanently.
- Tattoo removal usually requires at least three to four treatments scheduled eight weeks apart.
- Having a tattoo removed can cost anywhere from many hundreds to thousands of dollars.
- Sometimes scars and discoloration remain even after tattoo removal.



Tattoos and Missionary Service

To find out about how tattoos can affect your service as a missionary, see "Tattoos and Your Mission," at lds.org/go/missionNE2.

Tattoos seem to be getting more and more popular, almost mainstream. Most noticeably, more and more celebrities seem to have them. Sometimes these people even talk about what the tattoos represent and why they got them. They make them seem so *cool*.

So, why do Church leaders counsel us against tattoos (see *For the Strength of Youth* [2011], 6–7)? Is it just a generational thing—older people wishing that younger people would be more like them?

No. That's not it. Not even close.

As with so many things in the Church, the answer is tied to a basic truth. Your body is a temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17), and as President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said, “A tattoo is graffiti on the temple of the body” (“Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 52).

Whether you run marathons or drive a wheelchair, your body is a gift from God, a blessing you have received because you “kept your first estate” as a spirit before coming to this world (see Abraham 3:22–28). This means that you “accepted [Heavenly Father’s] plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and . . . eternal life” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129).

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, “Because a physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, we should not be surprised that Lucifer seeks to frustrate our progression by tempting us to use our bodies improperly” (“Things as They Really Are,” *Ensign*, June 2010, 18).

Most people who have tattoos say they got them in order to express

themselves or show their individuality. They see them as a sign of independence. How ironic, then, that the moment the needle pierces the skin to apply the pigment, they’re stuck with it permanently, regardless of how they may feel about it later—unless they opt to have a costly and complicated procedure to remove it. The fact that tattoos are a *permanent* defacement of your skin (and not simply cool-looking “body art”) is one of the reasons prophets discourage them. “If you have a tattoo, you wear a constant reminder of a mistake you have made” (*True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* [2004], 167).

Knowing what your body represents—a blessing, a gift, a temple—helps you know how you should treat it. And just as with our temple buildings, showing respect for it is a whole lot cooler than vandalizing it. **NE**

WHAT IF IT'S JUST PART OF MY CULTURE?

Even though tattoos and piercings may be part of your cultural tradition, you will be blessed if you follow the counsel of Church leaders. For instance, here's an experience from a man from Samoa:

“When I was a young man, my dad talked to me about the tribal band tattoos that are common. . . . Dad said, ‘Don’t participate in any of that. You’re a child of God before you’re Samoan, before you’re a big, tough guy from the islands.’ That is something I have always remembered.

“. . . Sometimes we have to have the courage to turn from these [cultural] practices and to the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Morgan Sa Mataalii, “The Gospel Comes First,” *Ensign*, June 2011, 71).

WHAT IF I KNOW PEOPLE WITH TATTOOS?

If you know people with tattoos, don't judge them for it. That would just push them away. Be kind, and be their friend. If the subject of tattoos comes up, rather than condemning their decision to get a tattoo, talk about why you treat your body the way you do. Learning about who they are and what kind of gift their body is may help them feel the Spirit and come closer to the Savior.