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Are you a stereotypical Mormon? If you surveyed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by far most of them would probably say no to this question. Of course, they might all have different ideas of what a stereotypical Church member *is*, but still, most of them would be pretty sure that they're not it.

That's because people generally feel that they're unique, and they don't like the idea of being lumped into generic categories. Of course, there are beliefs and behaviors that all Latter-day Saints ought to share, but we're also not all exactly alike in every way, nor should we be.

Unfortunately, sometimes people get the impression that there's a fixed mold that all Church members are supposed to fit into, and they feel like they don't fit. They sometimes even feel like the deeper their commitment to the Church becomes, the more they have to give up their personality or individuality.

So, what do you do if you start to feel like the Church doesn't fit your personality or that your personality doesn't fit in the Church?

Who Are You, Really?

Dr. Richard German Ellsworth, a psychologist and Church member, says that "the

WHAT IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU DON'T FIT IN
WITH EVERYONE ELSE AT CHURCH?



teenage desire to individuate [to 'be your own person'] is part of a normal developmental process." So, it's normal to feel like you need to "do your own thing" and "be yourself."

Over time, you'll notice there are certain things you like and want. You get a feel for your tastes, desires, preferences, talents, and skills, and you may think, "This is who I really am." In this process, however, ask yourself, "Who am I, really? And where does knowledge about my true self come from?"

"In reality," says President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "[we] are elegant and eternal creatures of infinite value with potential

beyond imagination. Discovering who we really are is part of this great adventure called life."¹

The Holy Spirit, which "speaketh of things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13), whispers these truths to you, teaching you that there's a lot more to you than what you're thinking, feeling, and wanting at the moment. In fact, there's far more to you than the sum total of everything you've experienced in this life.

You are the one and only you, a one-of-a-kind child of heavenly parents. Thus, your uniqueness has deep roots in the eternities. You existed as a spirit before you were born here on earth, and you chose even then to



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A fixed mind-set

A growth mind-set

IS YOUR MIND-SET TOO SET?

Believing that you can and should change is a much healthier mind-set than believing “that’s just the way I am.” Latter-day Saint psychologist Dr. Lynn D. Johnson says research shows that people with a “fixed” mind-set (“that’s just the way I am”) experience more negative emotions and outcomes than people with a “growth” mind-set (“I can become better”).

“A fixed mind-set focuses a person on innate talents,” for example, says Dr. Johnson. “A growth mind-set focuses a person on practice and hard work,” which bring greater success in the long run.

Changing the fixed mind-set, however, is definitely possible, says Dr. Johnson. “When people become aware of the two mind-sets, they can choose to switch and thus gain some tenacity and grit.” And this increased resilience is a key to a healthier, happier life.

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follow Heavenly Father’s plan and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior (see Abraham 3:22–28). So the journey to discover your “true self” can actually lead you closer to Heavenly Father. But, like so many good things, the quest for self-discovery can also be twisted into something that leads you away from Him and from the Church of Jesus Christ.

Does “the Church” Clash with “Your Personality”?

Part of being unique, of course, is being different. If you dwell on your differences from others, though, you may start to feel

like you don’t belong, and that’s never a very good feeling.

To those who feel they don’t fit in with others in the Church, President Uchtdorf has said, “If you could see into our hearts, you would probably find that you fit in better than you suppose. . . . Your background or upbringing might seem different from what you perceive in many Latter-day Saints, but that could be a blessing. . . . We need your unique talents and perspectives. The diversity of persons and peoples all around the globe is a strength of this Church.”²

Whether you have the same tastes and opinions as the other Church members you know says nothing about whether you belong in the Church. The Church is filled with all kinds of different people all over the world, and you’re one of them.

Though we may not all agree about our favorite authors and TV shows, about art, fashion, etiquette, politics, and a host of other things, Church members have all chosen to unite through covenants to become disciples of Jesus Christ. We’ve dedicated ourselves to His work, each of us contributing in a unique way. It’s not about being assimilated by the Church and having your individuality dissolved.

“We do not lose our identity in becoming members of this church,” said President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency (1920–2007). “We become heirs to the kingdom of God, having joined the body of Christ and spiritually set aside some of our personal differences to unite in a greater spiritual cause.”³



The Church's mission is to help people come unto Jesus Christ and receive salvation and exaltation. It does this by administering the teachings and ordinances of the gospel, which is "the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become."⁴

Is This "Just the Way You Are"?

This life is about learning and growing and changing—it's about *becoming* the self you came here to become, and the Church is there to help. We're supposed to acknowledge our weakness and be made strong through the grace of Jesus Christ (see Ether 12:27). Even repenting of sin isn't just about regaining lost innocence—it's about being transformed into a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17), something we've never been before.

So, to think of your personality, preferences, or opinions as something set or non-negotiable is to build potential roadblocks to your progress. You should never say, "That's just the way I am."⁵

But do you lose your individuality if you choose to alter your behavior and attitudes according to the standards taught in the Church?

Not really.

Now, if you mimic other people in the Church just to "fit the mold," that's not quite right. That kind of sameness for the sake of sameness "would contradict the genius of God" as well as "the intent and purpose of the Church," as President Uchdorf has said.⁶ Also, it's boring.

But if you choose to change because you feel it will help you be better or be more obedient or draw closer to the Spirit (and not simply because it matches what others are doing), then you're doing the right thing. And, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum

of the Twelve Apostles (1926–2004) said, "There is more individuality in those who are more holy."⁷ The Church needs you to be you—the best you.

Become Yourself

A lot of voices out there would tell you that the "real you" is lying dormant within you, waiting to be let out but always being boxed in by "the Church." Basically, they're trying to sell you a vision of yourself as a pre-packaged "natural man [or woman]" (Mosiah 3:19) defined by appetites, desires, selfishness, and pride and in no need (or perhaps even with no possibility) of change.

What the rest of the world doesn't know is that the "real you" is a fascinating mixture of past, present, and future: a past self, now forgotten, that existed in the eternities and was spiritually born of God; a present self that's a work in progress with unimaginable potential; and a future self that will be transformed, glorified, and perfected through trials, repentance, resurrection, and divine grace.

Your unique self is truly amazing. Your personality is something for all to appreciate. And by helping you to "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18; see also Matthew 22:39), the gospel of Jesus Christ—as well as the Church that administers it—helps you become the self that Heavenly Father knows you can become and wants you to become.

So, don't worry about whether you're a stereotypical Mormon. Be yourself. But do more than that. Become yourself. **NE**



NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Reflection in the Water," (Church Educational System fireside for young adults, Nov. 1, 2009); [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts).
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 23.
3. James E. Faust, "Heirs to the Kingdom of God," *Ensign*, May 1995, 62.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 33.
5. See Donald L. Hallstrom, "What Manner of Men?" *Ensign*, May 2014, 53–54; see also Jeffrey R. Holland, "For Times of Trouble," *New Era*, Oct. 1980, 11.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Four Titles," *Ensign*, May 2013, 59.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, "Repentance," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 30.

Different Personalities

If you want to see just a few of the different kinds of people and personalities there are in the Church, go to [mormon.org/people](https://www.mormon.org/people) and watch some of the videos.