

# Gaslighting Examples

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\*Note: When I use the words "church" or "church leaders", I'm referring to the messages that come from the institutional LDS church through its leaders.

**Gaslighting rhetoric** is what's stated or implied that leads people to *distrust themselves* and can lead people to subsequently turn to the institution (or leader) that's creating the rhetoric. A gaslighting institution proclaims to be (or acts as if it is) trustworthy *even* as it sends out messages that create fear or an altered reality.

**I've learned to see church gaslighting as connected to the phrase "as if"**

In other words, the church acts as if something is one way when reality (or what the church has taught as reality) is something else.

I've underlined the phrase as if in a variety of places throughout the document to draw attention to gaslighting.

From the Gospel Topics Essays:

Some of these examples are from [Mormons, you aren't going crazy — it's called gaslighting](#).

1. **The name *Gospel Topics Essays* makes it seem as if these essays are about routine subjects like prayer or faith.** This is a misdirection. This is gaslighting. These essays present information *never before seen* in official church curriculum and facts only *previously available in the anti-Mormon literature* that believing Mormons were warned not to read/believe. For many active Latter-day Saints, these essays present an alternate version of reality.
2. **Regarding this essay: [Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham](#).** *The church has changed its narrative about the origin of canonized scripture without official announcement to its members, without admitting error, and without correcting its curriculum.* [[See this IG post](#).] Most members of the Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints grew up with a specific story about the origin of the Book of Abraham: ① In 1835, Joseph Smith came to possess papyri that had been buried with a mummy. ② Joseph said the characters on papyri contained ancient scripture penned by the hand of the prophet Abraham. ③ Joseph translated the characters into English. In 2014, however, the church published an essay (entitled "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham") which contradicts the story they've always told. The essay makes it clear LDS and non-LDS scholars have examined the papyri and concluded ① the characters on the papyri do not match Joseph's translation of the book of Abraham. ② the papyri date to a time centuries after Abraham lived. ③ what's on the papyri is a common funerary text and has nothing to do with Abraham at all. In other words, Abraham never wrote on the papyri and Joseph was NOT translating the characters he insisted he was "translating." [In summary, "the church has long taught that the Book of Abraham is the product of Joseph's translation of ancient Egyptian papyri. The new narrative concedes that the Book of Abraham is not the product of Joseph's translation of Egyptian characters. Even more confusing is the implication that this doesn't matter, that we should believe in the *Book of Abraham* as if it were literally translated." This is gaslighting.]

3. **Regarding this essay: [Book of Mormon Translation](#). The church has changed its narrative about the gold plates and the tools of translation.** In the narrative you had consistently been taught, gold plates and the Urim and Thummim were essential to Joseph's ability to bring forth the Book of Mormon. In the new narrative, Joseph not only doesn't need to look at the plates, but he can also disregard the sacred tools the Lord gave him and turn an ordinary object into a "translation" tool. The implication is that it doesn't matter if the sacred is swapped with the commonplace. The church is acting as if it doesn't matter that the plates don't matter! This is gaslighting. [Also, to say that translation doesn't mean translation is gaslighting. [See this post.](#)]
4. **Regarding this essay: [First Vision Accounts](#).** The gospel topic essay says that the versions of the first vision tell a "consistent" story. BUT The 1832 and 1838 accounts differ in the details the LDS church has long said MATTER the most: ① why Joseph went to the grove to pray ② who appeared to answer the prayer ③ the scope of the impact of the prayer. [They also omit the fact that Joseph Fielding Smith was hiding the 1832 account in a safe. Clearly HE didn't think the versions of the story were consistent.] For the church to say the versions are consistent when the 1832 account (in JS's writing) is so inconsistent that you wonder if it's the same story—that's gaslighting. [See [this post.](#)]
5. **The gospel topic essay, [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#), says the following:** "Although the Lord commanded the adoption—and later the cessation—of plural marriage in the latter days, He did not give exact instructions

on how to obey the commandment." **The church is suggesting that if there are problems or inconsistencies in the way Joseph practiced polygamy, it's the Lord's fault for not being more clear.** The church is making it seem as if an all powerful heavenly deity isn't all powerful in order to protect the image of the founder of the church. The "Lord" is not the problem; to blame "the Lord" for Joseph's lies and manipulative methods of practicing polygamy is gaslighting. Furthermore, D&C 132 was supposed to be instructions AND Joseph didn't follow them. He married non-virgins, mother-daughter pairs, and did not get his first wife's consent. This isn't mentioned in the Gospel Topic essay. The omission that Joseph didn't follow the "instructions" he was supposedly given is gaslighting. Additionally, D&C 132 threatens to "destroy" Emma if she doesn't submit to this "law". For the gospel topic essay to not point out that God seems to care a lot that Emma does things exactly, but doesn't seem to care when Joseph goes off track—this is gaslighting, too. What the LDS church doesn't want attention brought to is Joseph's deception and manipulative/coercive tactics. How he practiced polygamy is much more important than the polygamy itself. Here's a few details:

- a. Joseph's first known relationship outside of his marriage with Emma was transacted with the 16-year-old housemaid, Fanny Alger, and took place before the Priesthood sealing keys were restored.
  - b. For a short time in 1843, Emma consented to let Joseph marry other women on the condition she could pick the women; when she chose the Partridge sisters (who already had been sealed to Joseph without Emma's knowledge), Joseph arranged to be sealed again in front of Emma rather than tell her the truth.
  - c. When Joseph requested 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball's hand in marriage, he promised the marriage would "ensure [her] eternal salvation & exaltation and that of [her] father's household & all of [her] kindred." Joseph gave Helen 24 hours to decide if she would offer herself in exchange for her family's salvation. Helen was the youngest but not the only teenage girl Joseph pressured to quickly answer his proposal.
  - d. Lucy Walker. Mormon Discussion #288 [Lucy Walker and Spiritual Experiences](#) [This is one of the most important episodes ever!]
  - e. "Happiness is the object and design of our existence" is often quoted without the context that this sentence is being used as part of a coercive strategy to manipulate 19 yr old Nancy Rigdon into marrying Joseph.
6. **The gospel topic essay, [Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#) also admits that Joseph had 30-40 wives and practiced polyandry BUT omits the fact that this has been omitted for decades in all Sunday School and Relief**

**Society/Priesthood curriculum.** This is gaslighting. Here's more examples of significant omission within church curriculum.

- a. For example, in the "Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith" (a manual produced by the church around 2007, not long ago) Emma was the only wife mentioned. Eliza R. Snow is referenced (dozens of times) in that same manual, but not once does it say that Eliza is married to Joseph. This is the church that teaches that someone's birth, marriages, and death information are extremely important biographical facts. [This is what's needed for genealogy.] *To include "beloved" Emma and exclude the more than 30 other women sealed to Joseph, in the significant biographical details of Joseph Smith is gaslighting. The church is acting as if these marriages don't matter.*
- b. The fact that Emma is the first and only legal wife of Joseph means she's listed first when Joseph's wives are acknowledged, BUT the sealing date of her and J. isn't listed ever. This leaves the impression she was the first to be sealed to him when the reality is she was around the 23rd woman sealed to him. No matter what Joseph said, Joseph didn't act as if beloved Emma was the priority that all the church lessons seem to imply.
- c. Dr. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, in an article called "The "Leading Sisters": A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth Century Mormon Society" says this about the women who attended the first Relief Society meeting: "Of the twenty women at the meeting, one was first wife to Joseph Smith, one gave him her daughter as a plural wife, two were offered the chance to become his wives but declined, and five more, thus invited, accepted." [see photos in this [IG post](#).] Every March women celebrate the birthday of relief society and this first meeting. [Here's an article](#) about the 180th RS birthday celebration. It says "the 20 women who gathered upstairs in the Red Brick Store had two missions — to relieve suffering and to save souls." BUT this article omits how these women were connected to each other via proposals by Joseph. *To act as if the beginnings of RS aren't connected to Joseph's polygamy is gaslighting.*

What I believe are some of the most egregious examples of gaslighting with huge present day negative impacts:

1. **Children are told they are being given a "choice" to be baptized as if they haven't been groomed for nearly 8 years to believe that when they turn 8, they are accountable (whether they are baptized or not!)** [See [this post](#).] Born in the covenant really means born in obligation to be taught the gospel. To imply kids have a choice—to act as if an 8 year old is capable of making an eternal covenant— is gaslighting. Explanation: When you are born in the LDS church, you are born into a world where adults tell you that you are "special" because you "know" things that most people in the world don't know. But what makes you "special" in Mormonism also makes you "accountable". When you turn 8, the age of accountability, you're told that you can "choose" to be baptized. (Before they even become teenagers, boys are also given the added accountability of "priesthood.") 🖐️ Mormonism teaches youth that once you are taught a gospel principle, you are accountable to live that principle. 💥 But Mormon kids don't have a choice in whether or not they are taught! This is how children "born in the covenant" are born in a system of obligation. Children cannot say, "Don't teach me this information that you are simultaneously telling me makes me accountable to God! That's scary and I'm not ready for that!" Many kids just take in the lessons and feel the pressure because they don't see a way out. Week after week and year after year.
2. **That the church teaches people that their eternal family relationships are dependent on staying in the church is gaslighting.** While the church uses the words "families can be together forever" what they are really teaching is that families can be eternally separated if you don't join/stay in the church. That the church acts as if a temple marriage is the only lasting marriage is a manipulative teaching that DIVIDES families IN THIS LIFE and terrifies many Latter-day Saint children (and scares adults, too!) It's unconscionable for the church to use family relationships as a fear tactic to keep people in the church but there's no question that this is what's happening.
  - a. That the church had—FOR DECADES— a wait-a-year policy if you had a civil wedding and then suddenly [changed it in May 2019](#) without apologizing for immense emotional harm was gaslighting. [Also, to have had a separate policy in the US than it did in other countries (in which a temple wedding couldn't also be a legal wedding) was also gaslighting. It wasn't that the church couldn't have allowed people to get married civilly and then get sealed afterwards (even on the same day), they just wouldn't allow this even though they knew it was preventing people from being present at the ceremony.] Then in 2019 the church made the announcement acting as if this change shows that the church is good b/c it cares about families. ([See letter](#).) "We anticipate that this change will provide more opportunities for families to come together in love and unity

during the special time of marriage and sealing of a man and a woman." [Personal story: As a young adult, I was emotionally devastated by the earlier policy. I joined the church when I was 19 (in 1989) and I was an only child. My parents only had ONE shot to see a child, their daughter, get married and we were close. My husband's family was super orthodox, especially his mom, and I knew he would have to have a temple wedding. We got married in the temple in 1992. Shortly before the wedding my mom came to me and said, "If your church is *for* family, why are they separating us on the most important day of your life?" What could I say to that? There's more to this story, but I will say that I couldn't get out of bed on many Sundays over the next two years. I felt I had done something wrong, even though I married the man I wanted to marry. I couldn't reconcile being forced to choose between getting married to the man I loved and having my parents attend my wedding.]

- b. This article, [How Fears About "Forever Family" Creates Trauma for LDS Kids](#) also shows more examples of the neg impact of this teaching. Here's the truth:
  - ◆ Children shouldn't lie awake in their bed at night worrying about who will "make it" to the celestial kingdom and who won't.
  - ◆ Children shouldn't have to worry that they might be eternally separated from an inactive or non-believing parent.
  - ◆ Children shouldn't have to worry about being "worthy" enough to feel accepted OR be in a position where they are trying to overcompensate for the "sins" of others by being extra faithful.
  - ★ Children have the right to feel safe and secure in their family relationships. Period.
3. **The church story about emotions is gaslighting.** [See [this post](#) and [this post](#).] The teaching that negative (uncomfortable emotions) are a sign that you're on the wrong track or doing something wrong or that something isn't true or that you're deceived by Satan is a false story that leads people to be *afraid of their own feelings* and afraid to leave the church. The story the church tells about emotions is not reality; it's intense gaslighting. (Our emotions come from the way we've learned to interpret the world, our thoughts, and beliefs. Feelings are not from external evil beings trying to harm us and are not a sign of truth.)
4. **That idea that Mormons make "covenants" in the temple is gaslighting.** [It took me decades to realize that "bow your head and say yes" isn't a question.] As a young adult, I was told that "covenants" were sacred *agreements*. This meant that God promised certain blessings to those who were willing to make certain commitments. No one told me what the commitments were. I was told they would be explained in the temple and then I'd have a chance to decide whether I *want* to agree. To agree to something, you need to be able to give consent. That isn't what occurred. Here's what happened instead: 1 I was given a chance to leave.

This opportunity came BEFORE the ceremony even started!!! I was told (by a male voice on intercom) that if I stayed, I would be taking on these "obligations" by my own free will and choice. Then the intercom voice said "God will not be mocked." 😬 This felt threatening, which was confusing because I'd been told the temple was peaceful. ② A movie began that depicted events in the Garden of Eden with actors that played the parts of Adam, Eve, and Satan. At one point Satan gestures towards the temple audience and says "IF THEY DO NOT WALK UP TO EVERY COVENANT THEY MAKE AT THESE ALTARS...THIS DAY THEY WILL BE IN MY POWER." 😬 This moment, for me, was shockingly scary., but I didn't tell anybody that. ③ Then came the rituals of putting on clothes, changing the positions of clothes, and learning covenant names and hand signals. After I heard each covenant (for the first time!) I was commanded to agree. The intercom voice said, "Each of you bow your head and say 'yes.'" 🖐️ It's not just that I didn't have any time to think about the covenant agreements. *I was never ASKED if I would agree to anything at all.* I had been turned into an actor who was playing a role and I mouthed my lines as directed. Let me just summarize what happens in the temple: 1. no one tells you ahead of time what will happen 2. you're given a chance to back out before the ceremony starts. 3. You're threatened by Satan. 4. You're told what to do and directed to say 'yes'. Of course, this happens in a group of people (often who you know and love) that all follow along and act like this is normal! It's not normal and this isn't an "agreement." ★ THERE IS NO COVENANT WITHOUT CONSENT. [See [this post](#).]

5. **That men stand at a pulpit to tell women they are valued is gaslighting.** These words don't match the reality that women are not treated as if their voices and opinions are valuable. Men supervise all the decisions that run the LDS church. 🖐️ A woman can give a talk AS LONG AS a man invites her to speak. 🖐️ A women can teach AS LONG AS a man "calls" her to be a teacher. 🖐️ A woman can have a leadership position AS LONG AS she is set apart by a man who presides over her. In LDS talks and lesson manuals, the words of men are continually quoted and referenced. ★ What a woman says isn't ever used to *prove a doctrinal point* or to prove that an action taken (by a member of the church) is legitimate. Since the church system claims that women's words cannot have "authority," members of the church (including women) learn to perceive women's voices as less significant. It doesn't matter how many times a man stands at the pulpit and insists that LDS women are valued. 😬 It's a MAN at the pulpit. That says it all.
6. **The teaching that we have a Heavenly Mother, but she doesn't speak and we can't speak to her is gaslighting.** [More here](#). You cannot be an all-powerful all-loving deity and have no powers and no relationship with your children. When

the church acts as if we should be ok with knowing nothing of the nature of Heavenly Mother, but that it's imperative that we understand the nature of Heavenly Father—that's gaslighting. If gender is eternal, women won't "be like" Heavenly Father.

7. **That love is conditional is gaslighting.** In 2003, Russell Nelson explained that God doesn't love us unconditionally. "[Divine love](#)," he said, is conditional as if "conditional" can go with love. Nelson is redefining love *as perfect obedience* and that's gaslighting. Love is not an exchange. If love is earned, it isn't love. The idea that love is conditional is especially harmful with regard to LGBT kids....the message that "we love you" while we simultaneously create policies that deny your existence and your right to even *hope* to marry or even hold hands.
8. **The assumption that the LDS church is the most trustworthy source of information about the church or the "gospel" is gaslighting.** [Along with this is Ballard's statement that the church is as "transparent" as they know how to be about its history.] Here's a quote from the church website where the church makes it seem as if outside sources should be questioned and makes it seem as if church sources (because they promote faith in the church) are trustworthy: "An essential skill for gospel learning is to be able to identify reliable and authoritative sources and to assess the motives of those who prepared the sources. We would be unwise to consider all sources to be equally reliable and trustworthy, particularly those which are on the internet. We should question the motives and intent as well as the knowledge of those who are encouraging doubt. We should also consider the tone of their statements and the outcome they hope to achieve. Is it to build faith or weaken it? Remember, "by their fruits ye shall know them." Of course the church never suggests you should question the church as a source.
  - a. That the church starts with the assumption that having faith in the "gospel" (which really means LDS church) is what's ideal/safe is gaslighting. The church is constantly creating fear of the outside world. Instead of giving critical thinking tools to discover truth, it implies that anything that promotes faith in the church is good and anything that doesn't is "dangerous" .
  - b. That the fruits of the church are "good" and implying that the church is "good" (while omitting info all all the cover-up of sex abuse and the harmful impacts of racism and homophobia and sexism....) is gaslighting.
  - c. The way the church uses the term "anti-Mormon" is manipulative. [See [this post](#).]
9. **Gaslighting connected to the finances of the church.**

- a. Acting as if it's only a non-profit org when it's really a corporate conglomerate. Acting as if there's good reason to keep all of its financial info hidden.
  - b. The tithing slips have categories as if marking a category matters. At some point, the church slipped in language (in small print) on tithing slips that lets you know it doesn't matter which category you mark, the church will use the money any way it wants. The category markers stayed the same, giving the image nothing had changed. It still looks as if you have the ability to choose where your money goes even though you don't.
  - c. For years the church taught that leaders aren't salaried, making it seem as if they didn't get a 3 figure stipend and expenses paid and cars provided and tuition for kids waived and book deals, etc.
10. **Current church leaders speaking out against racism —acting as if the church and previous leaders weren't outrageously racist.** [See [this post](#) and [this post](#).]

### **A few other examples**

- The omitting of the fact that Joseph Smith, in the first RS meeting, said that women could give blessings to heal. “Respecting the female laying on hands,” the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes record, Joseph said that “it is no sin for any body to do it that has faith,” and admonished, “if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let every thing roll on.” The church has long acted as if it's wrong for women to give blessings and as if Joseph didn't teach the opposite.
- Leaders act as if polygamy a thing of the past even as they have more than one eternal wife.
- Leaders of the LDS Church change the written account of some conference talks without noting that "edits" have occurred.  
<https://www.sltrib.com/religion/.../17/llds-conference-sermon/...>
- Leaders refer to the "priesthood ban" acting as if this was the most significant problem even though —before 1978— the church prohibited all black women and men from participating in the ordinances of exaltation.
- JR Holland to BYU faculty acting as if Holland needs protecting more than LGBT students.

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-jeffrey-r-holland-2021-byu-university-conference>

- In the 70's, the church says to members that porn is evil, acting as if it isn't allowing conversion therapy (which is showing porn to BYU students.)
- That the red-robed painting of Jesus (by Del Parson) presenting Jesus as if he was white.
- The church defines doctrine as "a fundamental, unchanging truth of the gospel" acting as if LDS doctrine doesn't change.
- The church teaches the prophet cannot lead the church astray, acting as if God would remove him if he tried. BUT omitting the fact that Joseph Smith and other so-called prophets have prophecies that have been proven false.
- The fact that people given a "new name" aren't informed that everyone that goes through the temple that day (including their escort) is getting the same new name is deceptive. Not informing people that their new name isn't special from God makes it seem as if their new name is special.
- That under Russell Nelson, the correct name of the church is "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" and the word "Mormon" is a win for Satan. This is an alternate reality (especially after the *I'm a Mormon* campaign). It's gaslighting.

### **One way to think of gaslighting.**

Let's say that you grew up in a home where the kitchen is painted blue. You go away from college and come back home to discover the walls are orange. When you say to your family, "I love the way the kitchen looks with new orange walls" they look at you and say, "What do you mean? The walls have always been orange."

In such a moment, you are forced to decide not only whether you can trust your memory, but also what you'd perceived was a shared reality.

Do you doubt yourself? Do you doubt your family? What happens when lots of your relatives don't seem to remember the blue walls you grew up with? What happens when everyone you know seems to indicate that the problem must be with you?

It's extraordinarily difficult to trust our perceptions when the people that we love and trust seem anchored to a different reality.

But if those we love HAVE TO believe that the walls have always been orange in order to see themselves as good people (because they are being told that good people are those who know that orange walls have always been present), then those we love might actually convince themselves that their walls must have always been orange.

### **Some types of gaslighting...**

- Changing things and acting as if the change means that the church is good without acknowledging that what was happening prior was significantly harmful.
- Omitting details from church history that the church itself has long implied are THE most significant details
- Leadership giving the burden to those without authority, acting as if the leaders are the ones who need help and to be rescued. (Like Holland's talk to BYU faculty)
- Leadership labeling the problems of the church in a way that's bad (which seems like they are transparent), but the label minimizes the "bad" because reality is much worse! For example, if the church admits there was a "priesthood ban" they are deflecting from the reality of an exaltation ban (which is what was really happening.) They act as if the label they give to the problem is as bad as it is.