



New Temple Recommend Questions

by Jason L | Jun 15, 2016 | Featured, Interviews, Temple, Worthiness | 10 comments



Before conducting my first baptismal interview on my mission, I sought the advice of my mission president. I knew what the right answers to the questions were but felt there must be something more to the interview – something ineffable that I was nonetheless supposed to detect in determining worthiness. The substance of his advice was this:

An interview is an opportunity for the new convert to share testimony. You might prepare them by asking about their conversion before beginning the interview. Then, during the questions, listen for the Spirit that will accompany the bearing of testimony.

His advice was excellent and transformed a bureaucratic experience into one of my favorite mission responsibilities.

The same perspective applied well to other interviews. I vividly remember my first temple recommend renewal interview – conducted with that same mission president – when I felt how a simple ‘yes’ can come loaded with testimony, when it is given in response to a question like “Do you have a testimony of the Atonement of Christ and of His role as Savior and Redeemer?” When I later served in a bishopric, I was similarly delighted to hear the power behind the ‘yes’ when interviewing ward members.

Though interviews have become, for me, a wonderful opportunity to declare testimony and commitment and to hear the same from others, that’s far from the universal experience. Often, for reasons completely unrelated to sinfulness, these can be harrowing experiences for members of the Church. Mostly, I suspect, this has to do with uncertain power dynamics and Church leaders who are too willing to interject their own additional requirements into the process.

As far as I know, the temple recommend questions have not come to us by way of revelation. Instead (as with many of the regulations of Judaism), they are a mortal attempt to protect something we hold to be sacred. So I think it is perfectly reasonable to reconsider how they might best reflect our understanding of the sacred and of the Savior’s universal invitation to come unto Him.

In this spirit and with my mission president’s advice echoing in my mind, here are my suggestions for the questions as I wish they were asked. I would love this to be the beginning of a wider conversation.

- Keep the opening questions about faith/testimony. As explained above, these to me are the heart of the process. (Though, couldn’t we add Heavenly Mother alongside Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?)
- Instead of asking about particular behaviors (chastity, health code, tithing, honesty), could we ask about repentance and forgiveness? Something like “Do you actively and regularly seek repentance and forgiveness?” seems to me much more important than weighing particular sins. The questions about specific standards are so open to interpretation anyway. I know plenty of people who said “yes” to keeping the Word of Wisdom but who don’t eat meat sparingly while others are kept from the temple for an occasional cup of coffee. Don’t even get me started on “honest in your dealings with your fellowmen” – even the dishonest will say yes and what’s with the gendered language?

- The wording of “Have there been any sins or misdeeds in your life that should have been resolved with priesthood authorities but have not been?” is a poor invitation to full repentance. Instead, it can come off as accusatory and reinforces the awkward power dynamic of too many interviews. How about this instead, following right after the general repentance question: “As part of the repentance process, is there anything you feel the need to confess or share at this time?”
- Speaking of interpretation, how many ways can we parse “Do you support, affiliate with, or agree with any group or individual whose teachings or practices are contrary to or oppose those accepted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?” If what we’re really worried about is polygamy, we should just ask that. If we also mean “Do you march in gay pride parades?” then ask that. But right now I know bishops who suspect you should answer ‘yes’ if you belong to the Democratic Party and others who think a ‘yes’ answer is reserved for groups intentionally dedicated to tearing the Church down. How about this for a clearer alternative: “Do you seek to damage or tear down The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints individually or as part of an organized effort?”
- I assume that, in part, the questions about “conduct relating to members of your family” and financial support to family members are there to protect the Church from criticism that we aren’t watching out for abuse or are shielding our tithe-paying members from child support. Promoting appropriate behavior and responsibilities to family seem like worthy goals, so I have no problem with keeping these questions.
- Which brings us to the closing question: “Do you consider yourself worthy to enter the Lord’s house and participate in temple ordinances?” Ugh. If, like me, you have high self-esteem and a reasonable confidence about Church matters, this is an easy question to answer “yes” to, with a bright smile. If, like many others I’ve interviewed, you struggle with a sense of your individual worth or your worth within the Church, this question to lead to additional anxiety. And it’s difficulty may have NOTHING to do with sinfulness and everything to do with Church culture, gender, sexual orientation, time as a member, race, ethnicity, political views, etc. Rather than introducing further uncertainty, why not – on

the basis of the earlier questions – close the interview by assuring the interviewee of her/his worthiness. Celebrate rather than adding another layer of doubt.

What are your thoughts? What would you discard, add, keep, or change to the interview questions?

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