

How do you understand the relationship(s) between science and your religious or secular tradition? – Dr. Jamie L. Jensen, Ph.D. Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day saints

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Jamie L. Jensen:	00:00	<p>So I think first of all to address science and religion, science and religion are both beautiful and valid ways of approaching truth. If we hold it in our minds as answering two very separate sets of questions but ones that both get at truth. So for instance if you're talking about the origin of life on the planet, then sciences answering questions such as mechanisms, how did it happen? When did it happen? How long ago? Whereas religion is more interested in answering questions of why did it happen? Why are we here? Who might've been involved? I think if we respect the fact that these are two different ways of getting at the same truth, then they really don't have to be in conflict. I think a lot of times in the past, there've been different ways of approaching this... Bringing together of science and religion. (01:22) One of them is sort of detrimental, it's more of a deficit model where we insist that if you don't agree with the science or understand the science then you must be deficient in some way, you must be lacking in some way. Then there's others who sort of take a resolution approach where if I show them the evidence, then maybe they'll resolve to believe the science over the religion. I would advocate a better approach, a reconciliation approach where they both can be held together, that they're both getting at the same truth just from different perspectives. As far as the LDS church goes, the LDS church has never been against science. From the very beginning we have quotes from the founding prophet Joseph Smith, who says that science is a good thing that we're seeking for truth. We've always been interested in seeking truth but culturally there's been a divide in that... That I think results from just this... The fact that our religious leaders are people and they fallen on both sides of the arguments in their opinions. (02:30) Those opinions have been shared and church members fall on both sides, so culturally there has sort of arisen this division especially with evolution. But if you look at the actual doctrine of the church, we have no official statement towards evolution for or against, we are in essence neutral. And if you look in... There are several sources that LDS people can go to read what those are and one them is... Brigham young university has put together what we call the BYU evolution packet. It has... It's compiled the only official statements there are about evolution.</p>
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There's a 1909 statement that was issued that talks about... The main ideas are just that God created man in his image, however he did that we don't know, that Adam was the first child of God here on earth, what that means we don't know and that's really all it says. (03:30) This statement was reissued in 1925, that is also in the evolution packet, then there's a statement in 1910 that's in there that talks about how our religion is not hostile to real science, that which science can show we accept with joy. Then most recently in 2016 there was a statement out in the new era that basically reiterates that we do not have a position on evolution for or against including human evolution in the origin of humans. That really leaves us open to seek for truth wherever we might find it. So regarding human origins, I mean what I would say is that we don't know, there's no official declarations, no regulatory evidence of where humans came from and how that came to be scientific evidence, there's lots, right? So if you look at the scientific evidence it's strongly suggestive that humans have somehow evolved, now where Adam fits into that... (04:32) And Adam and Eve, we don't know and I'm not sure we will ever know but looking at the scientific evidence, I'd like to put out my personal opinion that, is it possible? I would say it's possible that a loving heavenly father in his quest to teach us how to be better people needed to create an earthly experience for us where we would be required to overcome some of these most base and natural tendencies such as selfishness, pride and competitiveness. Thinking as a scientist as I am, I think, gosh, you know the perfect way to create a body, to house our spirits, that would have all of those qualities, that would be selfish, that would be competitive, that would be prideful is through evolution, through natural selection, survival of the fittest. You need to compete and be selfish to survive so it's possible. (05:30)

I'm not saying this is doctrine because we don't know, but is it possible that God used evolution as a way to create the perfect earthly experience for his children? It's possible. In that way for me I can see the scientific evidence and not be threatened by it, that we really are trying to get at the same truth. If we can just hold fast to our faith, I mean I have faith in God, I know that God exists, I know that Jesus Christ was his son, I know that he lived an earthly life but beyond that how our bodies got here and how they were created, it really doesn't matter. But the scientific evidence is so beautiful and an easy to mesh with what we know from a spiritual sense. (06:12) So as far as challenges go, there are quite a few interesting challenges. One of them that I see, first and foremost is that as humans we are really uncomfortable with ambiguity. We're really uncomfortable with being unsure, we want to see a

problem, find a solution, make a decision and call it done. It's one or the other, I think even for our youth especially and in my religion especially we grew up being so sure of everything spiritual that when we're confronted with this potential conflict, it's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable because we want a solution. I think the challenge there is to be okay with ambiguity, to realize, to be humble enough, to realize that if there is a conflict where it seems like your religious beliefs and the scientific evidence is coming to heads that to be humble enough to realize that it's probably because we don't know everything on either side, there may be missing information on the spiritual side, there may be missing information on the scientific side and if we can just be patient, most likely answers will come. (07:34) I think that's one of the biggest challenges especially for the youth, is just to be... As scientists, we sort of get into that mode that everything is uncertain. The more I learn about science the more I realize we just don't know, there's so much uncertainty and I'm okay with that. We're searching for that truth. So developing that sense of uncertainty is a big challenge. I think another challenge is just the cultural challenge, we have a big cultural hurdle that we have to overcome. So being informed, going back and reading your religion, reading what's been said, reading about the official declarations, knowing what your religion stand actually is, is a big challenge and it's not because we don't want to, it's just because we haven't had the opportunity so that's a big challenge. I think one of the biggest challenges is that we're constantly being fed that this is a divide, that these things can't coincide and that's a product of our cultural history across the country. (08:30) Our country's history that there is just this false dichotomy between these two that we need to overcome and that's a big challenge. But I think the benefit of doing this and approaching this challenge is that if we can get over that false dichotomy and realize that they can go together, we have this beautiful opportunity to seek truth from a multiple different ways and angles. I think it will make us better citizens, I think that as we understand and accept that evolution likely occurred amongst our own species even then we make better decisions about our health. We make better decisions about the conservation of our planet. One of the things that always comes to mind with me for health is antibiotics, right? So if you don't accept that evolution ever occurs, then why wouldn't you just take antibiotics anytime you wanted. I mean if the microbes aren't going to evolve, what's the threat? (09:23) But if you understand that evolution occurs, these microbes evolve and we're much more judicious in our use of antibiotics. There're countless examples of how this applies to your life if you're

willing to accept it. We've got these amazing opportunities to be more informed, to make better decisions but we also have this amazing opportunity to bridge this gap, stop this divisive conversation and to be able to help each other because both of us have great... Both sides have great things to bring to the table if we just allow that to happen without the division.

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