

WHERE TO TURN AND HOW TO HELP

UNDERSTANDING SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

LDS EDITION



Religious Doctrine — Science — Personal Witnesses

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FOUNDATION FOR ATTRACTION RESEARCH

**UNDERSTANDING
SAME-SEX
ATTRACTION**

Where to Turn and How to Help

Religious Doctrine—Science—Personal Witnesses

A new series from the Foundation for Attraction Research

What is the truth about same-gender attraction? Can people really change? Written by scholars, therapists, church leaders, and people who have personally dealt with same-gender attractions, *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* brings together three pillars of wisdom—religious doctrine, science, and personal experience to dispel many of the false notions about this important issue. God loves all of His children, and He does help the willing make meaningful changes in their lives. Regardless of your current perspective, this book will change the way you think about same-gender attraction.

“Understanding Same-Sex Attraction is a treasure chest filled with ‘gems of wisdom, pure and bright.’* Whether used as an introduction to the subject, a reference book for religious leaders, a study guide for someone in counseling, or a resource for the friends and family members of those who struggle, this book has something enlightening and helpful to offer everyone. This book will become a necessary addition to the libraries of individuals, families, Church leaders, mental health providers, and institutions of learning.” (*“*Oh Holy Words of Truth and Love*,” *LDS Hymns*, 1985 p.271)

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CONTENTS

SECTION I: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Part I. Prologue: People Like Me Do Exist	<i>Todd Daniels</i>	1
Part II. Misconceptions and Critical Concepts	<i>The Editors</i>	6
Part III. “Shadows on the Wall”: Reassessing What We Think We Know about Same-Sex Attraction	<i>M. Gawain Wells, PhD</i>	13

SECTION II: GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES:

“SEEK LEARNING, EVEN BY STUDY AND ALSO BY FAITH”

1. Physical Bodies and Earthly Experiences: “I Did Not Choose This Challenge, So Why Me?”	<i>Elder James O. Mason</i>	23
2. Created in the Image of God: The Powers Inherent in Our Divine Nature and Destiny	<i>John P. Livingstone EdD & Doris R. Dant, MS, MA</i>	45
3. No Struggle for Which the Atonement Is Not Sufficient: Statements from the General Authorities	<i>Compiled by Doris R. Dant, MS, MA</i>	63
4. The Sustaining Power of Faith in the Mortal Trial of Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Marleen S. Williams, PhD</i>	86
5. Showing God’s Love to Those with Same-Sex Attraction		
Part I	<i>Dennis V. Dahle, JD</i>	103
Part II	<i>Jason Park</i>	111
6. Finding Help and Healing from Both Revealed and Scientific Truths about Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Dennis V. Dahle, JD</i>	121
7. Selected Quotations from LDS General Authorities and Church Publications about Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Compiled by Richard W. Potts, PhD</i>	138

SECTION III: SCIENTIFIC, CLINICAL, AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES:

“SEEK YE OUT OF THE BEST BOOKS”

8. Homosexuality: What Science Can and Cannot Say	<i>A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH</i>	149
9. A Comparison of Counseling Women vs. Men Who Struggle to Diminish Same-Sex Attractions	<i>Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW</i>	173
10. Telling Others	<i>Doris R. Dant, MS, MA</i>	192
11. Professional Therapists: Finding, Choosing, and Changing	<i>S. Brent Scharman, PhD</i>	206
12. Understanding the Different Types of Therapy Used to Treat Unwanted Same-Sex Attractions	<i>Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW</i>	225
13. Practical Advice from a Therapist for Responding to Same-Sex Attractions	<i>Jeffrey W. Robinson, PhD</i>	249

14. Sexual Addiction and Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Todd Olson, LCSW</i>	279
15. The Question of Traditional Marriage, Dating, and Intimacy for Those Dealing with Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Dorothy Maryon, LPC & Daniel D. Gray, LCSW</i>	292
16. Helping Children and Adolescents Develop Healthy Sexual Identities	<i>Douglas A. Abbott, PhD</i>	302
17. Understanding and Helping Teenagers Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction	<i>David C. Pruden, MS</i>	323
18. What Is a Parent to Do?	<i>John P. Livingstone, EdD</i>	346
19. Risk Factors for Mental Illness and Physical Disease Associated with Homosexual Practices	<i>A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH</i>	360
20. Compassionately Standing Up for Traditional Marriage . . . and Why We Should Be Concerned about Same-Sex Marriage	<i>William C. Duncan, JD</i>	375

**SECTION IV: ADVICE FROM THOSE WITH EXPERIENCE:
“TEACH ONE ANOTHER WORDS OF WISDOM”**

<i>Note from the Editors about Stories of Personal Experiences</i>		387
21. Filled with Light: How I Found Help with Resolving Same-Sex Attraction through the Atonement of Jesus Christ	<i>Erin Eldridge</i>	388
22. The Fruits of Faith: My Journey Out of Homosexuality	<i>Robert James</i>	398
23. He Healed My Whole Soul: True Change Does Not Start or End with Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Katie Merrill</i>	435
24. Shock, Grief, and Healing: Dealing with the Tragedy of a Spouse and Parent Who Leaves Home to Pursue a Homosexual Lifestyle	<i>Rebecca Smith</i>	451
25. “Thou Shalt Love Thy Wife”: The Story of a Successful Marriage	<i>Todd Daniels</i>	460
Epilogue: Return to Reason—Drawing Upon the Three Pillars of Wisdom to Address Same-Sex Attraction	<i>Dennis V. Dahle, JD</i>	472
Appendix A: Where to Find Additional Help: Resources for Individuals and Families Dealing with Same-Sex Attraction		479
Appendix B: Introduction to Foundation for Attraction Research		485
Index		486

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We must, however, offer our special thanks to those who by their very lives offer living proof of the power that individuals have to determine the course of their lives, notwithstanding given circumstances and tendencies.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the hand of the Lord in our lives. We have felt His guidance in this endeavor as we have tried to reach out to those who have special challenges in their lives to offer hope and help.

The Editors

SECTION I

LAYING THE
GROUNDWORK

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK
PART I

Prologue

People Like Me Do Exist

*Todd Daniels**

People like me do exist. I spent most of my life struggling with homosexual feelings. I tried to find answers in gay relationships. Those were empty years for me, and I have left those things behind. This book is written not only for those who struggle, like me, but for families, friends, Church leaders, and others who want to better understand this issue. In a world where the proponents of gay rights and many in the professional therapy community send out the narrow, hopeless message that change is not possible and that people like me do not exist—a message most of the popular media repeats—the authors of this book explain the true realities of same-sex attraction from the perspectives of religion, science, and the real-life stories of people like me.

It is a message of hope—not only hope in a future salvation if the trial of same-sex attraction is resisted in this life, but hope that for me and many I know, change is possible in this life too. The first step is to better understand the condition of same-sex attraction, which this book will help you to do. I encourage you to read all of the chapters that follow, as each perspective is important.

For those who struggle, I hope that in reading this you will begin to believe that there are others who have traveled the same road,

* Not the author's real name

that there are people who care and understand, that help is available, and that you have good options. Some people dealing with same-sex attraction are frustrated that we do not talk about it much in the Church. Some who struggle believe they hold a deep, dark secret; they feel terrible and unlovable. I remember in my youth thinking what an awful, unspeakable secret my feelings were. I was certain my Aaronic Priesthood quorum advisors would rather have been run over by a truck than to even have said the word *homosexual*. Others even today have similar experiences. I hope this book will begin to soften hearts and give individuals the vocabulary and courage to speak about their struggles where appropriate.

Of course, in the Church we should not treat sacred things like sexuality lightly, nor should we speak in explicit or irreverent ways. But there are appropriate settings in which we can speak and individuals with whom we can share. It would be wonderful if those struggling young men and women who read this book could feel, at the very least, that they can talk to their bishop, to their parents, and to others who might offer support. As they do so, perhaps we in the Church can do more to put our arms around people who struggle rather than not speak of their challenge and hope it goes away.

The adversary has been very clever when it comes to this issue. For example, because of the strident voices in the media and elsewhere, a fourteen-year-old boy who may be struggling with gender and attraction issues is told that he must immediately label himself. That label, if adopted, may remain for a lifetime, no matter how inaccurate it is. Satan has also convinced many that feelings of same-sex attraction do not represent a struggle; rather, he would have them believe that they represent an identity, a biologically predetermined, immutable condition not subject to the exercise of individual agency. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Human sexuality is complex. We do not consciously choose same-sex attractions, nor do we choose a variety of other struggles in life. Regardless of our challenges, however, we choose how we respond to those challenges. The information and experiences in

the pages that follow emphasize an eternal truth: our destiny is not predetermined. It is our choice.

There will be many who tell you that you should not try to change—in fact, they will tell you it is impossible. Such a message flies in the face of the Savior’s teachings. It is also contrary to the most recent scientific research and to the personal experiences of many, including me. We are on this earth to change—to submit our will to the will of the Father. Does that mean changes will be immediate? No. Does it mean changes will be total and complete in mortality? Not necessarily. What it means is that through the power of the Atonement, we can make all sorts of changes in our lives. Hopefully, those reading this book will recognize the changes they have made or need to make by accessing the indescribable power of the Atonement. There is no struggle that is beyond the loving intervention of the Savior.

For many—and so it was for me—good professional therapy can help to deal successfully with same-sex attractions. My therapist helped me see and pursue better choices. As a friend of mine said, “If you have a broken leg, you go to a doctor.” In my own experience, change came from both my faith and the help of my therapist. It is important to understand and work on both the spiritual and the physical-psychological aspects of same-sex attraction, since leaving one or the other out can make the problem worse. I have never known anyone with extensive or long-term same-sex attractions to achieve lasting change in those feelings without counseling from someone with expertise in this area. It is important to find a therapist who both shares your values and has expertise in treating people with same-sex attraction. Just like choosing medical doctors, sometimes you must keep searching until you find the right one.

As I think of that therapy and the way it helped me, I am reminded of a comment my wife made not long ago. She said to me, “You had a choice to make many years ago. Just think about the consequences of that choice and how dramatically different your life could be had you chosen otherwise.” How true! Because of my choice and the Savior’s love, I have been married to a wonderful

wife for fifteen years. We have two beautiful children. Had I made another choice, I would never have experienced the wonder of a family. Not everyone who struggles will have the same experience, but I am convinced that everyone can experience peace in their lives and the love of the Savior while living lives of moral purity.

Yes, people like me do exist: people who have and do experience same-sex attraction but have also found helpful ways to address those feelings. We are your children, siblings, neighbors, friends, co-workers, and fellow Church members. For the most part we are a quiet bunch; we do not march, protest, or publicize our private lives. It is sad to me that more people do not make the choice we have made, and sadder still that many people do not even know they have the choice to make.

If you struggle, know that God does not leave us to struggle alone. His love and his grace make progression, change, and healing possible. I know something of His love because I have felt it. As I compare my life before and now, I know what it means to feel incomplete and what it means to feel whole. Please take the messages in this book to heart and know that God loves you, no matter what your struggle and no matter what path you have taken thus far.

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:12–14.)

About the Author

Todd Daniels (not the author's real name) successfully addressed his challenge of same-sex attraction. He went on to marry and become the father to several children. An active member of The Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mr. Daniels has served in a variety of callings. His story presented here includes a letter from his devoted wife.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK
PART II

Misconceptions and Critical Concepts

The Editors

Few subjects are as difficult to understand or as controversial as same-sex attraction. Viewpoints about it often fall into polar extremes. That is, it is seen as either a gross perversion or it is seen as an acceptable alternative to heterosexual attraction. If you are like many people, you hold strong opinions about same-sex attraction but may not actually know very much about it. Trying to sort out what is true can be difficult. In this book the editors have sought to bring together correct information from three perspectives: gospel doctrine, scientific and clinical findings, and practical experience and advice from those who have struggled with or been affected by the issue. Underlying these perspectives are a few critical concepts. Once those concepts are fully understood, they can prevent us from falling prey to certain widespread misconceptions.

Critical Concepts

Both the scientific and theological realms contain many false but prevalent notions and misunderstandings about same-sex attraction. The following summary statements begin to address some of those notions and will give the reader an initial overview of critical basic concepts. These will provide a helpful framework within

Caveat—While we believe we have assembled sufficient materials to give the reader a comprehensive overview of the subject of same-sex attraction, we hope readers will understand the constraints under which the editors and authors have labored. We have attempted to include information that will appeal to the scholar, while at the same time we have sought to keep the manuscript readable for a general audience. Because we anticipate that this book will be read by a cross-section of age groups and experiences, we have left out some material that might have been useful to a clinician but would not be appropriate for younger readers. We also recognize that the field of scientific knowledge continues to expand and that any work of this nature will become dated over time.

which to place a deeper study of the issues. Because there is substantial danger in oversimplifying, a reading of these summary statements should not be substituted for reading the rest of the book.

Same-sex attraction is similar to other challenges we do not necessarily choose

The majority of people who experience same-sex attraction did not choose to have the challenge. Instead, except in some cases of abuse, the feelings arose without any conscious understanding of their origin. In this regard, same-sex attractions are not so different from other mortal challenges or attractions that we do not necessarily choose. However, we *do* choose how we respond to such challenges.

Same-sex attraction not acted upon is not a sin

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has written, “Same-gender attraction is not a sin, but acting on those feelings is—just as it would be with heterosexual feelings.”¹

Sexual attraction is a physiological impulse; our response to it can be either a virtue or a vice

Sexual attraction is a physiological impulse. However, it is manageable and can be mediated by agency. We can choose how we respond to such impulses either righteously or sinfully. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said, “The distinction between feelings or inclinations on the one hand, and behavior on the other hand, is very clear. It’s no sin to have inclinations that if yielded to would produce behavior that would be a transgression. The sin is in yielding to temptation. Temptation is not unique. Even the Savior was tempted.”²

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints counsels its members to reach out in love and fellowship to those with same-sex attraction

The pamphlet *God Loveth His Children* proclaims, “You are a son or daughter of God, and our hearts reach out to you in warmth and affection. Notwithstanding your present same-gender attractions, you can be happy during this life, lead a morally clean life, perform meaningful service in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with your fellow Saints, and ultimately receive all the blessings of eternal life.”³ Elder Boyd K. Packer has said, “With some few, there is the temptation which seems nearly overpowering for man to be attracted to man or woman to woman. . . . We understand why some feel we reject them. That is not true. We *do not* reject you, only immoral behavior. We *cannot* reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We *will not* reject you, because we love you.”⁴

Gender is an eternal attribute; the divinely appointed purposes of physical intimacy can be fulfilled only through heterosexual relations

“Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”⁵ Sexual intimacy “is ordained of God for the creation of children and for the expression of love between husband and wife.”⁶ These divinely appointed

purposes of physical intimacy can be fulfilled only through heterosexual relations between husband and wife. These purposes cannot be fulfilled through homosexual relationships.

Homosexual behavior is not only a moral issue; it is also a public and personal health issue

The health and well-being of those who experience same-sex attraction is not aided by elevating homosexuality to the same level of societal acceptance as heterosexuality. Homosexuality is accompanied by serious health issues not caused merely by society's disapproval. As one author has said, "Gay marriage' is not bad because God forbids it. God forbids it because it is harmful for us as a society, and as individuals."⁷

The political and societal acceptance of same-sex marriage is a threat to religious freedoms

In warning that the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage may challenge our religious liberties, Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, "This is more than a social issue—ultimately it may be a test of our most basic religious freedoms to teach what we know our Father in Heaven wants us to teach."⁸ In 2006, Catholic Charities of Boston ceased adoption work after more than 100 years rather than comply with a new state law requiring licensed adoption agencies to place children with gay people.⁹ The experience of Catholic Charities may be a portent of things to come in the collision between traditional religious practices and the ascendancy of gay rights.

The subject of same-sex attraction is complex and multifaceted, requiring a highly nuanced and informed discussion

One reason we struggle to more effectively and agreeably communicate about the issue of same-sex attraction is that we often have difficulty finding the right words to describe it. Using the wrong words, or the right words in the wrong context, can lead to misunderstandings, create incorrect perceptions, and be

unnecessarily offensive. People often associate different meanings with the same words, leading to misunderstandings that might be avoided by first discussing the meanings intended. A good deal of disagreement regarding same-sex attraction can be avoided by a more nuanced and scientifically and doctrinally correct discussion about it. The following words and phrases can be especially problematic.

Same-gender attraction, same-sex attraction, and homosexual attraction

These terms are, for the most part, interchangeable. The term *homosexual attraction* is a more scientifically accurate term. The alternative we have chosen for general use in this book is *same-sex attraction* because of its wide usage. This term is actually a misnomer as there are many kinds of healthy and desirable attractions towards persons of the same sex. However, despite its technical incorrectness, the term has come to generally mean *sexual* attraction towards persons of the same sex. Within the Church, the term *same-gender attraction* has gained wide usage but is not as often used outside the LDS community.

Change

A word that is particularly subject to controversy is *change*. As used in this book, *change* means a diminishing or elimination of erotic attractions for members of one's own sex. Because the degree of this kind of change varies by individual, we do not define *change* to mean the complete elimination of same-sex attraction and its replacement with heterosexual attractions, although this does occur for some. The word *change* can have different meanings in different contexts. It can refer to a diminishment in homosexual attractions or an increase in heterosexual attractions. These are different types of change, and while complementary, they are neither codependent nor mutually exclusive. Same-sex attractions may be diminished without a corresponding increase in heterosexual attractions, and heterosexual attractions may increase without a corresponding decrease in same-sex attractions.

Dr. Jeffrey W. Robinson has compared changes in sexual attractions to learning a new language. If you grew up speaking English but wanted to learn Spanish, you might study very hard, immerse yourself in the Spanish language, avoid speaking and thinking in English, and even move to a Spanish-speaking county. But how long would it take for English to be completely eradicated from your memory? Would it ever? If this high bar were the definition of *change*, few would meet it.

When speaking of change, it is also important to recognize the differences between a change in sexual attractions and a change of heart. A person who experiences same-sex attraction can be pure of heart and free from sinful behavior and still desire to change by diminishing same-sex attractions. Likewise, a person who experiences same-sex attraction may commit sin, repent, and experience a change of heart even though the feelings of same-sex attraction may still be present.

As we come to more fully understand the multiple meanings of the word *change*, the contention that sometimes surrounds the issue of whether those with same-sex attractions can change diminishes and unity is promoted. Also, when we understand the full range of blessings the Savior offers us, we will recognize and be grateful for all of the miraculous types of healing change present in our lives. With regard to the Savior's power to heal, Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said:

Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a "healing" cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are "healed" by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us. . . . The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality.¹⁰

Gay and lesbian

The term *gay* in context of same-sex attraction is correctly defined as a sociopolitical identity assumed by individuals, both men and women, who have embraced their homosexual attractions as a core sense of self. Likewise, the term *lesbian* is an assumed sociopolitical identity but refers exclusively to women. These terms define people based on their sexual feelings and can incorrectly imply that same-sex attractions are innate physical characteristics on the order of being male or female.

Healing

As used in connection with same-sex attraction, *healing* can best be defined as a resolution of issues, both sexual and nonsexual, that allows an individual to feel at peace with himself or herself and at one with God. The Savior's power to heal includes both the removal of burdens and the bestowal of strength to endure them.

Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 2007, 42–45.
2. "Same-Gender Attraction," an interview with Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, lds.org.
3. *God Loveth His Children* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2007), 1.
4. Boyd K. Packer, "Ye Are the Temple of God," *Ensign*, November 2000, 72–74.
5. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
6. *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2001), 26.
7. Orson Scott Card, "Why and How to Defend Marriage," *Deseret News—Mormon Times*, July 3, 2008, http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon_voices/?id=3234.
8. "Same-Gender Attraction," an interview with Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman.
9. Boston Globe, March 11, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/03/11/catholic_charities_stuns_state_ends_adoptions.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," *Ensign*, November 2006, 6–8.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK
PART III

“Shadows on the Wall”

Reassessing What We Think We Know about Same-Sex Attraction

M. Gawain Wells, PhD

In the *Allegory of the Cave*,¹ Plato’s character, Socrates, describes a situation in which people are born and raised in a cave, chained so they cannot move or turn around. On the wall of the cave towards which they are facing, they see moving shadows cast by firelight and the movement of puppets upon a parapet wall between the fire and the prisoners. The puppeteers speak for the puppets, and their voices echo off the walls, making it appear as though the shadows were speaking. Unable to view the situation from any other vantage point, the people are quite sure that what they see upon the wall is reality, not the shadows of puppets. Socrates goes on to suggest that, if a prisoner were released from his bonds and were exposed to true sunlight and true figures and then were to return to the cave to warn fellow prisoners, he would be derided and mocked, the others never having experienced anything else.

This present book is written because we believe that the problem we have in addressing the controversial issues of same-sex attraction is analogous to Plato’s allegory of the cave. Many of us—therapists, parents, and Church leaders—have had experience with good and sensitive individuals who sincerely believe through their experience that same-sex attraction is innate and unchangeable,

that they've tried very hard, and nothing has worked. If we have been caring witnesses to the struggle or if we find professionals who argue that indeed change is not possible or desirable, we may begin to believe the same thing, not knowing that we and they are mistaking the shadows on the wall for reality and truth. Moreover, our faces are "chained forward" by the sheer political weight of organizations like the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, who decry research and treatment to change unwanted homosexual feelings as ineffective and harmful to the patients.

In a sense, this is not a new phenomenon. How many medical conditions that we now consider commonplace were once seen as untreatable? Would your great-grandmother have believed that polio could be prevented? I have in my possession a book from several years ago² that reviews the outcomes of treatment for several psychopathologies. Given the research available at that time, the book suggests that, with some exceptions, the best treatment for borderline personality disorder is no treatment at all. It suggests that people experiencing borderline personality disorder have such a traumatic experience with separation that psychotherapy is ill advised, because, by definition, therapist and client are eventually going to separate and go their own ways. However, in spite of that suggestion, research and treatment of the condition continued. Now, some twenty-plus years later, the data suggest a more optimistic outcome, and therapists are routinely being trained in the best techniques *currently available* to work effectively with individuals experiencing such difficulties.

The huge difference, of course, between treatment research in borderline personality disorder and that in unwanted same-sex attraction is that the adversary of us all, Satan, has a highly invested stake in convincing us that treatment of the latter cannot be done. The opposition to seeking prevention or therapy here is enormous, and it can occur invisibly in the lives of those who, having seen good people struggle unsuccessfully, decide same-sex attraction is immutable.

The purpose of this book is modest in one sense: it acknowledges how much we do not know. But we never know more unless we push against the envelope of what we currently understand. The study of change in homosexual orientation is obviously a controversial topic, frowned upon by research funding agencies and decried by some professionals as “nothing more than psychological terrorism . . . usually performed by practitioners who harbor intense bias against gay people.”³ So why are these organizations so opposed to “reparative” or “conversion” therapy for individuals wanting to change problems arising from same-sex attraction?

First, as mentioned, some individuals experiencing such feelings have tried psychotherapy and have felt it was unsuccessful. Their therapists, families, and friends who have observed them, agree with them.

Second, some individuals do not find same-sex attraction to be ego-dystonic (in other words, they like it, do not want to change, and believe they live happy, healthy lives without change). They assume that all people experiencing such attractions would feel the same if they were not hampered by the prejudices of culture.

Third, historically, terrible abuses have been perpetrated on people experiencing same-sex attraction. Those wanting to help people who want help to change have been “tarred by the same brush” as those practicing bigotry, even cruelty.

Thus, professionals in many organizations have fostered a culture and a politics of repression of research and treatment of those who wish to change, denying them their right to choose their own treatment in the belief that treatment does not work and that those assisting them in the change effort are misguided at best.

In another sense, this book is very ambitious in what we believe can be accomplished, particularly in the development of hope for change, the emergence of better understanding and treatment, and the growth of trust that the Lord “giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). This is a book for believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We begin by standing on what bedrock we can find—the words of ancient and living prophets—and go from there. “From there” includes reviews of what science can provide. And from there, we go to the findings and suggestions of professionals who are successfully working with individuals experiencing same-sex attraction. Finally, we turn to the individual, first-person stories of those who have made the journey and who testify both of the help of Him who is mighty to save and of the fulfillment found in their new lives. We believe it is critical that the voice of authority, of God through his ordained apostles and prophets, clearly supersede the voice of reason and especially the voice of personal experience or emotion-charged prejudice (the shadows on the wall). That is the only way that we will have the help of God in accomplishing this work.

Let us examine these voices a little more closely. The philosophy of how we obtain knowledge and truth is the study of epistemology. Here we consider the methods, sources, and limitations of our knowledge, as well as the way we establish its validity. Historically, four means have been defined for obtaining knowledge—empiricism, rationalism, the scientific method, and authority.⁴

Empiricism is based on the proposition that knowledge comes primarily through experience and relies upon physical sensation. In other words, one does not know without seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, or tasting. Scientists conduct empirical experiments to test theories that involve being able to observe the outcome with the senses. There is no gainsaying the benefits that have come to society from empirical methods of gathering and testing knowledge, and people tend to have great confidence in ideas when they are able to validate them with the five senses.

On the other hand, when we use the techniques of reason—hypothesizing, theorizing, induction, deduction, analysis, and concluding—we are using the techniques of *rationalism* to gain knowledge. Almost the opposite of empiricism, a rational approach assumes that there are ideas that are clear and dependable upon which we can build other knowledge.

The *scientific method* is born of the union of rationalism and empiricism. One tests rational ideas (hypotheses) by arranging

experiments that show whether the ideas work or not in ways that can be measured empirically. Knowledge is constructed gradually by testing ideas empirically to determine how they hold across situations. Scientists then use rationalism to build a theory of how things work more generally.

The final method, *authority*, relies on the expertise or knowledge of a person we trust, such as a wise, skilled, or experienced individual; on an organization such as a church or a professional association; or more generally on long-held cultural traditions. Throughout life, we learn and reach conclusions by watching, talking, and listening to other people. Indeed, many important truths and skills can be learned only by apprenticeship to an expert who teaches the apprentice what to do and how to do it. More mundanely, every day when we listen to or read the news, we rely upon those reports as being factual. Here the question is, “Is this person or organization expert enough and honest enough that I can rely on it to teach the truth?”

For a believing people, revelation from God is the ultimate voice of authority. Revelation is truth that God makes known to us through inspiration, the witness of his Spirit, his appointed messengers, and answers to prayer. It stands in sharp contrast to secularism, the belief that the answers to life are found through rational means—through the concrete, observable, and practical world of people and things. A secular approach denies or devalues sacred or spiritual meanings. Most secularists believe that the religious, spiritual, or sacred parts of life are merely the inventions or delusions of people who have not yet been appropriately educated. It is difficult for many Latter-day Saints to understand and appreciate this belief because they rely heavily on the truthfulness of the spiritual and sacred parts of life. However, this philosophy is a widespread assumption among many intellectual leaders in our society, who do not believe in anything divine.

Digging just a little deeper, philosophers have noted for hundreds of years the problem of the *existential predicament*; in other words, I will never know if I am seeing what you are seeing. I must always make my own personal interpretations, even from

my physical senses, without knowing if my conclusions are true. You and I are forever making a leap of faith from sensation to interpretation, from reason to conclusion, or from argument to trusting or distrusting its source.

Since there are different ways of obtaining knowledge and truth, it is vital at the outset that you know the mindset of the authors of this book. This book is for a believing people who trust in God. We suggest that many of the loudest voices in this controversial arena are, at best, describing shadows on the wall. Herein we present the voices of authority, men whom we sustain as apostles and prophets, messengers of God. We review the extant research literature, admittedly from our own point of view. And we present the voices of personal experience, in the form of professionals as well as individuals who have personally struggled with the issue of same-sex attraction. We freely admit their bias, but they are describing their experiences and ought to be heard.

We leave it to you, as we must, to reach your own conclusions as to its truth. We hope you will find hope as well as truth in this book.

About the Author

M. Gawain Wells, PhD, received his doctorate in psychology from Purdue University in 1972. From then until 2008, he has been associated with Brigham Young University, having held numerous posts, including chair of the Psychology Department, professor, and director of the Comprehensive Clinic. Dr. Wells is a past recipient of BYU's Brigham Award for facilitating student research and while at Purdue was a David Ross Research Fellow. A major emphasis of Dr. Wells's research and writing has been parenting and child psychology. Among his many publications is *Love, Limits, and Latitude: A Thousand Small Moments of Parenting* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2001; 2nd ed., 2007), cowritten with David D. Law and Jennifer E. Johnson. Dr. Wells is also one of the editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*. Dr. Wells and his wife are currently serving as LDS missionaries in South Africa.

Notes

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SECTION II

GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES

“Seek learning, even by study and also by faith”

CHAPTER 1

Physical Bodies and Earthly Experiences

“I Did Not Choose This Challenge, So Why Me?”

Elder James O. Mason

Entering mortality is not risk free. Most of us have some sort of physical or mental challenge. It is a miracle that, as complex as the human mind and body are, we end up with so few flaws. “Where in all of the world is the son or daughter of God who is totally without blemish?” President James E. Faust asked. “Is life not worth living if it is not perfect?”¹ Yes, it is worth it, but challenges are common, and we do not all bear equivalent challenges. Some of God’s children are burdened with major afflictions; others have minimal or imperceptible scarring.

We Are Challenged by a Variety of Afflictions

One needs only to look within his or her family or in the homes of neighbors to confirm that afflictions due to birth and environment are common. Soon after my first birthday, after I had begun walking, my mother noticed that I was reluctant to put weight on my left leg. She let this go for a few days. However, when it continued, she took me to see the doctor. He ordered an X-ray, which showed my left hip joint was abnormal. I did not like to put weight on that leg because it hurt. It turned out that I was suffering from a relatively rare disease named ischemic necrosis of the femoral

head, an inherited condition. The treatment of choice was to prevent the child from bearing weight on the afflicted leg until the bone repairs itself. If a person with this disease continues to bear weight on the joint, it is permanently deformed and does not grow normally. I was therefore confined to my bed for almost eighteen months, unable to run, walk, and play away from my crib with sisters and friends.

A family living a few houses up the street from our current home has been blessed with four children. Three are afflicted with cystic fibrosis. Children with this inherited malady have a defective gene that makes an abnormal protein that causes the body to produce thick, sticky mucus, which clogs the lungs, leading to life-threatening infections. The mucus also obstructs the pancreas and stops natural enzymes from helping the body digest food. Children with cystic fibrosis have a shorter life span and require special care. Acute pneumonia is a constant threat. About one thousand new cases of cystic fibrosis are diagnosed each year in the United States.

A few years ago a family living near us adopted a beautiful newborn boy. It soon became obvious that their son was not developing normally. He was slow to begin talking and walking. The anguish of parents upon learning their child is not developing as expected is indescribable. The questions, the concern about what the child will and will not be able to do, can be heart wrenching. This boy was evaluated at Primary Children's Hospital and found to have the physical and mental characteristics associated with fetal alcohol syndrome. He is unable to graduate from school and will need to be in a supervised living arrangement throughout his life. This boy's mental and physical afflictions are the result of his mother's alcohol abuse during pregnancy. As many as six thousand babies are born each year in the United States with this severe, but easily preventable, condition.

My niece gave birth to a baby boy with Down's Syndrome. This is an affliction that occurs as the result of abnormal chromosome division during early fetal life, resulting in a person's having all or part of an extra twenty-first chromosome. Those with Down's

Syndrome have some degree of impairment of cognitive ability and physical development. My niece's son, now nine years old, will need supervised care during his entire life. I have seen love and tender care as his parents and sisters cope with this growing boy. Each year about four thousand children are born with Down's Syndrome in the United States.

Several years ago a young man in our ward entered the Missionary Training Center enthusiastic about his call to serve in a distant land. Soon after beginning his training, he started experiencing unfamiliar feelings. His heart pounded rapidly, and he was overwhelmed with worries of impending failure. His inability to progress and his obvious distress led those responsible for his training to refer him to the medical clinic. A diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive disorder with anxiety was made after doctors determined that the symptoms were not the result of any physical illness. After receiving counseling to understand the cause of his symptoms and after receiving appropriate psychotropic medication, he had a productive and mostly symptom-free mission.

The number and variety of common and rare afflictions Heavenly Father's children arrive in mortality with or acquire after birth are legion.

Individuals with Congenital and Acquired Afflictions Must Make Choices

Mortal afflictions are classified as either *congenital* (if present at birth) or *acquired* (if the cause of the problem occurs after a baby's delivery). The word *congenital*, which simply means present at birth, does not explain cause but identifies the insult (something causing disease or functional disruption) as occurring during in-utero development. As many as 4 percent of all newborns suffer from some kind of congenital abnormality. Congenital disorders may be inherited from one or both parents because of abnormal genes and chromosomes, may result from an infection in the mother or child during pregnancy (such as rubella, cytomegalovirus, toxoplasmosis, syphilis, genital herpes, or AIDS), or may

stem from in-utero exposure to toxic substances, including alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Congenital defects may also be caused by a deficiency during pregnancy of an essential nutrient, such as an amino acid or a vitamin.

Inherited disorders result in a large burden of human suffering, and many, of course, are very serious. Genetic defects result in biochemical, anatomical, or physiological changes within those affected. Science has yet to recognize all of the possible inherited challenges. Genetic disorders include almost four thousand recognized abnormalities caused by a defect in only a single gene. Many inherited disorders are apparent at birth, but others may not appear until early childhood or later. Huntington's disease, for example, affects the central nervous system and does not become apparent until after the person reaches thirty years of age or older—even though it is a congenital condition.

More than half of all known single-gene disorders lead to early death. Three-quarters are incompatible with life beyond infancy and limit access to schooling, ability to work, or both. Two-thirds impair the reproductive capability of affected individuals.²

We are also subject to the influences of environment after we leave the womb. Afflictions may be acquired after birth as a result of something in the environment such as a toxin; a dietary deficiency; a perverse interpersonal relationship with a parent, sibling, or other person; or an accident on the highway, in the workplace, or during sports and recreational activities.

Obviously, congenital and acquired afflictions are not “normal,” even though they may occur in a population with a high or a predictable frequency. If an affliction causes symptoms that detract from a person's quality of life, treatment should be instituted whenever possible. The course of these afflictions can often be modified by behavioral changes and/or therapy. This possibility means that, unless an affliction results in severe mental retardation, individuals with congenital or acquired disorders usually have choices to make. For example, following a prescribed diet

and monitoring and frequently adjusting insulin levels are choices made by individuals under treatment for diabetes. Avoiding foods containing phenylalanine is the treatment for phenylketoneuria. Special enzymes and antibiotics are used to treat cystic fibrosis. Clotting factors are administered by injection to persons suffering from hemophilia. Antidepressants, exercise, and cognitive-behavioral therapy help a person suffering from major depression regain quality of life. A combination of medication, psychotherapy, and sometimes group therapy lessens or eliminates the effects of the severe posttraumatic stress disorder often suffered by war veterans.

The behavior modification and medicine required to treat many of the acquired and congenital challenges are demanding, may be expensive, and usually must be continued over a lifetime. In such cases, there is rarely a cure. By following a prescribed course of action, however, the sufferer is able to lead a more satisfactory and productive life. Family, clergy, friends, and therapists should encourage and assist persons with congenital or acquired challenges.

Same-sex attraction is one of the many challenges that mortals are afflicted with. Much has been written and published in scientific and lay literature about cause. Some claim same-sex attraction is something a person is born with. Others argue that the cause is nurture—influences in a child's environment after birth. Others see a combination of causes. Still others claim a person chooses to have same-sex attraction. My experience with those struggling with same-sex attraction indicates that this last claim is not correct.

Learning what causes same-sex attraction is important to a Latter-day Saint, primarily from the perspective of prevention. Understanding the mechanisms whereby a person acquires it may also lead to methods to prevent and better treat the affliction. Ultimately, however, it does not make any difference how one came to have same-sex attractions. The behavioral choices that should be made by a person with those attractions remain the same regardless of what may have caused them.

Mortal Afflictions Should Be Viewed from an Eternal Perspective

Our individual existence did not start with mortal birth. Our life did not begin on earth, and it will not end with death. Keeping this in mind is important. As President Boyd K. Packer taught, “If our view is limited to mortal life, some things become unbearable because they seem so unfair and so permanent.”³

The gospel teaches that we prepared ourselves in a spirit realm to come to earth in forgetfulness, as captured by William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood”:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

We are Heavenly Father’s spirit children, with potential to become like Him. We lived with Him before birth as His sons and daughters. We may not know the details of what we did in premortal life, what conditions prevailed, or how long we lived with heavenly parents. Nevertheless, what has been revealed is sufficient for us to accomplish our purpose here on earth. We know that we “are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”⁴

Through mortal birth, one’s spirit body is temporarily joined with a physical tabernacle begotten by earthly parents. Each of us in premortal life looked forward with expectation and joy to this momentous opportunity and essential stage in our progress toward exaltation and eternal life (see Job 38:7). Mortality, although

a temporary stage of our existence, is absolutely essential for two reasons. First, it is essential to receive a physical body. Without a physical body, a man or woman cannot receive a fulness of joy (see D&C 93:33). Second, this mortal life is a period of development and probation (see Abraham 3:25–26). Mortality is a time of learning and walking by faith and obedience.

A fundamental feature of mortality is opposition. This opposition occurs as a result of temptation, Satan's influence, and the function of natural law. Natural law began to influence mortal birth and life after the Fall, often resulting in disabilities. President Packer has clarified how and why natural law is allowed to operate:

The very purpose for which the world was created, and man introduced to live upon it, requires that the laws of nature operate in cold disregard for human feelings. We must work out our salvation without expecting the laws of nature to be exempted for us. Natural law is, on rare occasions, suspended in a miracle. But mostly our handicapped, like the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, wait endlessly for the moving of the water (John 5:2–4).⁵

In other words, congenital and acquired disabilities and handicaps are part and parcel of opposition.

In mortality, physical handicaps may persist, but through the Atonement, struggles with same-sex attraction can eventually be eased or removed. Regardless of the outcome, God's children do not have to face opposition unaided. Elder Dallin H. Oaks promised, "If your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden."⁶

Fortunately, the eternal spirit is not blemished by our mortal afflictions of body or mind. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that "all spirits while in the pre-existence were perfect in form, having all their faculties and mental powers unimpaired. . . . Deformities in body and mind are . . . physical."⁷ Spirits that are beautiful, innocent, and perfect are often temporally restrained by physical impediments.

President Brigham Young provided an insightful perspective on the relative duration of earth life with its trials and afflictions:

We talk about our trials and troubles here in life; but suppose that you could see yourselves thousands and millions of years after you had proved faithful to your religion during the few short years in this time, and have obtained eternal salvation and a crown of glory in the presence of God? Then look back upon your lives here, and see the losses, crosses and disappointments, the sorrows . . . ; you would be constrained to exclaim, “But what of all that? Those things were but for a moment, and we are now here. We have been faithful during a few moments in our mortality, and now we enjoy eternal life and glory, with power to progress in all the boundless knowledge and through countless stages of progression, enjoying the smiles and approbation of our Father and God, and Jesus Christ our elder brother.”⁸

President Packer also commented on the relative brevity of mortal life:

If a microscopic droplet of water should represent the length of mortal life, by comparison all the oceans on earth put together would not even begin to represent everlasting life. . . . After mortal death we will rise in the resurrection to an existence to which there will not, neither could there be an end. The words *everlasting*, *never ending*, *eternal*, *forever and forever* in the revelations describe both the gospel and life.⁹

Mortal life, although brief compared with eternal life, very much determines our future. The Savior taught his disciples this truth with vivid images:

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: . . .

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: . . .

And if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Mark 9:43, 45, 47.)

We must put away from us any environment or circumstance that might lead us to not make or keep eternal covenants.

God Uses Affliction to Bless Us

The tribes of Israel were allowed to struggle for years in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. The reasons, the Lord revealed to Moses, were that “thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deuteronomy 8:2).

There is a purpose in the misery, suffering, and pain we all experience to a greater or lesser degree during mortality. Lehi declared, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). Trials and tribulations come to us as part of living in an imperfect, temporary world. Sometimes they arise as a result of our own unwise choices and mistakes or the mistakes of others.

Do afflictions also come as a challenge the Lord gives us even when we appear to be innocent? This question was aptly raised by Elder Neal A. Maxwell:

There may be those who choose to debate the significance of whether or not an omnipotent God *gives* us a particular trial or simply *declines to remove it*. The outcome is obviously the same either way; God is willing for us to undergo that challenge. Yet He promises us that His grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9; Ether 12:26–27). He even indicates that some of the weaknesses and infirmities given to us can actually become a strength to us.¹⁰

God allows these challenges to test and prove us. It is Lucifer who causes pain, suffering, and affliction. He wants us to be miserable, as he is. God will help us, through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, to rise above any and all challenges. Furthermore, our temptations are not above our ability to withstand: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13). However, when we are not watchful, through succumbing to small temptations, we can get in over our heads.

For example, the Lord loved David, whose heart was pure. However, after becoming king, David became accustomed to ease and power. On one very important occasion when he should have been at the front leading the armies of Israel against the Assyrians, he chose the easy way and remained in his palace. One day, he arose from his bed “in the evening” to stroll on the palace roof. His eyes fell upon a beautiful woman who was bathing. He apparently stole second and third glances, and after giving further consideration to what he had seen, he sent for the woman. An adulterous relationship ensued, and Bathsheba became pregnant.

Her husband, Uriah, was away on the battlefield, where David should have been. To cover their sin and make things look right, David summoned the woman’s husband home from battle. Uriah, loyal to his troops, refused to enter his home. David sent this honorable man back to the battlefield, contriving an evil plan that resulted in Uriah’s death at the hands of Assyrian soldiers (see 2 Samuel 11).

David was not tempted beyond his ability to resist. His downfall began when he failed to do his duty as king and go to battle, where he should have been. This choice led to idleness and lustful glances at an attractive woman. Glances became the precursors to unrestrained thoughts. Thoughts became actions when he sent for the woman. An attempt to cover up adultery resulted in premeditated murder. David was not tempted beyond his ability to resist at any point in this tragic tale. A small, relatively insignificant

temptation to not be where duty required opened up a wide and crooked pathway leading to evil.

Amulek exhorted his people to “be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing” (Alma 34:39). By developing and maintaining our spiritual strength through prayer, scripture study, church attendance, and fasting, we expand our ability to resist evil. James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. . . . But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:12, 14).

God tested Abraham, just as we are also tested. Abraham did not understand, and frequently we do not either. Nonetheless, Abraham did what was required and successfully passed his test. He and his numerous posterity have been richly blessed because of his faithfulness. In Hebrews, Paul tells us that Abraham’s faith made it possible for him to comply, for even though Isaac might die, Abraham proceeded, counting on God being able “to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19).

Abraham’s testing was a deliberate, chastening experience (D&C 101:4), as Elder Maxwell explained:

Fittingly, Abraham, who was later to become a god, learned through obedience what it was to be asked to sacrifice his son (D&C 132:37).

A good friend, who knows whereof he speaks, has observed of trials, “If it’s fair, it is not a true trial!” That is, without the added presence of some inexplicableness and some irony and injustice, the experience may not stretch us or lift us sufficiently. The crucifixion of Christ was clearly the greatest injustice in human history, but the Savior bore up under it with majesty and indescribable valor.¹¹

Why Me? I Did Not Choose My Challenges

When physical and mental afflictions occur, it is natural for the afflicted person to ask, "What did I do wrong?" The false doctrine that all suffering is somehow the direct result of sin and error has been around since ancient times. The Savior corrected this erroneous thinking in response to a question posed by some of the early disciples: "[A]s *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? *Jesus* answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:1–3).

"There is little room for feelings of guilt in connection with handicaps. . . . Afflictions come to the innocent," President Packer has assured us.¹² "However unfair they may seem to man's way of reasoning, they somehow suit the purposes of the Lord in the proving of mankind."¹³

In addressing the questions of Why me? or Why my child? President James E. Faust commented:

The Savior's teaching that handicaps are not punishment for sin, either in the parents or the handicapped, can also be understood and applied in today's circumstances. How can it possibly be said that an innocent child born with a special problem is being punished? Why should parents who have kept themselves free from social disease, addicting chemicals and other debilitating substances, which might affect their offspring, imagine that the birth of a disabled child is some form of divine disapproval? Usually both the parents and children are blameless. . . .

The works of God are manifest in so many ways in the challenges of parents and children, especially to those who are handicapped and to those who have lost their way. For those who have asked, "Why did this happen to me?" or, "Why did this happen to my child?" there is assurance that the difficulty will not last forever. Life on this earth is not long. . . . For those who carry such a

challenge in this life, God himself provides a response. That response is patience and the strength to endure. It lies, as Paul and Job testify, “In hope of eternal life, . . . promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2), “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).¹⁴

After talking about the fatal illness of his beloved five-year-old daughter, Elder Lance B. Wickman concluded:

Do not ever doubt the goodness of God, even if you do not know “why.” The overarching question asked by the bereaved and the burdened is simply this: *Why? Why* did our daughter die, when we prayed so hard that she would live and when she received priesthood blessings? *Why* are we struggling with this misfortune, when others relate miraculous healing experiences for their loved ones? These are natural questions, understandable questions. But they are also questions that usually go begging in mortality. The Lord has said simply, “My ways [are] higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). . . . Reduced to their essence, humility and submissiveness are an expression of complete willingness to let the “why” questions go unanswered for now, or perhaps even to ask, “Why not?”¹⁵

A willingness to ask “Why not” echoes Nephi’s humble response: “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

Might we have agreed to some mortal challenges? The words of Elder Maxwell give us pause:

There are clearly cases of individuals with special limitations in life, conditions we mortals cannot now fully fathom. For all we now know, the seeming limitations may have been an agreed-upon spur to achievement—a developmental equivalent of a “thorn in the flesh.” Like him

who was “blind from birth,” some come to bring glory to God (John 9:1–3).¹⁶

If I Was Not Supposed to Be Gay, Why Did Heavenly Father Send Me Here This Way?

Someone whispers, “Heavenly Father would not have sent me here this way if I wasn’t supposed to be gay.” One more easily might blame Lucifer than to claim that God is responsible for same-sex attraction. God did not cause same-sex attraction or any other physical or emotional handicap, any more than he causes juvenile diabetes, hemophilia, bipolar depression, or fetal alcohol syndrome. President Packer pointed out that “there are what President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., called ‘pranks’ of nature, which cause a variety of abnormalities, deficiencies, and deformities.”¹⁷

No physical or emotional deviation from so-called normal, whether small or huge, should be allowed to determine one’s eternal destiny. The eternal outcome of mortal experience will be determined by the choices we make, not by an inborn or acquired mortal handicap. We determine our eternal destination because our choices have eternal consequences. Indeed, we—not the capricious winds blowing hither and yon—are the masters of our ship. However, those who encounter overwhelming hurricanes during mortality are accountable only for what they have the capacity to control or what they can control with a capacity enlarged by God. Our Savior, a perfect judge who has seen it all, will hold us harmless for things we truly can do nothing about.

Elder Maxwell, who had personal experience with suffering and affliction, came to understand that “adequacy in the first estate may merely have ensured a stern, second estate with more duties and no immunities! Additional tutoring and suffering appears to be the pattern for the Lord’s most apt pupils. (See Mosiah 3:19; 1 Peter 4:19.) Our existence, therefore, is a continuum matched by God’s stretching curriculum.”¹⁸ On another occasion Elder Maxwell bore witness that “some wrenching conditions provide sharp, persistent thorns in the flesh which are to be endured, not removed (see 2 Cor. 12:7).”¹⁹

President Wilford Woodruff reminded us of whom we would be with in celestial glory: “If we had no trials we should hardly feel at home in the other world in the company of the Prophets and Apostles who were sawn asunder, crucified, etc., for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ.”²⁰

Eternal Marriage Between a Man and a Woman Is Essential for All

Regardless of the physical and emotional challenges faced by God’s children in mortality, his plan for eternal happiness requires the righteous union of husband and wife either here in mortality or hereafter (see 1 Corinthians 11:11; Ephesians 5:31; D&C 130:2; 131:2). That message has been officially announced to the world:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . . Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.²¹

President Packer reminded us that “natural and spiritual laws which govern life were instituted from before the foundation of the world. They are eternal, as are the consequences for either obeying or disobeying them. They are not based on social or political considerations. They cannot be changed. No pressure, no protest, no legislation can alter them.”²²

To bless those who through no fault of their own are unable to marry during mortality, provision for obeying this law has been made in the plan of redemption through a loving and merciful Savior. A vast number of Heavenly Father’s sons and daughters fall into this category, for a plethora of reasons. Many of His children die before marriage; others have physical or emotional challenges that prevent marriage. But God has provided that at a later time

and in another sphere of activity, the righteous among them will have the opportunity to marry and to earn a place in the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom. In the celestial glory, we are told, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4).

In a parable, President Packer highlighted the critical importance of marriage between a man and a woman:

Once a man received as his inheritance two keys. The first key, he was told, would open a vault which he must protect at all cost. The second key was to a safe within the vault which contained a priceless treasure. He was to open this safe and freely use the precious things which were stored therein. He was warned that many would seek to rob him of his inheritance. He was promised that if he used the treasure worthily, it would be replenished and never be diminished, not in all eternity. He would be tested. If he used it to benefit others, his own blessings and joy would increase.

The man went alone to the vault. His first key opened the door. He tried to unlock the treasure with the other key, but he could not, for there were two locks on the safe. His key alone would not open it. No matter how he tried, he could not open it. He was puzzled. He had been given the keys. He knew the treasure was rightfully his. He had obeyed instructions, but he could not open the safe.

In due time, there came a woman into the vault. She, too, held a key. It was noticeably different from the key he held. Her key fit the other lock. It humbled him to learn that he could not obtain his rightful inheritance without her. . . .

Together they opened the safe and partook of their inheritance. . . .

Some [of their posterity] tried to reshape the key they had been given to resemble the other key. Perhaps,

they thought, it would then fit both locks. And so it was that the safe was closed to them. Their reshaped keys were useless, and their inheritance was lost.

Those who received the treasure with gratitude and obeyed the laws concerning it knew joy without bounds through time and all eternity.²³

The highest priesthood ordinance in mortality is given only to man and woman together (see D&C 131:2). If certain behaviors are sins in the sight of God, and they are, then the Church and its officers would be unloving were they not to sound the voice of warning, just as a loving mother warns and protects her small child from the terrible consequences of swallowing lye. The Church cannot revoke God's decrees! The Church must label as wrong any behavior that impedes eternal progress. Failure to do so would be cowardly and unloving.

The world, rejecting eternal values and focusing instead on the now and upon the physical and carnal, labels the Church intolerant, judgmental, and mean. The very opposite is true.

All Afflictions, Including Same-Sex Attraction, Will Be Healed in the Resurrection

In the resurrection, mortal afflictions will disappear. This assurance, Elder Oaks stated, “gives us the strength and perspective to endure the mortal challenges faced by each of us and by those we love, such things as the physical, mental, or emotional deficiencies we bring with us at birth or acquire during mortal life. Because of the resurrection, we know that these mortal deficiencies are only temporary!”²⁴

President Packer testified of the courage granted by the promise of the Resurrection:

I bear witness of the restoration which will come. Each body and mind will be restored in perfect frame. However long and unfair mortality may seem, however long the suffering and waiting may be, [the Lord] has said,

“After that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come. Behold, I the Lord, have spoken it” (D&C 58:11–12).

It is my intent to teach doctrine which, if understood, will reinforce your courage and endurance, even foster a measure of contentment with circumstances which you did not invite, do not deserve but from which you cannot turn away.²⁵

As a restoration of more than just the physical, the promised resurrection provides additional reasons for us to obey the commandments during mortality. Elder Oaks drew together several scriptures to unfold this truth:

Resurrection is much more than merely reuniting a spirit to a body held captive by the grave. We know from the Book of Mormon that the resurrection is a restoration that brings back “carnal for carnal” and “good for that which is good” (Alma 41:13; see also Alma 41:2–4 and Helaman 14:31). The prophet Amulek taught, “That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world” (Alma 34:34). As a result, when persons leave this life and go on to the next, “they who are righteous shall be righteous still” (2 Nephi 9:16), and “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life . . . will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18).²⁶

Upon reading Alma 34:34 carefully, some might wonder whether a person with same-sex attraction in mortality might continue to have those same feelings in the Resurrection. Same-sex feelings in mortality, however, are not components of the eternal spirit. They are the imperfect product of mortality and will not be retained in the morning of the First Resurrection. Unwelcome same-sex

feelings that are controlled or sinful behavior that is repented of completely during mortality will not be present in the Resurrection. Desirable thoughts and emotions will replace unwanted thoughts, anxieties, and fears. The unwanted and unwelcome feelings of same-sex attraction will no longer encumber eternal progress, and attention will appropriately be turned to the opposite sex. The characteristics of the spirit that will possess your body in the eternal world will be related solely to attitudes, behaviors, and feelings over which one has power to control.

Must I Wait until the Resurrection to Be Healed?

While all afflictions will be healed in the Resurrection, those with mortal challenges do not have to wait until then for help. The Savior came in the meridian of time to redeem, atone, ransom, reconcile, and advocate for us. Because He went forth “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” (Alma 7:11), He can be our help, power, and strength if we will be loyal and follow Him. He is the Master Healer.

As Elder Oaks reminds us, “The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality.”²⁷

Many who have struggled with same-sex attraction testify of the healing power of the Atonement. Over time, their cries were answered, and they received strength to overcome their temptations. Their feelings were modified. Peace came upon their souls. They moved on in service to the Lord.²⁸

Someday, I know, there will be an answer to the almost universal question, “Why is this happening to me?” But even without that answer, we can and should rely on the Lord’s assurance to Moroni, given as Moroni was completing his translation of the Book of Ether: “If men will come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me,

then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

At times we may despair that this process is too slow or that the burdens of a mortal affliction are too heavy. Elder Oaks gives this counsel for the low times in our lives: “When it seems that a tempest is raging in our lives, we may feel abandoned and cry out like the disciples in the storm, ‘Master, carest thou not that we perish?’ (Mark 4:38). At such times we should remember His reply: ‘Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?’ (v. 40).”²⁹

Have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His power to redeem and to lift burdens. Never lose the power of discernment, and never forget, even for a moment, your real identity and your enormous divine potential. You can be filled with God’s power and rise above temptation.

As you keep baptismal, priesthood, and temple covenants, no blessing pertaining to exaltation and eternal life will be withheld because of same-sex attraction. In the day of Resurrection, you will have normal affections and be attracted to the opposite sex. The blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the Holy Father has will be added upon you forever and ever.

About the Author

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Notes

1. James E. Faust, "The Works of God," *Ensign*, November 1984, 60.
2. See Eve K. Nichols, *Human Gene Therapy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 3–9.
3. Boyd K. Packer, "The Moving of the Water," *Ensign*, May 1991, 9.
4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
5. Packer, "The Moving of the Water," 8.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," *Ensign*, November 2006, 9.
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 3:19.
8. Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, November 9, 1859, 1.
9. Packer, "The Moving of the Water," 9.
10. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 31.
11. *Ibid.*, 31.
12. Packer, "The Moving of the Water," 8.
13. Boyd K. Packer, "For Time and All Eternity," *Ensign*, November 1993, 21.
14. Faust, "The Works of God," 60.
15. Lance B. Wickman, "But If Not," *Ensign*, November 2002, 30.
16. Neal A. Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 98–99.
17. Packer, "For Time and All Eternity," 21. See J. Reuben Clark Jr., "Our Wives and Our Mothers in the Eternal Plan," *J. Reuben Clark: Selected Papers on Religion, Education, and Youth*, ed. David H. Yarn Jr. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 62.
18. Neal A. Maxwell, "Premortality, a Glorious Reality," *Ensign*, November 1985, 17.
19. Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 53.
20. Wilford Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: John Henry Smith, 1883), 23:328.
21. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 102.
22. Packer, "For Time and All Eternity," 22.
23. Packer, "For Time and All Eternity," 23.
24. Dallin H. Oaks, "Resurrection," *Ensign*, May 2000, 15.
25. Packer, "The Moving of the Water," 7, 9.
26. Oaks, "Resurrection," 15–16.
27. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," 8.

28. The stories of several such people are included in this volume.
29. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," 8.

CHAPTER 2

Created in the Image of God

The Powers Inherent in Our Divine Nature and Destiny

John P. Livingstone, EdD and Doris R. Dant, MS, MA

You and I have been singing “I am a child of God” for a long time. We pray to “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). We accept that God is our Heavenly Father. This direct relationship to God has deep significance for mortals: *“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”*¹ As children of a God of power, we are granted basic powers similar to His, and we can obtain access to additional powers. Despite any seemingly crippling weaknesses and inclinations we may carry with us through mortality, our divine nature and destiny orients us to face these problems squarely and to plead abjectly with our Father for His miraculous help, strength, and power. Relying on His help and power, we overcome our carnal attributes and ultimately grow to become like our Heavenly Father.

The Creator’s Plan for Happiness

“In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”²

From this passage in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” as well as from Latter-day Saint scriptures, we learn that we have a divine destiny: our Heavenly Father wishes us to grow to become like Him and to have what He has. This is our eternal goal. For instance, the Doctrine and Covenants scriptural passage known as the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood states that “he that receiveth [accepts] my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given him” (D&C 84:38).

Father Lehi addresses these grand purposes when he writes that “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). Joseph Smith also said, “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it.”³ The happiness of His children seems to be the ultimate goal of our Heavenly Father.

Eternal Identity and Power

Perhaps we could draw the analogy of our Heavenly Father having ultra-ultra-superpowers. The parallel can perhaps work without too literal an application or interpretation. It is simply used to envision a perspective on the eternal purposes of our lives here on earth. The point is that our Heavenly Father has the superpowers, and it seems clear from scriptures and the words of living prophets that He would like to someday share, or grant, all of His superpowers to His children. Mortality may be viewed as a qualifying test for the ultimate obtaining of these superpowers.

Attributes or powers we develop in mortality, such as conscience, agency, and procreation, represent some of what might be termed superpowers. In fact, additional superpowers may be granted to us even while here in mortality. Each of the saving or essential ordinances of salvation introduces us to the possibility of having additional powers bestowed upon us as we grow in the gospel, or in other words, as we become more like our heavenly parents.

1. The ordinance of baptism grants us “the power of entering into the kingdom of God on earth.”⁴ Symbolically, it represents a

“spiritual rebirth” that comes of wanting to be good and making covenants or “sacred deals” with God (see Mosiah 5:2, 5, 7). This spiritual awakening represents a new outlook on life where we begin to put our motivations, objectives, behaviors, and decisions into a more eternal perspective, looking beyond mere mortal considerations. This new perspective may represent a kind of “supervision” where we begin to spiritually “see” or “get” things beyond our normal view.

2. Following baptism, we are confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift may represent an additional superpower. If we are genuinely sincere in our repentance and our willingness to covenant with God, we are granted the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, almost a kind of “spiritual radar” to help us successfully negotiate the minefields or pitfalls of mortality.

3. Similarly, ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood means that worthy and caring priesthood-holding men, whose purposes and motivations are aligned with God’s, can perform ordinances to heal and bless the sick. Ordination not only brings the potential power to physically and spiritually heal others, but under a system of key-holding priesthood leaders, it actually enables these God-given spiritual powers to be shared generally among the children of God. With the permission of Aaronic Priesthood key-holding bishops and Melchizedek Priesthood key-holding stake and mission presidents, good men ordained to this priesthood may not only perform the essential ordinances of salvation but, with key-holder permission, also ordain others to receive the very same powers.

4. The temple endowment may bring with it even more potent powers. That is, the spiritual effects of being endowed seem to allow God’s children to spiritually “see” where they are situated within the plan of salvation and to estimate where they are at on the straight and narrow path of personal progress. Returning to the temple often and participating in the process of receiving the temple endowment ceremony for the dead reinforces in the minds and hearts of the participants the purpose of life and the

necessity of making and keeping sacred covenants with God. The highly symbolic nature of the endowment and its associated covenants encourages them to try to see *through* the symbolism to gain a comprehension of eternal truths that the symbols represent. Correspondingly, a kind of “spiritual X-ray vision” begins to develop within alert and dedicated temple attendees. It allows them to leave the temple not only with the feeling of being lifted and fed, but also spiritually gifted or endowed to see *through* “mists of darkness”—those potentially confusing and misleading situations that arise in life—and see *beyond the obvious*.

5. Finally, to be married or sealed to a member of the opposite sex in the temple is a culminating symbolic ceremony that encourages participants to go home and make their marriages and homes *feel* more like the spiritual atmosphere of the house of the Lord. The happiness that can be achieved in family life is perhaps exceeded by no other. This kind of happiness and joy cannot be found without the binding love that such a home features. Men and women do not begin life with an understanding of the love of which they are capable. Only after they have sacrificed their time, talents, and personal comfort to someone of the opposite sex and enjoyed the birth and rearing of their own progeny can they appreciate the power of home and family. The symbolic temple sealing must sometime, perhaps in the next life, be followed by a *real* sealing of their marriages by the Holy Spirit of Promise, whose ratification is essential to the exaltation of husbands and wives. The Lord told Joseph Smith, “I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily *I seal upon you your exaltation*, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father” (D&C 132:49, italics added). Temple marriage is symbolic of being sealed up unto eternal life: “*Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.*”⁵

The Divine Superpower of Faith

While reading about Harry Potter or the wizard Sparrowhawk-Ged of Earthsea, we may long for the gift of magical power. With magic we could smooth our path, battle our enemies, and ultimately succeed against all the odds. What we may not realize in those moments of fantasy is that we can receive a gift of incredible power, a god's power, in fact.⁶ We call that power faith. While we may think of faith as belief, we should never forget that it is also “a principle of action and power.”⁷ And this power is given to children, women, and men—indeed, to “all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth.”⁸

Like magic, faith “works by mental exertion instead of physical force. It is by words.”⁹ However, make no mistake. “Faith is not illusion nor magic”; it is a power that is deeper and broader and everlasting, for it is “a power rooted in eternal principles.”¹⁰ With this superpower the ancient prophets succeeded against all odds—they “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Hebrews 11:33–34). This is not the stuff of fantasy. This is real power, real “magic.”

Nor were the men alone in the exercise of this power. Paul assures us that it was through faith that Rahab survived the fall of Jericho, Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac “when she was past age,” Moses’ mother (and father) successfully hid him from Pharaoh’s minions, and “women received their dead raised to life again” (Hebrews 11:35, 11, 23, 31).

“True faith has enormous power,” Elder Richard G. Scott observes, but, he adds, “there are principles that must be followed to unleash that power.”¹¹ We are familiar with them. Their underlying precept is very simple: “Faith as a principle of power comes from a consistent pattern of obedient behavior and attitudes.”¹² And unlike the fabled misuse of power by wicked magicians, what we ask to use our power for must be expedient

according to the wisdom of God (see D&C 88:64–65). Some of us may be hesitant. But we are promised that “the consistent, willing exercise of faith” will increase our “confidence and ability to employ the power of faith.”¹³

As we exercise our faith, the Lord will repair malfunctioning weaknesses. Remember the father who brought his son to Jesus to be healed (Matthew 17:23–24)? Jesus reassured him, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” The father said he did believe. At that point Jesus seems to have given the father a searching look, for the father corrected himself and begged, “Help thou mine unbelief.” All of us have times when we stumble for lack of faith and must cry out, “Help thou my unbelief.” Even now, some of us may be troubled or holding back from doing something for lack of faith. Or we may be undergoing a trial of our faith. But Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), will build our faith, our superpower—in ways that are expedient to Him—as we are obedient and as we plead for that divine aid.

Earth, a Simulator for Learning to Use Power

Pilots learn to fly in simulators, where they have a safe place to practice. There they have little chance to harm either an aircraft or themselves. Earth life could be perceived as a sort of simulator where the children of God can “try out” the superpowers, given to them as mortals, without doing serious damage to the eternal world.

How we use, manage, and maintain the powers of conscience, agency, and procreation in mortality may actually demonstrate whether or not we would be interested in living the kind of life our Heavenly Father lives. If we tend to use our agency to do things we actually feel are unwise, unsafe, or even wicked, we may not immediately realize we are actually violating our own consciences. When mortals do this, it would seem to evidence the notion that they really do not control or use the power of agency well. If they use their powers of procreation in ways that are selfish and manipulative, hurting others as well as themselves, they can

easily become discouraged and perhaps even convinced that they are incapable of controlling the powers of procreation that were granted to them by God in mortality.

Surely that lack of control has serious implications for the “permanent” granting of such power to these mortals in the eternities. If Heavenly Father were to give them all of his superpowers today, right now, would the rest of the universe be safe? On the other hand, if these powers were used appropriately, within the bounds which the Lord has set through His prophets here in mortality, the behaviors and actions of such mortals may indicate that the universe would remain safe if they were given this power eternally. The question of eternal safety may well be the very essence of the test of mortality.

We are told about our divine destiny, power, and eternal potential in Doctrine and Covenants 132: “Then shall they be gods, because they have all *power*” (D&C 132:20; emphasis added). The righteous “shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ,” Joseph Smith says; they will “inherit the same *power*, the same glory and the same exaltation, until [they] arrive at the station of a god, and ascend the throne of eternal *power*.”¹⁴

We also read that if we do not qualify to live with Heavenly Father, He says, “Where I am they cannot come, for they have no *power*” (D&C 29:29; emphasis added). If we learn to handle the powers we are granted in mortality responsibly, it appears we may have more in the next life.

Opposition and Power

The minefields of opposition we face in mortality not only come from Satan, but also may come “hard-wired” into our mortal bodies. Father Lehi understood this when he taught readers to not choose evil, “according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate” (2 Nephi 2:29). King Benjamin warned that “the natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19), but he could well have pointed out that the natural man is also an enemy to himself. Understanding that with birth we are clothed with a mortal body whose

human nature is strong and consistent helps us realize that we do not do well to follow its every urge and whim. The struggle to control our urges, desires, appetites, and passions in mortality helps us determine how these attributes and their management fit into the grand purposes of the eternities.

Learning to use divine power to train the body to respond to our will and not to allow the body to dominate our will becomes a major task on earth. Those who lose control of their bodies soon discover that if the body is running their life, life is difficult. When we control our bodies, life is better. Allowing the body to become habituated or addicted to substances like food, alcohol, or drugs—or to events such as sexual stimulation—produces a compulsivity that soon begins to feel like the captivity mentioned by Lehi.

We do not arrive on earth impossibly addicted or habituated. Even babies born to drug- or alcohol-addicted mothers are soon medically weaned away from the problem substances. And while there may be residual propensities or inclinations in those whose progenitors used substances or events to self-medicate their insecurities, each has the power of agency, the power to choose, and can decide whether or not he or she will follow those predispositions or inclinations. Inclinations cannot trump agency. Agency cannot be lost without active choices being made.

With choices come the attendant responsibilities and consequences. Of course, these choices are often so private and personal that only the individuals themselves know their choices, their responsibility, and sometimes even the resulting consequences. One of the compounding consequences of same-sex activity, especially among males, where frequency of sexual activity may be excessive, is a reinforcement of hopelessness stemming from a feeling of powerlessness in recovering agency over temptation. Same-sex activity may feel like a sliver in the eye, but it becomes overly disabling because of the seemingly inordinate pain and the spiritual blindness that results. And when the power of our spiritual radar is gone, we often compound our difficulties and foolishness even further.

One of us (John) once had a psychology professor who stated that every powerful tool is an equally formidable weapon. Human

sexuality may be viewed as perhaps one of our most powerful tools in mortality. But when we lose control of our sexual urges and become compulsively driven to act out our sexual temptations, the resulting “weaponization” of sexuality becomes a problem for many a mortal, both victims and perpetrators. Controlling sexual temptations saves so much sorrow.

The Arm of Flesh Not a Source of “Superpower”

The scriptures warn against sins “of the flesh” or placing “trust in the arm of flesh.” Counting or relying on the carnal comforts of mortality rather than on God and His powers causes one to turn away from that which is spiritual to that which is sensual. Jeremiah taught, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:5).

The Bible and Book of Mormon call this departing from God a “hardening” of the heart.¹⁵ It is as if there is a sort of spiritual cholesterol that makes mortals spiritually sluggish and insensitive and may even bring them, in their reinforced hopelessness, to “fight against God.”¹⁶ Alma said, “They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of *the word* until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11; emphasis added). Whether the “chains of hell” refers to loss of power and control, addiction, or to open rebellion against God, the effects seem to describe being stopped or damned in one’s spiritual or eternal progress.

Our loving Heavenly Father wishes to give us all that He has, which includes the supreme power and happiness He enjoys. We can use the teachings of Jesus Christ to strengthen our spirituality and prepare us for the power needed to become like our Heavenly Father.

Reading and Pondering the Word of the Lord

Alma's reference to resisting "the word" not only suggests that when we capitulate to trusting in the pleasures of the flesh for comfort and security we lose sensitivity to scripture, but conversely seems to imply that the word of the Lord could perhaps serve as a recovery resource for those who have a tendency to seek power in things of the flesh or the world. Could it be that reading and studying the word of the Lord is a powerful recovery resource for those attempting to transition away from the hopeless reliance on the "carnal, sensual, and devilish,"¹⁷ a reliance that leads to diminishing of power?

The Liahona operated according to the faith, the spiritual power, of those using it (see Alma 37:40). Is it possible that exercising greater faith in scripture study could actually lead troubled individuals out of their hopelessness and powerlessness? Alma taught earlier that just giving it a try was worth it. He said, "If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27).

Could it be that those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction temptations (as well as those struggling with *any* unwanted attractions) may benefit from trying to "desire to believe" and letting that "desire work in you" to the point where they may be led "into a far better" condition? Perhaps the Lord's injunction to "search the scriptures" (see John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Jacob 7:23; Alma 17:2; 3 Nephi 10:14) can bring more relief than we might initially think. It also may be that a more specific topical searching may be of greater help than reading cover to cover or just opening the scriptures and letting the pages fall where they may.

The Topical Guide in the English version of the LDS scriptures includes many helpful subjects that searchers may ponder. Some who have wrestled with homosexuality have looked up words such as *Homosexuality* and come away simply feeling wicked. But such a brief or cursory search may not be enough. When troubled

with compulsive thoughts or behaviors, we may feel as if we are under attack or even in some kind of bondage. Looking up *Bondage, Spiritual* in the Topical Guide shows forty-three scripture references addressing this problem. Searching through, reading, and pondering the references under this topic may take awhile. Turning to the first actual reference, reading a few verses before, then reading the verses listed, and also a few verses after gives some context to the kinds of spiritual bondage mentioned in the scriptures. Using the Internet scriptures on <http://lds.org> can dramatically speed up the search, not to mention actually generate a change in our computer habits.

Just reading and pondering scripture like this may result in a spiritual power that can help against the temptations one faces during the day. Perhaps the words that are read may speak directly to the soul of those who are struggling. On other occasions, the Spirit can extend its influence while the scriptures or writings of Church leaders are read and contemplated; that causes one to see things (as well as oneself) in a different light. These spiritually enlightening moments can fill the mind and heart with such empowering faith and hope and love and appreciation that changes become possible and paralyzing powerlessness and hopelessness are put into a manageable perspective that perhaps may come no other way. Additional enlightenment may also come as one looks up topics that are opposites. If one can be strengthened by considering and laboring over a topic such as *Bondage, Spiritual*, then perhaps the prayerful looking up of an opposite theme such as *Power* or *Liberty* or *Freedom* or *Deliverance* would create spiritually useful counterpoints too. Have faith that deep and consistent (not necessarily long) scripture study can offer refreshing empowerment and hope and help one manage, cope with, or perhaps, in time, even overcome overwhelming temptation and difficulty.

Sometimes problems like unwanted same-sex attraction may be nested with other temptations or addictions such as pornography or masturbation. The compulsive reinforcement resulting from the frequency of participating in such events complicates the disturbance and can seem completely smothering and neutralizing.

Consistently using the teachings of Jesus Christ, as found in the Topical Guide and other Church resources such as the lds.org website or the *Ensign* magazine, serves as both a defense and an offense against these spiritually crippling, power-sapping problems.

Marshalling spiritual resources against human temptations and weaknesses strengthens one's power, one's capacity and resolve, and may ultimately be the *only* way some problems may be managed or overcome. Latter-day Saints enjoy a host of spiritual resources that can bring the teachings of Jesus Christ to bear on our difficulties.

Filling the Hole

One does not merely abandon temptation and unrighteous activities. Trying to do so leaves a huge hole in life. Jesus warned, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he [the evil spirit] saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Matthew 12:43–45).

Knowingly and wisely dedicating, even completely consecrating, oneself to the Lord and chastity not only fills voids and changes directions in life but ultimately extinguishes the natural-man tendency toward the selfishness, laziness, and the inherent rebellious streak that otherwise engender such deep and wicked problems in life. The proclamation on the family illustrates and reinforces the fact that we are not forced to follow our instincts "according to the management of the creature" (Alma 30:17).

Family

The power to conceive and bear children is perhaps as divine a power as can be given to mortals, who themselves are created in the divine image of God himself. To create a family is to exercise one of the key powers of godhood shared with mortals, which hints toward both our eternal heredity and destiny. Homes can be

places of power. The powers of peace, protection, and love found in the temple augment motherhood, fatherhood, childhood, and even priesthood, and are best practiced in the home. (A literal hood is a symbol of the power of knowledge when conferred with a higher college degree.) Real power is exercised in the home when kindness, comfort, and peace are maintained by family members who understand the plan of God and live by it.

Elder David A. Bednar spoke in the April 2009 general conference of the protection of temple covenants:

For many years Sister Bednar and I hosted faithful men and women as devotional speakers at Brigham Young University–Idaho. Many of these speakers were emeritus or released members of the Seventy who had served as temple presidents following their service as General Authorities. As we talked with these stalwart leaders, I always asked this question: “What have you learned as a temple president that you wish you had better understood when you were a General Authority?”

As I listened to their answers, I discovered a consistent theme that I would summarize as follows: “I have come to understand better the protection available through our temple covenants and what it means to make an acceptable offering of temple worship. There is a difference between church-attending, tithe-paying members who occasionally rush into the temple to go through a session and those members who faithfully and consistently worship in the temple.”

The similarity of their answers impressed me greatly. Each response to my question focused upon the protecting power of the ordinances and covenants available in the house of the Lord.¹⁸

The proclamation on the family issued by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles draws a line in the social and spiritual sands of religion. It is a bold declaration of what is right and what is wrong—what is good and what is evil—relative to the

exercise of human sexuality and the results of that use. Being a child of God means that we have been given the divine power to beget offspring. This power to create a family is the source of deep spiritual satisfaction in life. Just stop for a moment and consider how you feel about becoming a father or a mother. As a child of God, you have the capacity to be a wonderful parent. You have been given attributes and guidance to rear children in happiness and truth.

The opening paragraph of the proclamation says, “We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”¹⁹ Such a declaration ensures that the reader understands that the definition of a nuclear family means a man and a woman with children. It also makes clear that the family is viewed by Church leaders not as a social fabrication, but as a critical basic unit in the economy of God.

Latter-day Saints know that this and other references help in the deduction of several truths about God:

- God is a man.
- God is an exalted man.
- God is an exalted married man.
- God is an exalted married man with children.
- God is an exalted married man with numerous children.
- God wishes us to become like our exalted, married heavenly parents.

If the above is true, then it is a short distance to the conclusion that to be married and to become a parent is to practice godhood here in mortality by learning not only more about ourselves and life in general, but also about children, families, and our relationships with others.

It is clear that any other path will not lead to eternal happiness. (Remember, however, that the righteous who cannot have a family

in this life will be granted such in the next.) For all, it is an eternal goal to cling to. President Lorenzo Snow taught:

When two Latter-day Saints are united together in marriage, promises are made to them concerning their offspring, that reach from eternity to eternity. They are promised that they shall have the power and the right to govern and control and administer salvation and exaltation and glory to their offspring worlds without end. And what offspring they do not have here, undoubtedly there will be opportunities to have them hereafter. What else could man wish? A man and a woman in the other life, having celestial bodies, free from sickness and disease, glorified and beautified beyond description, standing in the midst of their posterity, governing and controlling them, administering life, exaltation, and glory, worlds without end.²⁰

Those who do have a family in mortality will find that becoming a mother or a father and nurturing children into responsible adulthood is one of the greatest endeavors in life. The rewards of selfless nurturing and teaching are not fully describable in words alone. Humans usually have no idea how much love they are capable of sharing with others until they have their own children and grandchildren.

Warm and welcoming friendships filled with humor and cleverness are wonderful. Having a meaningful and challenging career can be very fulfilling. Interesting hobbies where time is spent with fascinating diversion add much to life. But dedicating oneself to raising a family where parents love each other deeply and where children are welcomed with hope and love can produce a deep joy unlike any other.

Conclusion

We “*are gods; and all of [us] . . . children of the most High*” (Psalms 82:6; see also John 10:34). We need not be crippled or paralyzed or

neutralized by every “sin which doth so easily beset us” (Hebrews 12:1). We have access to the powers granted by the Father of us all to overcome this world and the challenges it presents. Faithfully fighting temptations rather than giving in to them develops strength and resolve, as well as compassion and understanding for others similarly tempted. Making and keeping sacred covenants with God brings additional power and strength to resist temptation and avoid transgression. Giving in to our temptations brings transgression and powerlessness. Hopelessness and discouragement can then often lead to rebellion and hatred. That is where Lucifer landed when his proposals were not accepted in the premortal life. Misery has become his goal and objective. For us, choosing, whether subtly or overtly, any other path than faith, repentance, ordinances, and covenants, ultimately leads to deep misery and unhappiness. Following the plan of our Heavenly Father leads to the enjoyment of an ultimate happiness and the eternal powers that come with it.

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Notes

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102; emphasis added.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. 5:134.
4. John H. Vandenberg, "Becoming a Somebody," *Ensign*, January 1973, 38.
5. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World"; emphasis added.
6. See Kevin W. Pearson, "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, May 2009, 38–40.
7. *Ibid.*, 38; see also *LDS Bible Dictionary*, 670, s.v. faith.
8. David A. Bednar, "Ask in Faith," *Ensign*, May 2008, 94; citing Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 3; see also Hebrews 12:2; Moroni 6:4.
9. A. Theodore Tuttle, "A Prophet's Faith," *Ensign*, November 1975, 23; citing Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*.
10. Richard G. Scott, "The Power of a Strong Testimony," *Ensign*, November 2001, 87.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Pearson, "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," 38.
13. Richard G. Scott, "The Sustaining Power of Faith in Times of Uncertainty and Testing," *Ensign*, May 2003, 75.
14. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 222; emphasis added.
15. See Matthew 19:8; Mark 3:5; 10:5; 16:4; Romans 2:5; 1 Nephi 2:18; 7:8; 14:7; 15:3, 4, 10; 17:19, 46; 2 Nephi 1:17; 25:12; Jacob 1:15; Jarom 1:3; Mosiah 13:32; Alma 13:4; 14:11; 21:3; 22:22; 30:29, 46; 33:20; 35:15; Helaman 6:35; 13:8; 3 Nephi 2:1; 7:16; Mormon 1:17; 3:12; Ether 4:15; 15:19; Moroni 9:10; Moses 6:27.
16. See Acts 5:39; 23:9; 1 Nephi 14:13; 2 Nephi 6:12; 2 Nephi 10:13, 16; 25:14; 29:14; Moroni 7:12; D&C 121:38; Moses 7:15.

17. See Mosiah 16:3; Alma 42:10; Moses 5:13; 6:49.
18. David A. Bednar, "Honorably Hold a Name and Standing," *Ensign*, May 2009, 99.
19. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World."
20. *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, 138.

CHAPTER 3

No Struggle for Which the Atonement Is Not Sufficient

Statements from the General Authorities

Compiled by Doris R. Dant, MS, MA

The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality. —Dallin H. Oaks (“He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 8, italics added)

For some reason, we think the Atonement of Christ applies only at the end of mortal life to redemption from the Fall, from spiritual death. It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life. When we are racked or harrowed up or tormented by guilt or burdened with grief, He can heal us. While we do not fully understand how the Atonement of Christ was made, we can experience “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” . . .

The Atonement has practical, personal, everyday value; apply it in your life. It can be activated with so simple a beginning as prayer. You will not thereafter be free from trouble and mistakes but can erase the guilt through repentance and be at peace. —Boyd K. Packer (“The Touch of the Master’s Hand,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 23–24)

When we apply the Atonement to our lives, its healing, cleansing influence can permeate every struggle and sorrow. This is true

for all individuals, no matter what their thoughts and behaviors. Unfortunately, some people believe the Atonement cannot apply to them because they are too steeped in sin or because they cannot comprehend how God can possibly love them. Others have a limited view of the Atonement that prevents them from appealing for divine aid with *all* their burdens. As a result, they endure an uneasy truce with themselves or enjoy no peace at all.

Knowing of God's love for all of his children, no matter what their trials and temptations, the General Authorities have testified of the Atonement's power hundreds of times. From these testimonies, eight core concepts have been distilled. This chapter is organized around those concepts:

- The Atonement is available to each of us.
- Repentance and forgiveness of past sins are made possible through the Atonement.
- The Atonement provides help with ongoing temptations and limitations.
- The suffering will be succored.
- When we lay claim upon the Atonement, we can forgive ourselves.
- The Atonement enables us to forgive others.
- Healing through the Atonement comes in a variety of ways.
- The Atonement can take us from repentance to perfection.

The section for each concept begins with one or more general quotations. Then subheadings guide you through key statements from the General Authorities.

The Atonement Is Available to Each of Us

Is it possible to reclaim a life that through reckless abandon has become so strewn with garbage that it appears that the person is unforgivable? Or what about the one who is making an honest effort but has fallen back into sin so many times that he feels that there is no possible way to break the seemingly endless pattern?

Or what about the person who has changed his life but just can't forgive himself?

. . . The Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to each of us; His Atonement is infinite. It applies to everyone, even you. It can clean, reclaim, and sanctify even you. That is what infinite means—total, complete, all, forever. (Shayne M. Bowen, “The Atonement Can Clean, Reclaim, and Sanctify Our Lives,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 33–34.)

When we habitually understate the Atonement's broad meaning, we do more harm than leaving one another without comforting reassurances—for some may simply drop out of the race, weighed down beyond the breaking point with self-doubt and spiritual fatigue. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 8.)

Christ . . . is so eager for our return that He comes to meet and strengthen us all along our way. Nephi wrote, “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” Christ's running to us is a vivid symbol of that grace. We talk often in the Church about coming to Christ. Perhaps we should talk more about how Christ also comes to us. No matter where we are on that path, we are never lost to Him. We often sing “Who's on the Lord's side? Who?” Let us also sing “Be still, my soul: The Lord is on *thy side*.” We never have more value in the Lord's sight than when we are feeling completely worthless. (Bruce C. Hafen, “A Disciple's Journey,” *BYU Devotional*, Provo, Utah, February 5, 2008, p. 2.)

You are not born to a life of no escape. The angels of the devil convince some that they are born to a life from which they cannot escape and are compelled to live in sin. The most wicked of lies is that they cannot change and repent and that they will not be forgiven. That cannot be true. They have forgotten the Atonement of Christ. . . .

Christ is the Creator, the Healer. What He made, He can fix. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of repentance and

forgiveness (see 2 Ne. 1:13; 9:45; Jacob 3:11; Alma 26:13–14; Moro. 7:17–19).

“Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). (Boyd K. Packer, “I Will Remember Your Sins No More,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 28.)

The deceiver preys upon some passion or tendency or weakness. He convinces them that the condition cannot be changed and recruits them for activities for which they never would volunteer.

But sooner or later that spark of divinity in each of them will ignite. They can assert their agency as sons and daughters created in the image of God and renounce the destroyer. That which they had been led to believe could not be changed, will be changed, and they will feel the power of the redemption of Christ. Their burden will be lifted and the pain healed up. That is what the Atonement of Christ is all about.

They can claim their inheritance as children of heavenly parents and, despite the tortured, agonizing test of mortal life, know that they are not lost. (Boyd K. Packer, “The Standard of Truth Has Been Erected,” *Ensign*, November 2003, 25–26.)

Christ’s Atonement was about individuals, not an impersonal mass of sin. For many years I thought of the Savior’s experience in the garden and on the cross as places where a large mass of sin was heaped upon Him. Through the words of Alma, Abinadi, Isaiah, and other prophets, however, my view has changed. Instead of an impersonal mass of sin, there was a long line of people, as Jesus felt “our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15), “[bore] our griefs, . . . carried our sorrows . . . [and] was bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:4–5).

The Atonement was an intimate, personal experience in which Jesus came to know how to help each of us.

The Pearl of Great Price teaches that Moses was shown all the inhabitants of the earth, which were “numberless as the sand upon the sea shore” (Moses 1:28). If Moses beheld every soul, then it seems reasonable that the Creator of the universe has the power to become intimately acquainted with each of us. He learned about

your weaknesses and mine. He experienced your pains and sufferings. He experienced mine. I testify that He knows us. He understands the way in which we deal with temptations. He knows our weaknesses. But more than that, more than just knowing us, He knows how to help us if we come to Him in faith. (Merrill J. Bateman, "A Pattern for All," *Ensign*, November 2005, 75–76.)

Through the Atonement you can know that God loves you. Satan will strive to alienate you from your Father in Heaven with the thought that if He loved you He would have prevented the tragedy. Do not be kept from the very source of true healing by the craftiness of the prince of evil and his wicked lies. Recognize that if you have feelings that you are not loved by your Father in Heaven, you are being manipulated by Satan. Even when it may seem very difficult to pray, kneel and ask Father in Heaven to give you the capacity to trust Him and to feel His love for you. Ask to come to know that His Son can heal you through His merciful Atonement. (Richard G. Scott, "To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 2008, 41.)

Not only is the Atonement the grand expression of Heavenly Father and Jesus' love for us, but through it we can come to know of Their personal love for us. (Neal A. Maxwell, "Testifying of the Great and Glorious Atonement," *Ensign*, October 2001, 15.)

The Atonement offers hope to all. Another affirmative endowment of grace is the gift of *hope*, which blesses us with the state of mind necessary to deal with the gap between where we are and where we seek to be. As the remission of our sins makes us lowly of heart and meek enough to receive the Holy Ghost, the Comforter fills us with "hope" (see Moro. 8:25–26). The gift of hope offers peace and perspective, like the encouragement we feel when a close friend gives us insight about a difficult problem and we sense that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Such hope can be literally life-sustaining when given us by the Savior, for the light at the end of life's darkest tunnels is the Light and the Life of the

world. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 13.)

With reference to our mortal acts and the Atonement, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. contributed this valuable insight when he said:

“I feel that [the Savior] will give that punishment which is the very least that our transgression will justify. I believe that he will bring into his justice all of the infinite love and blessing and mercy and kindness and understanding which he has. . . .

“And on the other hand, I believe that when it comes to making the rewards for our good conduct, he will give us the maximum that it is possible to give, having in mind the offense which we have committed.” (James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 19.)

You have a choice. [This] may be a struggle from which you will not be free in this life. If you do not act on temptations, you need feel no guilt. They may be extremely difficult to resist. . . .

Now, what of you who have already made mistakes or have lost yourselves to an immoral lifestyle? What hope do you have? Are you cast off and lost forever?

These are not unforgivable sins. However unworthy or unnatural or immoral these transgressions may be, they are not unforgivable (see D&C 42:25). When completely forsaken and fully repented of, there can open the purifying gift of forgiveness, and the burden of guilt will be erased. There is a way back—long, perhaps; hard, certainly; possible, of course! (see Acts 5:31; Eph. 1:7; Mosiah 4:2; 26:29; D&C 1:31–32; 58:42; 61:2).

You need not, you cannot find your way alone. You have a Redeemer. The Lord will lift your burden if you choose to repent and turn from your sins and do them no more. That is what the Atonement of Christ was for.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

The choice rests with you; you are not cast off forever. I repeat, these transgressions are not unforgivable. (Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 74.)

Humbly I lay claim upon the atonement of Christ. I find no shame in kneeling down in worship of our Father and His son. For *agency* is mine, and this I *choose* to do! (Boyd K. Packer, “Atonement, Agency, Accountability,” *Ensign*, May 1988, 72.)

As an act of will, we must take the first step that initiates our journey. . . . God Himself cannot and would not force us to take that step. (Bruce C. Hafen, “A Disciple’s Journey,” BYU Devotional, Provo, Utah, February 5, 2008, p. 2.)

Repentance and Forgiveness of Past Sins Are Made Possible through the Atonement

We must change anything we can change that may be part of the problem. In short we must repent, perhaps the most hopeful and encouraging word in the Christian vocabulary. We thank our Father in Heaven we are *allowed* to change, we thank Jesus we *can* change, and ultimately we do so only with Their divine assistance. Certainly not everything we struggle with is a result of our actions. Often it is the result of the actions of others or just the mortal events of life. But anything *we* can change we *should* change, and we must forgive the rest. In this way our access to the Savior’s Atonement becomes as unimpeded as we, with our imperfections, can make it. He will take it from there. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 70.)

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Savior does not redeem men *in* their sins: “The wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death” (Alma 11:41). The Savior came to redeem men *from* their sins upon the conditions of repentance (see Helaman 5:11). (Dallin H. Oaks, “The Atonement and Faith,” *Liahona*, April 2008, 11.)

I testify that of all the necessary steps to repentance, the most critically important is for you to have a conviction that forgiveness comes in and through Jesus Christ. It is essential to know that only on His terms can you be forgiven. (Richard G. Scott, “Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 17.)

The Atonement applies to all situations but one. I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the Atonement of Christ. (Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *New Era*, April 2005, 7.)

Some think that God created them with overpowering, unnatural desires, that they are trapped and not responsible (see James 1:13–15). That is not true. It cannot be true. Even if they were to accept it as true, they must remember that He can cure and He can heal (see Alma 7:10–13; 15:8). (Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 74.)

[Paul wrote:] “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Here is [a] . . . statement . . . [that] is true! Certainly, the kingdom cannot be populated with such men as Paul had found in the Church branches where he worked. It could hardly be glory and honor and power and joy if the eternal kingdom were made up of . . . such people. But Paul’s next thought is comforting as well as clarifying:

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

This is the great secret. Some of those who inherit the kingdom may have committed such grievous sins but are no longer in

those categories. They are *no longer unclean*, having been washed, sanctified and justified. Paul's hearers had been in those despicable categories, but having now received the gospel with its purifying, transforming powers they were changed. The cleansing process had been applied and they were washed clean and had become eligible for the first resurrection and for exaltation in God's kingdom. (Spencer W. Kimball, "God Will Forgive," *Ensign*, March 1982, 21; an edited version of "God Will Forgive," *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, chapter 22 pp. 351–352.)

There is not a point of no return. Satan, "the father of all lies" (2 Nephi 2:18), "the father of contention" (3 Nephi 11:29), "the author of all sin" (Helaman 6:30), and the "enemy unto God" (Moroni 7:12), uses the forces of evil to convince us that this concept [there is a point of no return] applies whenever we have sinned. The scriptures call him the "accuser" because he wants us to feel that we are beyond forgiveness (see Revelation 12:10). Satan wants us to think that when we have sinned we have gone past a "point of no return"—that it is too late to change our course. In our beautiful but also troubled world, it is a sad reality that this attitude is the source of great sorrow, grief, and distress to families, marriages, and individual lives. . . .

Christ came to save us. If we have taken a wrong course, the Atonement of Jesus Christ can give us the assurance that sin is *not* a point of no return. A safe return is possible if we will follow God's plan for our salvation. (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Point of Safe Return," *Ensign*, May 2007, 99.)

Sometimes a guilty consciousness overpowers a person with such a heaviness that when a repentant one looks back and sees the ugliness, the loathsomeness of the transgression, he is almost overwhelmed and wonders, "Can the Lord ever forgive me? Can I ever forgive myself?" But when one reaches the depths of despondency and feels the hopelessness of his position, and when he cries out to God for mercy in helplessness but in faith, there comes a still, small, but penetrating voice whispering to his soul, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

The image of a loving, forgiving God comes through clearly to those who read and understand the scriptures. Since he is our Father, he naturally desires to raise us up, not to push us down, to help us live, not to bring about our spiritual death. “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,” he has said, “. . . wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” (Ezek. 18:32.) (Spencer W. Kimball, “God Will Forgive,” *Ensign*, March 1982, 21; an edited version of “God Will Forgive,” *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, chapter 22 p. 344.)

I have seen some who have spent a long winter of guilt and spiritual starvation emerge into the morning of forgiveness. (Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *New Era*, April 2005, 4.)

One may think, *It is too late, my life will soon be over, and I am eternally doomed.* Not so, for “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19).

Just as the physical body can be cleansed and healed, so can the spirit be washed clean by the power of the Atonement. The Lord will lift you and carry your burden during the suffering and struggle required to make you clean. That is what the Atonement of Christ is all about. He said, “I, the Lord, [will] remember [your sins] no more” (D&C 58:42; see also Heb. 8:12; 10:17; Alma 36:19). (Boyd K. Packer, “‘Ye Are the Temple of God,’” *Ensign*, November 2000, 74.)

The Atonement helps with addictions. Some addictions can control us to the point where they take away our God-given agency. One of Satan’s great tools is to find ways to control us. Consequently, we should abstain from anything that would keep us from fulfilling the Lord’s purposes for us, whereby the blessings of eternity may hang in jeopardy. We are in this life for the spirit to gain control over the body rather than the other way around.

. . . Addictions are offensive to the Spirit. While some addictions require professional clinical help, let us not overlook the

spiritual help available to us through priesthood blessings and through prayer. The Lord has promised us, “My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27). Let us remember that the power to change is very real, and it is a great spiritual gift from God. (James E. Faust, “The Power to Change,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 124.)

Repentance blesses our lives. True repentance blesses our lives with the effects of the Atonement: we feel God’s forgiveness and His peace, and our guilt and sorrow are lifted away; we enjoy the influence of the Spirit in greater abundance; and we are better prepared to live with our Heavenly Father. (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 100.)

I readily confess that I would find no peace, neither happiness nor safety, in a world without repentance. I do not know what I should do if there were no way for me to erase my mistakes. The agony would be more than I could bear. It may be otherwise with you, but not with me. (Boyd K. Packer, “Who Is Jesus Christ?” *Ensign*, March 2008, 18.)

The Atonement Provides Help with Ongoing Temptations and Limitations

[Christ] will . . . lift us up, not only at the end of life, but in each day of our lives. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 13.)

God will cast out Satan. As soon as you start moving toward the light, the gravitational pull of darkness will immediately try to jerk you back, “for Satan desireth to have you.” He will tempt, frighten, and fight you.

Satan may rattle us, but he cannot overcome us, for God can cast him from our presence. (Bruce C. Hafen, “A Disciple’s Journey,” *BYU Devotional*, Provo, Utah, February 5, 2008, p. 3.)

Trust in heaven's promises. Are you battling a demon of addiction—tobacco or drugs or gambling, or the pernicious contemporary plague of pornography? Is your marriage in trouble . . . ? Are you confused with gender identity or searching for self-esteem? Do you—or someone you love—face disease or depression or death? Whatever other steps you may need to take to resolve these concerns, come *first* to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Trust in heaven's promises. In that regard Alma's testimony is my testimony: "I do know," he says, "that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions." (Jeffrey R. Holland, "Broken Things to Mend," *Ensign*, May 2006, 70.)

Transgression brings pain and sorrow. But there is a way out of "the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity" (Mosiah 27:29). If we will turn to the Lord and believe on His name, we can change. He will give us the power to change our lives, the power to put away bad thoughts and feelings from our hearts. We can be taken from "the darkest abyss" to "behold the marvelous light of God" (Mosiah 27:29). We can be forgiven. We can find peace. (James E. Faust, "The Power to Change," *Ensign*, November 2007, 123.)

Increased awareness of weakness means we have moved closer to Christ. Is it possible that the closer we come to Christ, the more aware we will be of what we yet need to do? Yes, for He said, "*If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness [and] if they humble themselves before me . . . , then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*" So if we are becoming more aware of our weaknesses, that doesn't mean we are drifting away from Him; it may well mean that we are drawing closer. Like a good coach, a good tutor will always help his students see their mistakes and correct them. When we understand that, correction is motivating, not discouraging. For because of the Atonement, we can learn from our mistakes without being condemned by them. (Bruce C. Hafen, "A Disciple's Journey," *BYU Devotional*, Provo, Utah, February 5, 2008, p. 5.)

The Atonement compensates for our limitations. [Christ] is not only aware of our limitations, but that he will also in due course compensate for them, “after all we can do.” That, in addition to forgiveness for sin, is a crucial part of the good news of the gospel, part of the victory, part of the Atonement. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 8.)

Don’t give up. The soul that comes unto Christ, who knows His voice and strives to do as He did, finds a strength, as the hymn says, “beyond [his] own.” The Savior reminds us that He has “graven [us] upon the palms of [His] hands.” Considering the incomprehensible cost of the Crucifixion and Atonement, I promise you He is not going to turn His back on us now. When He says to the poor in spirit, “Come unto me,” He means He knows the way out and He knows the way up. He knows it because He has walked it. He knows the way because He *is* the way.

Brothers and sisters, whatever your distress, *please* don’t give up. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 71.)

The Suffering Will Be Succored

Christ’s love is so deep that He took upon Himself the sins and afflictions of all mankind. Only in that way could He both pay for our sins and empathize with us enough to truly succor us—that is, run to us—with so much empathy that we can have complete confidence that He fully understands our sorrows. (Bruce C. Hafen, “A Disciple’s Journey,” *BYU Devotional*, Provo, Utah, February 5, 2008, p. 6.)

Through his own experience, Christ knows how to succor us. Through this suffering, Jesus redeemed the souls of all men, women, and children “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” In doing so,

Christ “descended below all things”—including every kind of sickness, infirmity, and dark despair experienced by every mortal being—in order that He might “comprehend all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, March 2008, 37.)

The Savior will succor the injured. The injured should do what they can to work through their trials, and the Savior will “succor his people according to their infirmities.” He will help us carry our burdens. Some injuries are so hurtful and deep that they cannot be healed without help from a higher power and hope for perfect justice and restitution in the next life. . . . He understands our pain and will walk with us even in our darkest hours. (James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 20.)

In our times of extremity, the Lord’s efforts never cease. Perhaps you know . . . courageous people who are carrying heavy burdens and feeling private pain, who are walking through the dark valleys of this world’s tribulation.

. . . They feel near the end of their strength—they are tired in brain and body and heart, they wonder if they can get through another week or another day or sometimes just another hour. They are desperate for the Lord’s help and they know that in such times of extremity nothing else will do.

Well, at least one of the purposes of . . . the teachings of the prophets down through the ages is to declare to these very people that the Lord is equally fervent in trying to reach them, that when there is trouble His hopes and His striving and His efforts greatly exceed our own and it never ceases.

We have been promised, “He that keepeth [us] will not slumber, . . . nor [will he] sleep.” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 83.)

When We Lay Claim upon the Atonement, We Can Forgive Ourselves

So many live with accusing guilt when relief is ever at hand. So many are like the immigrant woman who skimped and saved and deprived herself until, by selling all of her possessions, she bought a steerage-class ticket to America.

She rationed out the meager provisions she was able to bring with her. Even so, they were gone early in the voyage. When others went for their meals, she stayed below deck—determined to suffer through it. Finally, on the last day, she must, she thought, afford one meal to give her strength for the journey yet ahead. When she asked what the meal would cost, she was told that all of the meals had been included in the price of her ticket. (Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *New Era*, April 2005, 7–8.)

Forgiving ourselves may be the most difficult part of repentance. Often the most difficult part of repentance is to forgive yourself. Discouragement is part of that test. Do not give up. That brilliant morning will come.

Then “the peace of God, which passeth . . . understanding” comes into your life once again (Philip. 4:7). Then you, like Him, will remember your sins no more. How will you know? You will know! (See Mosiah 4:1–3.) (Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *New Era*, April 2005, 8.)

Satan encourages continuing guilt. To continue to suffer when there has been proper repentance is not prompted by the Savior but the master of deceit, whose goal is to bind and enslave you. Satan will press you to continue to relive the details of past mistakes, knowing that such thoughts make forgiveness seem unattainable. In this way Satan attempts to tie strings to the mind and body so that he can manipulate you like a puppet. (Richard G. Scott, “Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 18.)

Satan will try to make us believe that our sins are not forgiven because we can remember them. Satan is a liar; he tries to blur our vision and lead us away from the path of repentance and forgiveness. God did not promise that we would not remember our sins. Remembering will help us avoid making the same mistakes again. But if we stay true and faithful, the memory of our sins will be softened over time. (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 101.)

Continuing to suffer for repented sins denies the efficacy of the Atonement. Now if you are one who cannot forgive yourself for serious past transgressions—even when a judge in Israel has assured that you have properly repented—if you feel compelled to continually condemn yourself and suffer by frequently recalling the details of past errors, I plead with all of my soul that you ponder this statement of the Savior:

“He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

“By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins— . . . he will confess them and forsake them.” (D&C 58:42–43)

. . . I testify that when a bishop or stake president has confirmed that your repentance is sufficient, know that your obedience has allowed the Atonement of Jesus Christ to satisfy the demands of justice for the laws you have broken. Therefore you are now free. Please believe it. To continually suffer the distressing effects of sin after adequate repentance, while not intended, is to deny the efficacy of the Savior’s Atonement in your behalf. (Richard G. Scott, “Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 17–18.)

Turn your thoughts to the Redeemer. For all who are obedient to His teachings . . . the distressing effects of sin need no longer persist in one’s life. Indeed, they cannot persist if one truly understands the meaning of Christ’s Atonement. Alma conquered thoughts of past unworthiness by remembering the mercy of the Redeemer. He marveled, “Behold, he did not exercise his justice

upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us . . . the salvation of our souls.”

When memory of past mistakes encroaches upon your mind, turn your thoughts to the Redeemer and to the miracle of forgiveness with the renewal that comes through Him. Your depression and suffering will be replaced by peace, joy, and gratitude for His love. (Richard G. Scott, “The Path to Peace and Joy,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 26.)

The Atonement Enables Us to Forgive Others

The goal of the great plan of happiness is to become like Christ so that we may someday dwell in his presence and in the presence of our Heavenly Father. An unforgiving and vengeful heart is unholy, as is the heart of an adulterer or someone addicted to pornography. Any inability we might have to forgive others becomes a barrier between us and the Savior. If we are to become like him, we must freely forgive others as he has forgiven us (see 3 Nephi 13:11; D&C 64:10). (Spencer J. Condie, “The Fall and Infinite Atonement,” *Ensign*, January 1996, 27.)

We must forgive to be forgiven. The Savior has made it clear that to receive forgiveness you must forgive others their offenses against you.

“I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

“And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.” (D&C 64:10–11)

“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

“But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25–26)

If as an innocent victim you have been seriously wronged, don’t harbor feelings of hatred, anger at what appears to be unjust. Forgive the offender even when you are innocent. To do that may

require an enormous effort on your part. Such forgiveness is most difficult, but it is the sure path to peace and healing. (Richard G. Scott, “Peace of Conscience and Peace of Mind,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 16–17.)

Forgiving others is the essence of the Atonement. Closely related to our own obligation to repent is the generosity of letting others do the same—we are to forgive even as we are forgiven. In this we participate in the very essence of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Surely the most majestic moment of that fateful Friday, when nature convulsed and the veil of the temple was rent, was that unspeakably merciful moment when Christ said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” As our advocate with the Father, He is still making that same plea today—in your behalf and in mine.

Here, as in all things, Jesus set the standard for us to follow. Life is too short to be spent nursing animosities or in keeping a box score of offenses against us—you know—no runs, no hits, all errors. We don’t want God to remember our sins, so there is something fundamentally wrong in our relentlessly trying to remember those of others. (Jeffrey R. Holland, ““The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom,”” *Ensign*, November 1996, 83.)

If you pray, you will be given strength to forgive. “And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor’s trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation” (Mosiah 26:30–31). . . .

But where do we acquire the spiritual and emotional strength to forgive those who have offended us and sinned against us? Mormon provides the prescription: “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love . . . ; that when [Christ] shall appear we shall be like him . . . ; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moro. 7:48). (Spencer J. Condie, “The Fall and Infinite Atonement,” *Ensign*, January 1996, 27.)

Forgiveness of others may take time. As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser and even have feelings of sorrow for him or her. When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heartache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser. As a result, you will enjoy greater peace. While an important part of healing, if the thought of forgiveness causes you yet more pain, set that step aside until you have more experience with the Savior's healing power in your own life. (Richard G. Scott, "To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 2008, 42.)

Forgiving others helps us to heal. When we have been hurt, undoubtedly God takes into account what wrongs were done to us and what provocations there are for our resentments, but clearly the more provocation there is and the more excuse we can find for our hurt, all the more reason for us to forgive and be delivered from the destructive hell of such poisonous venom and anger. It is one of those ironies of godhood that in order to find peace, the offended as well as the offender must engage the principle of forgiveness. (Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom," *Ensign*, November 1996, 83.)

The Atonement not only benefits the sinner but also benefits those sinned against—that is, the victims. By forgiving "those who trespass against us" (JST, Matt. 6:13) the Atonement brings a measure of peace and comfort to those who have been innocently victimized by the sins of others. The basic source for the healing of the soul is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. (James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *Ensign*, November 2001, 20.)

Complete healing will come through your faith in Jesus Christ and His power and capacity, through His Atonement, to heal the scars of that which is unjust and undeserved. (Richard G. Scott, "To Be Free of Heavy Burdens," *Ensign*, November 2002, 88.)

Healing through the Atonement Comes in a Variety of Ways

Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a “healing” cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are “healed” by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us.

The people who followed Alma were in bondage to wicked oppressors. When they prayed for relief, the Lord told them He would deliver them eventually, but in the meantime He would ease their burdens “that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses . . . that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions” (Mosiah 24:14). In that case the people did not have their burdens removed, but the Lord strengthened them so that “they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (v. 15). . . .

At times we may despair that our burdens are too great. When it seems that a tempest is raging in our lives, we may feel abandoned and cry out like the disciples in the storm, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). At such times we should remember His reply: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (v. 40). . . .

The Atonement of Jesus Christ and the healing it offers do much more than provide the opportunity for repentance from sins. The Atonement also gives us the strength to endure “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind,” because our Savior also took upon Him “the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11). Brothers and sisters, if your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden. (Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 7–9.)

The Atonement Can Take Us from Repentance to Perfection

Through the Holy Ghost, the Atonement makes possible certain spiritual endowments that actually purify our nature and enable us to live a more “eternal” or Godlike life. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 12.)

We must put off the natural man and become saints. Mercy and repentance are rehabilitative, not retributive. The Savior asks us to repent not just to repay him for paying our debt to justice, but also to induce us to undergo the personal development that will purify our very nature. The “natural man” will remain an enemy to God forever—even after paying for his own sins—unless he also “becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.” (Mosiah 3:19.) (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 9.)

Let me suggest that hands are made clean through the process of putting off the natural man and by overcoming sin and the evil influences in our lives through the Savior’s Atonement. Hearts are purified as we receive His strengthening power to do good and become better. All of our worthy desires and good works, as necessary as they are, can never produce clean hands and a pure heart. It is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that provides both a *cleansing and redeeming power* that helps us to overcome sin and a *sanctifying and strengthening power* that helps us to become better than we ever could by relying only upon our own strength. The infinite Atonement is for both the sinner and for the saint in each of us. (David A. Bednar, “Clean Hands and a Pure Heart,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 82.)

Through grace, we gain a divine nature. Our relationship with [Christ] can mirror his relationship with the Father: “For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and *be glorified in me as I am in the Father*; [thus] *you shall receive grace for grace.*” (D&C 93:19–20; italics added.)

. . . Just as the sinless Christ was “made perfect” through interaction with his Father’s grace, so his atoning grace can move us beyond the remission of sins to the perfection of a divine nature. (Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 12.)

Thus, the enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity. I testify and witness that the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement is real. Without that strengthening power of the Atonement, I could not stand before you this morning. (David A. Bednar, “In the Strength of the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 77.)

Because of the Atonement, our “almost” will be enough. Even when we utterly spend ourselves, we lack the power to create the perfection only God can complete. Our *all* by itself is still only *almost* enough—until it is finished by the *all* of Him who is the “finisher of our faith” [Heb. 12:2; Moro. 6:4]. At that point, our imperfect but consecrated *almost* is enough. (Bruce C. Hafen, “The Atonement: All for All,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 98–99.)

Conclusion

The overwhelming message of the Atonement is the perfect love the Savior has for each and all of us. It is a love which is full of mercy, patience, grace, equity, long-suffering, and, above all, forgiving. (James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 20.)

About the Compiler

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CHAPTER 4

The Sustaining Power of Faith in the Mortal Trial of Same-Sex Attraction

Marleen S. Williams, PhD

The challenges of mortal life can have very different meanings depending on whether we use a mortal perspective or an eternal perspective to explain and understand them. Using the eternal perspective would be easier if we had a complete understanding of all that God does. But by design, we are limited in our understanding and memory of premortal experiences, conditions, and covenants. The future world of eternity is also not directly accessible to our full understanding. We must exercise faith in order to understand mortal challenges from an eternal perspective.

Faith can sustain us through trials, temptations, and sin even though we don't have all the answers. Faith helps us replace false beliefs with the truth. It helps us humbly accept the will of God as He works with us to turn our weaknesses into strengths. The source of this help is Christ, "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Faith Must Be Built upon Knowledge of God's Nature

Because of the failings in our own human natures, faith would be impossible if we did not understand the true character of God. It could be easy to assume that God's nature is similar to worldly

models of power and authority. But too often those worldly examples have included abuse or unrighteous use of power. It is very difficult to have faith in—to trust—someone we fear may be erratic, angry, and punitive. Fortunately, Joseph Smith, who had personal experience with the nature of God, taught that God is just the opposite; He is long-suffering, slow to anger, full of compassion, gracious and merciful, and of a forgiving disposition.

The Prophet also taught that God is unchangeable and is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We can have faith that God will do what He says because He cannot lie or deceive us. Joseph Smith assures us that it is safe to trust a God who possesses perfect love for all of His children. He is not a respecter of persons, meaning that He does not love one child above another. He does not suspend eternal laws for some and not for others; those who desire eternal life must all enter through the same gate.¹ If we believed that He is capricious, unfair, or unloving it would be difficult to trust Him, draw close to Him, and exercise sufficient faith for our salvation. When we come to understand His character, it is easier to overcome doubt and place our faith in Him.

Through Faith, We Fulfill Our Mortal Missions Even Without All the Answers

God does not reveal all things to us in mortality. There is much that we do not know concerning why we each have our specific trials and struggles in mortality. Because we do not have the answers to all questions, faith in what *has* been revealed becomes even more important.

Often our faith is tested to see if we will continue to “hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21). Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and many others were beloved of God yet were still asked to remain faithful through difficult experiences. Through great faith, they were able to complete their challenging mortal missions even when they did not have full answers and resolutions to all that they desired to know and do while in mortality. Paul teaches us that they “all died in faith, not having received the

promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded by *them*, and embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Like these great men and women, we can still have faith even when we do not know all the answers to our personal struggles and questions. We can continue to believe in promises that are seen afar off.

Mortality not only leaves us with unanswered questions, it may also deny us earned blessings and thus appear unfair. This can be especially painful for those who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions and yet strive to keep God’s commandments. For some, it is possible to still find heterosexual attractions that lead to a successful marriage. With time, unwanted attractions may diminish. For others, this may not be possible in mortality. For various reasons, many faithful members of the Church do not find an eternal companion in mortality. They may greatly desire to do so yet despite sincere efforts find that goal unavailable in mortality.

Because certain blessings may be postponed, we must have faith that a compassionate Father in Heaven loves each of His children and that the promised eternal blessings will eventually come to all who desire them with a sincere heart and continue worthy to receive them. We have further counsel on this from latter-day leaders: “Not all problems are overcome and not all necessary relationships are fixed in mortality. The work of salvation goes on beyond the veil of death, and we should not be too apprehensive about incompleteness within the limits of mortality.”²

Mortality is only a small part of our eternal story. Because we cannot see our premortal or postmortal experiences, mortality requires great faith. Like those great examples from scriptural stories, however, we can trust that a loving God has an eternal plan for our personal happiness and exaltation.

The Veil, the Fall, and the Atonement— All Require Faith in Christ

The sorrows and seeming unfairness of mortality can begin to make sense only in the context of the plan of salvation. The Fall of

Adam brought not only death into the world but also bodies that were subject to affliction and dysfunction. As mortal descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherit all of the effects of the Fall. None of us are exempt (1 Corinthians 15:22) from opposition, temptation, bodily imperfections, and all of the struggles of mortality. These imperfections and struggles can include unwanted sexual attractions.

Because of our mortal condition, we could overcome the effects of the Fall only through an Atonement made by one worthy to rescue us from our mortal sins and imperfections. The Fall made the Atonement necessary, but it also allowed us to enter the great preparatory school called mortality.

We learned the purposes of both the Fall and the Atonement while in premortality. Even before we were born, we received our first lessons and were prepared to come forth in mortality to do God's work (see D&C 138:56). We were to learn from our mortal experiences and be tried and tested to see if we would be obedient while separated from God and our heavenly home (see Abraham 3:25). Mortality would be a time of instruction and growth (see 2 Nephi 33:9; Alma 42:9; Mormon 9:28).

The Fall and the Atonement, however, were both parts of a loving plan designed for our joy (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25). Both were agreed upon in premortality. We shouted for joy at the chance to continue our progression through a mortal experience (see Job 38:7). We agreed to accept the imperfect conditions because we trusted the perfect love of Christ and the power of His Atonement. We knew there was a way to return home.

This plan also meant that a veil was drawn over our memory when we entered mortality. We do not personally remember all that we were and covenanted to become in that premortal council. We may not remember our joy as we anticipated mortality. Our mortal memories have forgotten our former glory as sons and daughters of God, our Father. This condition of mortality requires that we exercise faith in God and His revealed word concerning the Atonement and its power to sustain us through the struggles of mortality.

Without Faith We May Look for Love in the Wrong Places

Separated from God by the Fall, we may forget the love we experienced in premortality. We long to reexperience this love but may forget its true source. It is our divine nature to seek for love. Without faith, however, we may look for fulfillment of our longing for love through sources that may lead us away from that which we desire most. In our loneliness and longing, it may be easy to settle for temporary relief rather than have faith in the eternal promises of fulfillment. Without faith, mortality may be all that is seen and may appear to be the only chance at happiness. Mortal eyes may lose sight of how the love of God influenced His plan for each of us individually. If we lose sight of eternity, it is easier to err while looking for love.

Mortality's Hardest Trials Require Redemptive Faith

Alma taught that faith can be nurtured and cultivated. He compared the knowledge of the revealed word of God to a seed. If it is cared for, nurtured, and acted upon, it begins to grow. The more we exercise faith, the more we develop it until it grows into knowledge (see Alma 32:28–35). In order to come to a greater knowledge of God, we must take the first steps to experiment with faith rather than reject God's word. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland teaches us that this preparatory faith is based on experiences we have had in the past. We learn to trust God because of what we have seen and known. We learn this faith from experience. Elder Holland also teaches of a higher faith, redemptive faith, which leads to even greater knowledge of God. Redemptive faith requires that we act on our belief in things that are not seen, yet are true (see Hebrews 11:1, 3, 7; Alma 21:21).

Many of mortality's hardest trials require redemptive faith. Challenges such as same-sex attraction are difficult because the general public knows so little about the causes and because *we do not know why* some individuals experience these attractions. It may be easy to want to fill in unanswered questions with inaccurate

answers rather than exercise faith. But it is redemptive faith that gives us the strength and courage to act on revealed truth even when we do not have all of the answers to our mortal questions. Such faith precedes miracles rather than develops from being persuaded by seeing a miracle first.³ It is only after we have been sufficiently tried in our faith that we can receive a witness (see Ether 12:6).

The brother of Jared showed redemptive faith when he followed God's command to build barges and led his people from their known lands to a place previously unknown to them. Abraham left the idolatrous culture of his father because he had faith that he could find greater happiness and peace through the ordinances of the priesthood rather than the empty promises of his culture.

Through faith, Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage. He exercised redemptive faith when being pursued by the Egyptian army. He responded to the Lord's command, lifted up his rod, and parted the Red Sea. It was redemptive faith that gave Daniel the courage to continue his prayers even under threat of being thrown into a den of lions. He could not foresee what would become of him, but he still acted on his faith.

Redemptive faith led converts to the Restoration to leave comfortable homes and possessions and join the Saints in a far-off desert community. Faithful men and women in all dispensations have shown redemptive faith in the revealed word of God, even when promised blessings could only be "seen afar off" (Hebrews 11:13). Although separated from God's presence by the Fall, they trusted in His infinite love and the plan of salvation.

Remembering the Atonement During Our Trials Builds Our Faith

Those who wished to be called God's people have always been asked to exercise faith in the midst of difficult trials and experiences. It is also so for us. We may be asked to endure loneliness, difficult temptations, being misunderstood, physical suffering

and pain, or perhaps even waiting an entire lifetime for promised blessings. During those trying times, it is sometimes hard to keep our faith in God's goodness, love, and concern. Even Joseph Smith cried out, "O God, where art thou?" (D&C 121:1). The revelation that followed told Joseph to remember the suffering of the Savior: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all [all Joseph's recent trials]. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:8). In other words, when we truly understand what Christ did in love for us, our trials pale by comparison.

In the midst of our suffering, when our faith begins to falter, we should remember that although Christ was sinless and, therefore, owed no debt for sin, He willingly endured indescribable agony, agony greater than anything we will ever know, to make it possible for us to return to the presence of our Father. President James E. Faust uses scripture to help us picture the suffering of Christ's Atonement:

He suffered so much pain, "indescribable anguish," and "overpowering torture" for our sake. His profound suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He took upon Himself all the sins of all other mortals, caused Him "to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit." "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly," saying, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" . . . He was stripped, smitten, spat upon, and scourged. . . .

He was led to Golgotha, where nails were driven into His hands and feet. He hung in agony for hours on a wooded cross. . . . Darkness came, and [he] cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" No one could help Him. He was treading the wine-press alone.⁴

Christ voluntarily accepted the painful work of the Atonement because of His great love for His Father and His great love for us. No one has ever suffered or could suffer as He did. This He did to

provide us the opportunity to repent of our sins, exercise faith in Him, and be able to return to our home with God as exalted beings.

In the midst of our suffering, we can shore up our faith by remembering that He paid not only for our sins but also for all of the sorrows, losses, and injustices of mortality. There is no trial that we could experience, no suffering we could endure, no disappointment or hurt that we might encounter that He has not endured severalfold (see Alma 7:11–13).

When we must hang onto our faith in the midst of difficult mortal afflictions, we can gain strength by reflecting on the Atonement. Christ did more for us than we could ever repay. Our trials pale in comparison with His love for us. He gave so much and asks so little by comparison.

During Temptations and Sin, Faith in God's Nature Enables Us to Replace False Beliefs with the Truth

Many people may erroneously believe that their sexual temptations and sins place them beyond God's love and the power of Christ's Atonement. At such times, it is critical that they exercise faith in God's true nature, that they trust that He is actually long-suffering, slow to anger, full of compassion, gracious and merciful, and forgiving. They must continue to believe that because God is unchangeable, He cannot lie or deceive us. Thus what He does for one person He will do for all, regardless of how serious their sexual sins have been.

Having faith in the true nature of God, we can replace false beliefs concerning temptation, sin, and repentance with the truth. For example, it can be easy to confuse the capacity for temptation with sin. Often those who are tempted through inappropriate sexual desires and impulses that would transgress God's laws may conclude that even being tempted is evidence of depravity. They may sink into despair when those temptations persist or are difficult to resist. They may even feel too ashamed to talk with God in prayer concerning their temptations.

It is important to separate the mortal capacity for temptation from taking the step to give in to the temptation. Christ took upon Himself mortality, which included the capacity to experience temptation. Christ personally experienced temptations yet resisted those temptations and did not sin (see Luke 4:2–13). Because Christ also experienced temptation, He knows how to help us to resist. There is nothing that we may experience in mortality that He does not understand (see Hebrews 2:16; Alma 7:11–13). We can call upon Him to ask for His help. Because He has perfect love for us, we need not fear condemnation or harsh judgment for experiencing temptations. All mortals experience temptation, but when temptations are resisted, we are innocent, as was Christ.

Those who do give in to sexual temptations may believe that their actions have permanently separated them from the power of the Atonement. They may believe that they are lost and beyond redemption. Therefore, they believe there is no good reason to stop sinning. Paul, preaching to the Ephesians, taught clearly that through repentance and faith in Christ, there was hope of returning to God’s family even when one has committed serious sexual sins (see Ephesians 2:2–19). He spoke to those who previously “walked according to the course of this world” and followed the “lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath.” Yet through faith in the grace of God, they were able to change their behavior and be cleansed of their sins.

Christ’s Atonement does have sufficient power to cleanse such serious sins, and through repentance the person can be washed clean. Through Isaiah we receive this precious invitation and promise: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

The Book of Mormon teaches a progressive process of repentance. Each step of the process brings the repentant person closer to God. The process gives the person access to the Holy Ghost, which brings hope and perfect love.

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism;
 And baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the
 commandments;
 And the fulfilling the commandments bringeth re-
 mission of sins;
 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and
 lowliness of heart;
 And because of meekness and lowliness of heart co-
 meth the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter
 filleth with hope and perfect love,
 Which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until
 the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with
 God. (Moroni 8:25–26.)

The person who desires forgiveness of sins must first covenant with God through baptism or must return to the baptismal covenant that was already made. In order to be worthy of the blessings of the covenant, the person promises to keep the commandments of God. Keeping commandments brings forgiveness of sin.

The process of repentance may take more than one decision to change behaviors. Often people commit to change but find it difficult and relapse into old behaviors. This can be very discouraging and lead them to believe that change is not possible. When relapse occurs, it is important to learn how to recognize events, behaviors, and emotions that contributed to the relapse, learn from past mistakes and errors in judgment, and recommit to the change process. Relapse is often part of change, but with continued faith that God's grace never fails, the person can recommit, and at some point, lasting change in behavior will occur.

Moroni recognized that change is often a drawn-out process rather than a single event. He taught patience with those who were sincerely trying to repent (see Moroni 6:8). The Lord also promises forgiveness to those who struggle with relapse but desire with real intent to truly repent: "Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me" (Mosiah 26:30). The truth is that these promises apply to you because God does not

lie or make exceptions. You can trust Him, which means you can have faith that you are included when He promises forgiveness to the repentant.

Faith Helps Us Humbly Accept the Will of God

All that God does is done with love for us.⁵ Having faith in that love, in His wisdom, and His knowledge of our needs and future, we humbly yield our will to the will of God. Christ set the example of humility when He submitted to the will of the Father in accepting the painful work of the Atonement. As we read in Matthew,

“And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. . . . He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” (Matthew 26:39, 42.)

When we humble ourselves before God, He promises to send the Holy Ghost, who can give us comfort in our trials and temptations and fill our hearts with hope that we can overcome and endure.

Alma, who had personally experienced this process, had faith in the importance of accepting God’s will rather than trying to convince God to change His plan for Alma. Alma desired to have the power of an angel to go forth and “speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth.” He quickly recognized that he was not to counsel God but to accept God’s counsel.

But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.

I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth

unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to *their* wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? (Alma 29:3–6, italics added.)

Alma recognized that by faithfully accepting the circumstances and limitations he experienced in mortality, he could, like Christ, humbly submit to the will of the Father. He also recognized that by trying to counsel God, he risked that God would grant his request—but at the peril of his soul. Therefore, Alma did not seek to persuade God to change, but rather he changed himself to humbly accept God’s will. He put his faith in the Lord, for the “Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true” (v. 8). Rather than asking God to accommodate his desires, Alma aligned himself with God’s will. As with Alma, our happiness is not found in asking God to change His laws but in asking God to help us to live His laws.

The opposite of faith and humility is pride. The Book of Mormon shows how pride leads to persecuting others, but it also shows how humble faith in the Lord’s purposes can bring peace and comfort even in the face of persecutions.

And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction.

Nevertheless, they [the more humble part of the people] did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of

Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Helaman 3:34–35.)

The power of the Comforter was sufficient to fill their souls with joy and consolation even in the face of persecution. As they grew stronger in humility and firmer in their faith in Christ and His Atonement, they became sanctified by yielding their hearts to Christ. Although God did not immediately release them from their trials and afflictions, He changed their souls in the midst of their afflictions. Their painful mortal experiences did not have the power to take them from the love of God or shake their faith in His wisdom.

When we completely give our hearts to God through daily repentance and strive to do His will rather than our own, we yield our hearts to God. Prayerfully and faithfully continuing this process assures us that we will be given the strength to endure to the end, when all the saints shall dwell with God (Moroni 8:26).

When Faith Is Paired with Humility, Weak Things Become Strong

Moroni recorded:

If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27.)

Humbly acknowledging our weaknesses can be the means of accessing great strength. As we turn to God for help in overcoming weaknesses, humility and submission to God's will gives Him the opportunity to extend His grace and to strengthen us. But Moroni makes it clear that we must pair that humility with faith in God's power before we can be strengthened.

Seeking the Lord in faith and humility for help in overcoming weakness is a process of repentance. Elder Bruce C. Hafen teaches that this process of repentance is not a punishment. It is given to us to change us to become like Christ: “Mercy and repentance are rehabilitative, not retributive. The Savior asks us to repent not just to repay Him for paying our debt to justice, but also to induce us to undergo the personal development that will purify our very nature.”⁶

This process can give one the strength and motivation to put expression of sexual feelings on hold, throughout mortality if necessary, rather than separate oneself or another from eternal blessings.

Alma understood this process. He had felt the power that had changed him from a sinful priest in the court of King Noah to a prophet of God. He understood and had faith in the power of the Atonement. He had faith that because of what Christ would experience in Gethsemane and on the cross, we could take our burdens to Him and He could help us. He had faith that Christ would understand how hard mortality can be and how much we can hurt at times. But Alma also knew we could trust Christ to help us through those difficult experiences, consecrate them to our good, teach us how to resist temptations, and bring us home to receive all of the blessings of eternal life. Alma wrote of Christ:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11–12.)

Christ Is the Finisher of Our Faith

Although we are required to do our part by coming to Christ, having faith in His word, keeping His commandments, continuing to grow through the process of repentance, and enduring to the end, the Atonement has sufficient power to heal us of all that mortality can inflict upon us. We are promised that the Atonement can make up for those things that cannot be healed in mortality. Nephi, who had personally experienced great suffering and sacrifice, wrote, “Be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23).

Sometimes healing in mortality may come from receiving greater understanding of our problem or being given enough strength to endure and grow from it. Christ promised that if we will take our problems to him, He can comfort us: “Come unto me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

The Apostle Paul stands as an example of one who turned a mortal struggle into an opportunity to grow spiritually. He spoke of a “thorn in the flesh” that troubled him greatly. Although we do not know the nature of his affliction, we can learn from his patience in enduring it. Three times he begged the Lord to remove this “thorn” that Satan used to buffet him. He asked God to heal him of this affliction. The Lord chose not to release him from this mortal experience, but counseled him, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

Paul learned to “glory in [his] infirmities” because he knew that the power of Christ was with him. He realized that humbly depending on Christ and having faith in the Atonement is what made him spiritually strong. Paul continued to stay faithful and was able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). Christ and the Atonement did for him what he could not do by himself. Christ was the “author and finisher” of his faith (Hebrews 12:2; see also Moroni 6:4).

The Jaredite prophet Ether witnessed much suffering during his mortal life. He left us his testimony of the power of faith to

sustain us in the trials of mortality: “Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast” (Ether 12:4).

Christ has the power to heal all infirmities, whether in mortality or hereafter. He may release us from the “thorns in our flesh,” teach us how to overcome them, or help us to continue to grow and learn from them. As we draw closer to Christ during the challenges of mortal experiences, exercising faith in His word, we can receive the strength we need from understanding the Atonement. Because Christ overcame the world (see John 16:33), we have justifiable reason to never lose hope, regardless of where we are now.

About the Author

Marleen S. Williams, PhD, earned her doctorate in clinical psychology. She currently works as clinical professor of Counseling Psychology at BYU. Her research and writing has focused on women’s mental health, marriage and relationships, disabilities, spirituality and mental health, and coping with trauma. Her research has been published and presented nationally and internationally. She has written articles for the *Ensign* and *Liahona* and is also a frequent speaker at LDS conferences and workshops. She is a former president of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP). Her most recent book is *Matters of the Mind: Latter-day Saint Helps for Mental Health*, cowritten with John P. Livingstone and W. Dean Belnap and published by Deseret Book (2008). She is married to Dr. Robert F. Williams, also a clinical psychologist, and they have nine children and twenty-four grandchildren.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38–44.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Powerful Ideas,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 24.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 18–19.
4. James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 19. Also see Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–20 for the Lord’s own description of his suffering. Elder Faust cited part of it.

5. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 38–44.
6. Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 9.

CHAPTER 5

Showing God's Love to Those with Same-Sex Attraction

Editors' note: This chapter is presented in two parts: Part I is written from the perspective of someone who does not experience such attractions but has had experience in Church leadership and other contexts interacting with those who do. Part II is written by someone who has dealt with same-sex attraction most of his life, and who offers advice about how to treat those who struggle with this challenge.

PART I

Dennis V. Dahle, JD

Writing in the October 2007 *Ensign*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gave a model of how we can better interact with those with same-sex attraction. First, if you feel a little unsure about what is appropriate and nonoffensive, you are not alone. Elder Holland observed:

Although I believe members are eager to extend compassion to those different from themselves, it is human nature that when confronted with a situation we don't understand, we tend to withdraw. This is particularly true of same-gender attraction. We have so little reliable

information about it that those wanting to help are left feeling a bit unsteady.¹

Elder Holland recounted an interview with a young man struggling with same-sex attraction. Notice Elder Holland's reaction to the young man's announcement of his challenge:

A pleasant young man in his early 20s sat across from me. He had an engaging smile, although he didn't smile often during our talk. What drew me in was the pain in his eyes.

"I don't know if I should remain a member of the Church," he said. "I don't think I'm worthy."

"Why wouldn't you be worthy?" I asked.

"I'm gay."

I suppose he thought I would be startled. I wasn't.

"And . . . ?" I inquired.²

Note that Elder Holland was not startled, nor did he condemn or overreact. Notice also how Elder Holland begins to teach the distinction between feelings and actions by the query "And?" We should not be startled if someone we know experiences same-sex attraction. While estimates vary, it is believed that between three and five percent of the general population experiences same-sex attraction. Elder Holland continued:

A flicker of relief crossed his face as he sensed my continued interest. "I'm not attracted to women. I'm attracted to men. I've tried to ignore these feelings or change them, but . . ."

He sighed. "Why am I this way? The feelings are very real."

I paused, then said, "I need a little more information before advising you. You see, same-gender attraction is not a sin, but acting on those feelings is—just as it would be with heterosexual feelings. Do you violate the law of chastity?"

He shook his head. "No, I don't."

This time I was relieved. "Thank you for wanting to deal with this," I said. "It takes courage to talk about it, and I honor you for keeping yourself clean."³

Note that the first thing Elder Holland helped this young man to understand was that feelings of same-sex attraction are not a sin, but that acting on those feelings is. While direct questions about a person's worthiness should be left to parents and priesthood leaders, it is important for all of us to know that same-sex attractions themselves, as opposed to acting on such attractions, are not a sin. Many people suffer needless guilt and shame under the mistaken belief that their attractions make them unworthy and unloved by the Lord. Note also that Elder Holland affirmed the young man's worth and honored him for keeping himself clean.

In the next part of the interview, Elder Holland affirmed God's and his own love for this young man and taught several important principles, including (1) knowing the cause of same-sex attractions is not as important as keeping the commandments, (2) those who experience same-sex attraction are worthy Church members if they keep the commandments, and (3) it is unwise to identify oneself by his or her sexual feelings:

"As for why you feel as you do, I can't answer that question. A number of factors may be involved, and they can be as different as people are different. Some things, including the cause of your feelings, we may never know in this life. But knowing why you feel as you do isn't as important as knowing you have not transgressed. If your life is in harmony with the commandments, then you are worthy to serve in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with the members, attend the temple, and receive all the blessings of the Savior's Atonement."

He sat up a little straighter. I continued, "You serve yourself poorly when you identify yourself primarily by your sexual feelings. That isn't your only characteristic, so don't give it disproportionate attention. You are first and foremost a son of God, and He loves you."

“What’s more, I love you. My Brethren among the General Authorities love you. I’m reminded of a comment President Boyd K. Packer made in speaking to those with same-gender attraction. ‘We *do not* reject you,’ he said. ‘We *cannot* reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We *will not* reject you, because we love you.’”⁴

Not only do persons serve themselves poorly by identifying themselves by their sexual feelings, but we also serve such persons poorly when we do the same thing. In addition to taking away from them their paramount attribute as children of God, labels such as “gay” and “lesbian” suggest that sexual feelings, like gender, are core elements of who a person is and can perpetuate the incorrect notion that sexual feelings are innate and therefore immutable. The use of proper terminology is important to both understanding and communicating clearly about same-sex attraction.

Elder Holland also suggested ways to help those who struggle with same-sex attraction. (I recommend that you obtain and read his entire article, as no summary or commentary can fully capture the wisdom and spirit of his words.) Elder Holland’s advice includes the following:

Let’s assume you are the family member or friend of someone with same-gender attraction who comes to you for help. What do you say? What do you do?

I’d begin by recognizing the courage that brought your son, daughter, sibling, or friend to you. I’d recognize the trust that person has extended. Discussing the issue with someone of trust is a healthy first step to dealing with confusing feelings, and it is imperative that these first steps be met with compassion.

Next, if you are a parent of one with same-gender attraction, don’t assume you are the reason for those feelings. No one, including the one struggling, should try to shoulder blame. Nor should anyone place blame on another—including God. Walk by faith, and help your loved one deal the best he or she can with this challenge.

In doing so, recognize that marriage is not an all-purpose solution. Same-gender attractions run deep, and trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them. We are all thrilled when some who struggle with these feelings are able to marry, raise children, and achieve family happiness. But other attempts have resulted in broken hearts and broken homes.

Above all, keep your lines of communication open. Open communication between parents and children is a clear expression of love, and pure love, generously expressed, can transform family ties. But love for a family member does not extend to condoning unrighteous behavior. Your children are welcome to stay in your home, of course, but you have every right to exclude from your dwelling any behavior that offends the Spirit of the Lord.⁵

I empathize with those who want to help someone struggling with same-sex attraction but are “left feeling a bit unsteady,” as Elder Holland said. Some years ago I was called to be the bishop of a student singles ward. I have perhaps never felt less steady than the first time a young man disclosed to me that he experienced same-sex attraction. What could I say? I knew almost nothing about it. But while my intellectual knowledge of the issue was lacking, the Spirit confirmed to me how much the Lord loved this young man.

In time, after counseling other young people who experienced same-sex attraction and a variety of other problems associated with attractions, including the widespread problem of pornography addiction, I felt a deep and sustained impression to organize the Foundation for Attraction Research for the purpose of developing materials to help people keep their attractions and expressions of those attractions within the boundaries established by the Lord. Since that first interview some years ago, I have had the opportunity to discuss the issue with many different people, including people who experience same-sex attraction, their family members, Church leaders, and therapists. From this perspective I offer the following advice.

1. *Study the words of the latter-day apostles and prophets.* Read and become familiar with the publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the words of the General Authorities. During the almost five-year period that it took to produce this book, I have had the occasion to read many articles and sermons on the subject of same-sex attraction, have served as an editor of this current volume, have written two chapters in this book, and have contributed to others. Inevitably, whenever I believe I'm inspired about a particular subject, I find even greater inspiration in the sermons and writings of the General Authorities.

Occasionally, I hear someone question whether the General Authorities understand the issue of same-sex attraction. Most often, those who criticize the General Authorities have unfounded expectations about the kind of counsel they believe the General Authorities should give, or these critics reject the doctrines of the Church. Regarding what we should expect from the General Authorities, we should observe that not even the Lord chose to teach or speak about the science of the afflictions he healed. That was not His purpose. The study of the sermons of the General Authorities should be a study of principles and should not be limited to the specific topic of same-sex attraction. For example, a search of *Ensign* articles at lds.org on the topic of "same-gender attraction" would not find Elder Richard G. Scott's sermon discussing the distinctions between truth obtained by revelation and truth discovered through the scientific method.⁶ As one who has spent many hundreds of hours reading, writing, editing, discussing, and pondering about this issue, I bear witness to the inspiration and clarity of the General Authorities on the subject of same-sex attraction. There is no substitute for their guidance.

2. *Increase your secular knowledge about the issue.* Same-sex attraction seems to be an issue about which many have strong opinions, but relatively few have been introduced to good information about the topic. This book provides an excellent survey of secular knowledge about the issue.

3. *Be compassionate without patronizing.* People who experience same-sex attraction need our love and acceptance, but they

do not need or want to be patronized. They need solid, reliable information, from both religious and secular perspectives, in order to make correct choices. It is not enough to say, "You're okay; everything will be fine," when in fact there may be hard realities and difficult choices to be dealt with. In this regard, same-sex attraction is like every other challenge in life—we must assist our brothers and sisters in every way we can to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, while at the same time standing firm in our faith and adherence to gospel standards.

4. *Treat others with respect and dignity.* In interviewing potential authors for this book, I was introduced to Robert James (a pseudonym), the author of chapter 22. In our initial meeting I felt apprehensive, unsure of how to act or what to say. Robert and I met several more times over the course of obtaining and editing his manuscript. About the third time we met, before we discussed his chapter, Robert began telling me about his work. It was the kind of convivial conversation between friends that occurs every day. Suddenly, it dawned on me that the last thing I wanted to discuss with Robert was his chapter and the unpleasant things he had left in his past. Robert is a wonderful person, a very noble and faithful son of God who had endured much and who had much to offer. We had become true friends, and the fact that Robert had experienced (or still did experience) same-sex attraction was not an issue. What Robert needed was for me to treat him like I did everyone else, and I needed him to treat me the same way. We were both edified by our friendship.

5. *Be wise.* We should not act blindly. It would be imprudent and unwise to ignore the implications of same-sex attraction in contexts in which it is relevant. In his story, Robert tells how his first sexual experience occurred as a young teenager, when he was molested by an older man. Robert describes being sexually attracted to men in the past. These statements have implications that should not be ignored. At the same time that we reach out to people with same-sex attraction in fellowship, we can and must take into consideration all relevant information to do the best and wisest thing in all circumstances. People should not be placed in

situations that would make their challenges more difficult, and other people, especially our youth, must be protected. We understand this principle quite well in relation to the mixing of men and women, but we can do a much better job when it comes to interacting with people who experience same-sex attraction. Sometimes the situation is not dealt with appropriately. On the one hand, we may overreact and shun those with same-sex attraction, or on the other hand we might accept the worldly view that same-sex attraction is as acceptable as heterosexual attraction and fail to exercise discretion appropriate to the situation.

There is a middle ground from which we can reach out to and include our brothers and sisters with same-sex attraction, while at the same time addressing real issues with wisdom, prudence, and inspiration in a spirit of love and concern. There is much we can and must do to help. The mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to bring souls unto Christ, and blessing the lives of those who struggle with same-sex attraction is part of this mission.

About the Author

Dennis V. Dahle, JD, a corporate attorney in private practice in Salt Lake City, Utah, has served as a bishop and currently serves as a stake president. In 2005, Mr. Dahle and others founded the Foundation for Attraction Research, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization for the purpose of creating resources and sponsoring research supportive of traditional Judeo-Christian standards of moral conduct. *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* is the Foundation's first project and brings together a distinguished group of authors and editors to address this sensitive topic. The Foundation's board of directors includes A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH; Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW; William C. Duncan, JD; Doris R. Dant, MS, MA; John P. Livingstone, EdD; and M. Gawain Wells, PhD. Mr. Dahle is also one of the editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*.

Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 2007, 43.

2. *Ibid.*, 42.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 44.
6. Richard G. Scott, "Truth: The Foundation of Correct Decisions," *Ensign*, November 2007, 90.

PART II

Jason Park

(Note: The following is written from the perspective of someone who has experienced same-sex attraction.)

Kevin was seventeen when his parents found out about his same-sex attractions. He did not dare tell them, but they suspected it, searched his room, and found a note from a friend. His father was so angry that Kevin thought he would kill him. In fact, his father almost broke Kevin's arm before he threw him out of the house, and in the year since that happened his parents have refused to have anything to do with him. Kevin is now left to struggle with his problems on his own, without the support of his family.

Although same-sex attractions are serious, the solution is not to reject loved ones but to encourage them and help them work through these difficult problems. What follows presents suggestions on how to be supportive and helpful.

Manage the Initial Shock of Finding Out

In her book *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* Barbara Johnson talks about the agony she felt when she discovered that her son was attracted to other men: "Flashing in my mind was this wonderful son who was so bubbly and happy—such a joy to have around. Thinking of him entwined with some other male brought heaves of heavy sobbing from deep wounds of agony."¹

When loved ones tell you they struggle with same-sex attractions, you may experience any of a number of reactions, including shock, tears, denial, disappointment, guilt, and, quite possibly, anger and hostility. You may hope that this is just a phase that they will grow out of. If you are a parent, you may wonder what you did wrong, or you may think your son or daughter is trying to punish you in some way. Your reactions may have nothing to do with reality, but they will be based on feelings that are real.

Although you should be understanding and show Christlike love, sometimes the information is a bombshell that makes it difficult to show compassion. Be willing to state your own limitations. You may need to tell your loved ones that the information has come as a shock and that you will need some time to sort things out. You may have to take time to process the information and come to grips with your own feelings before you can discuss it rationally. You may need time to read up on the issues or talk with your loved ones further to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Remember that your loved ones are the same people you have always loved. Knowing more about them and the struggles they face should not negate the joy they have been to you in the past. Be grateful you have this chance to help them. Be grateful that they have enough confidence in you that they are willing to share their burden with you. And above all, be thankful they do not have to deal with their challenge alone.

Get Your Loved One to Open Up to You

People who experience same-sex attractions will likely be embarrassed to talk about them at first. For them to open up to you will require that they feel a great deal of love and trust from you. People who have same-sex attractions usually keep such feelings to themselves and seldom admit them to anyone—including their family. In church meetings and LDS homes, homosexuality is not discussed much, and when it is, it is usually with disgust. When we talk about homosexuality, we seldom consider the possibility that

someone in the room struggles with same-sex attraction themselves. Over the years, they have learned that rather than admit that they are one of those “repulsive” people, it is better to keep it a secret. And that deep, dark secret is a tremendous burden to bear alone. They can begin to resolve their attractions once they admit them and begin to open up and share their burdens.

Be Accepting and Caring

When people admit to you that they struggle with same-sex attractions, they need to feel you accept them as a valuable person. When a friend of mine admitted his same-sex attractions to his bishop, the bishop stood up from the chair immediately next to him and moved to another chair across the room. The rejection he felt from the bishop set back his progress, and it was several years before he could again approach another priesthood leader. Since part of the struggles those with same-sex attraction have is that they feel people do not accept them, it is important to show acceptance and love by your words and your actions.

It is important that they feel that you care about them in the midst of their pain. Your willingness to develop a relationship with them on a deeper level will be an important ingredient in the healing process. Although you do not have to become an expert on the subject of same-sex attraction, they will appreciate any effort you make to understand their situation because it will show you care.

Express Your Own Feelings and Limitations

Remind them that you are not perfect. Explain to them that you are an imperfect human just as they are, and ask them to be tolerant and understanding of your opinions and feelings just as they hope for compassion and understanding from you about the struggles they are going through.

You do not need to subordinate your own feelings and needs to theirs. Do not be afraid to express to them how you hurt and are struggling to come to terms with the situation. Create a climate where trust and disclosure are mutually shared.

Don't Accept Responsibility for Things That Are Not Your Fault

Parents and spouses tend to take responsibility for more than their share of the blame when a child or spouse discloses same-sex attraction. Parents begin to think that they could have provided more for their child than they did. Spouses tend to feel they are at fault for perceived deficits in their own femininity. But parents and wives are not to blame for feelings of same-sex attraction. They did not cause the feelings and cannot cure them. No one wins in the damaging game of "Who is at fault?" Rather than spend your energies trying to determine who is guilty, focus on what can be done now.

Don't Try to "Fix" the Situation

A common temptation for parents, spouses, and friends is to try to "rescue" their loved ones. Only when the person with same-sex attractions accepts responsibility for his or her actions and makes firm decisions can these feelings be resolved. Although you may think you know what is best for them (and you may even be correct about steps that would help), what really matters is that *they* are committed to doing what they must to address their challenge. You should encourage them to do things that will help, but do not *force* your intentions on them because it may only alienate them from you and prevent them from developing their own commitment to do what they should. For instance, it may do more harm than good to drag them to therapy if they do not want it. Real resolution is only going to be possible when they desire to resolve their challenge. Ultimately, you cannot make the decisions for them. They must make choices and experience the consequences of their actions, even though it may be difficult for them and for you when they experience pain and tragedy in the process. Allowing them the freedom to make choices shows that you respect their agency. Since God alone can give them the desire to change, believe that God can help them resolve their same-sex attraction better than anything you could come up with. So, in everything you do to help, seek His guidance and help.

Don't Offer Simplistic Solutions

Time and again I have heard the tales of people who talked with their parents or bishops about their same-sex attractions and were simply told to read the scriptures, pray, and have more faith. Although these actions are certainly part of the answer, they may sound as unsympathetic as, "Just shape up and act as you know you should." Gender identity and same-sex attractions can be complex, and simplistic answers show a lack of understanding. The last thing those with these struggles need from you is a lecture about the evils of homosexuality. They already know they should not be sexually attracted to the same gender; they are reaching out to you to help them figure out what they can do about it.

Don't Be Quick to Judge

Before we judge others, we should look at ourselves. We are often quick to judge and condemn the actions of others but slow to see our own faults. Remember, Christ was forgiving of the women caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). He was, however, harsh in his criticism of those who were hypocrites (Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:44).

Recognize This Is a Learning Process

Neither you nor people who struggle with same-sex attractions will have all the answers or even know all the questions. Agree to learn together and recognize that it will take time. Everyone is different; for some, it may take years to understand and deal with all the emotions and issues. In this sense, same-sex attraction is not so different from many other conditions experienced in mortality.

Support Their Efforts

Growing out of same-sex attractions will take an enormous amount of time and energy, and you can help those with this struggle by being supportive of the many things they need to do. While they should not neglect family and other duties, they will need to spend much time reading about the subject, attending meetings, and

building relationships with others. Men with same-sex attraction issues will need time to build appropriate relationships with other men. Rather than being jealous of this time, encourage them to do the things they need to do to grow. Help them schedule time, and when they are with you, make the time productive.

Use Professional Counseling Resources

LDS Family Services may have an office in your area, and if not, Evergreen International (see the Appendix for further information) can direct you to therapists who are trained in treating people with same-sex attractions. Because many people with same-sex attractions also have emotional deficits, they almost always require professional help to resolve them. Caution your loved ones to use care in choosing a therapist because some can do more harm than good. (See chapter 11 by Dr. S. Brent Scharman for advice on choosing a therapist.)

Unresolved same-sex attractions can at times seem hopeless to overcome. This despair leads many to entertain thoughts of suicide. If someone you know is considering suicide, get professional help immediately. You can help by focusing on the eternal plan of salvation. When people understand their eternal nature, and God's love for them, they will realize that suicide is no solution at all. The very fact that they are disturbed by same-sex attractions marks them as spiritually sensitive souls for whom there is great hope.

If abuse has been involved, professional help may be needed for that as well.

Take Care of Yourself

In your zeal to help others, do not ignore your own problems. You have needs of your own and must come to terms with your feelings and learn how to deal with the situation. You may find it helpful to talk with a professional counselor or join a support group. There are groups for mothers, fathers, wives, and siblings that can help you learn to understand your situation and deal with your own problems. Be sure to join a group that will be uplifting and

positive. You may also find it helpful to read books on how to deal with your own feelings and issues. If you are a priesthood leader, be sure to consider the spouse and family, since they are also affected by the same-sex attraction and have needs of their own. They may need professional counseling as well.

Show Christlike Love but Maintain Your Integrity

People with same-sex attraction need to know that even if they make mistakes, they will find safety and reassurance with you and that their burden will be lightened (not added upon) because of their relationship with you. What they need from you is helpfulness, not condemnation; understanding, not accusation; and sympathy, not threats. The Savior said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). How does the Savior love people with same-sex attraction? Does he love them any less because of their attractions? We are to love others as he loves them. Christ is our example of true love.

President Boyd K. Packer taught, "There is a difference between what one *is* and what one *does*. What one is may deserve unlimited tolerance; what one does, only a measured amount."² It can be difficult to show Christlike love when someone's behavior offends you or disappoints you, but you need to stand by them. When they are at their lowest is when they need you the most.

Loving unconditionally does not mean you accept behaviors and beliefs you disagree with; it means that you show Christlike love to people regardless of their behavior. You must maintain your integrity by standing up for your beliefs and standards. When people commit transgressions, you do not have to excuse or defend their choices to others to prove your love or commitment to them. In fact, they need your righteous example and stability. Because of the many voices they hear, they need your strength as you maintain your standards and beliefs and continue being a stable influence in their life.

Unconditional love simply means that you do not hang demands or conditions on your love. You extend love and

support regardless of their level of progress as they struggle through their challenges.

Keep Lines of Communication Open

Even if you reach an impasse in resolving the situation, agree to keep communicating. You may have to say, “I don’t understand why you have made the decisions you have made, but I do love you and want to keep working at this until I understand it. I don’t want you to have to deal with this alone.” If you love them, show it by listening to and spending time with them.

Keep the Information Confidential

Admitting same-sex attraction is a major disclosure, and those who make that admission will expect you to keep the information in the strictest confidence. A slip of the tongue may be considered an impropriety in some settings, but in this circumstance those who confide in you will likely consider any breach of confidence to be a major betrayal—a betrayal that may damage or destroy the trust you have established with them. Remember that they have disclosed their “deep, dark secret,” something that is embarrassing to them and very personal. Respect their right to decide what information they share and with whom.

An important part of healing from same-sex attraction is to relate to others of the same gender, and to develop appropriate, close relationships with them, and this may be difficult or impossible if others know about the same-sex attractions. Most people are afraid of homosexuality and have misconceptions about it, and they may therefore shun those who experience same-sex attraction, when what those struggling with the attractions need most desperately is love and acceptance. *Keep confidences*, and don’t divulge any information without the express permission of the person who confided in you.

Disclosure of the Challenge

Since the issue of same-sex attraction belongs to those with the challenge—and not to you—they have the stewardship of determining who, when, and how much to tell. The decision should be made through prayer and individual inspiration, since what is best for one person may not be for another. They may not find it necessary or prudent to tell anyone beyond their family or closest friends. If others know about their attractions, it may be more difficult for them to build needed friendships and grow in ways of dealing with their attractions. Chapter 10 in this book has a helpful discussion of this question directed towards people with same-sex attraction.

How to Approach Someone You Suspect Has Same-Sex Attractions

If you suspect same-sex attractions in someone you love, you may want to open the door for those you suspect to tell you about them. They may be afraid to admit their attractions because they are embarrassed or afraid you will reject them. Create an atmosphere where they know you will be open to sharing such feelings. “I want us to have an honest relationship where you feel you can tell me anything.” You may want to talk about a news event or a television show that had a gay topic. “This is really an interesting topic. What do you think a person should do if he has same-sex attractions?” After discussing the topic, you could say, “If people I know struggled with these feelings, I would still love them and would want them to tell me so I could understand them and be a support to them.”

If you think your son or daughter has these feelings, talk with them about such feelings and point them in directions that can help them start to understand their feelings early, and get help before the attractions become more complex. Parents sometimes avoid direct discussions about sexual topics by talking about issues in the third person. However, discussions about how wrong or disgusting homosexuality is may just increase the guilt and shame the

child already feels and bury even deeper any attempt to admit that he or she has these attractions and delay any effort to seek help. Instead, establish feelings of love and trust; then ask directly and discuss openly.

Finally, I would leave you with this thought. Many who struggle with same-sex attraction feel lost and alone. We are losing many of them. As the Savior said, “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (Luke 15:4–5). As we should all be shepherds of each of other, may we be better shepherds of those who so often struggle alone with same-sex attractions.

About the Author

Jason Park (not the author’s real name) is the author of three books: *Resolving Homosexual Problems: A Guide for LDS Men*; *Understanding Male Homosexual Problems: An Introduction for Latter-day Saints*; and *Helping LDS Men Resolve their Homosexual Problems: A Guide for Family, Friends, and Church Leaders*.

This chapter was adapted from the book *Helping LDS Men Resolve Their Homosexual Problems: A Guide for Family, Friends, and Church Leaders* by Jason Park (Salt Lake City: Century Publishing, 2007). Used with permission and adapted by the author.

Notes

1. Barbara Johnson, *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1979), 10.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 85.

CHAPTER 6

Finding Help and Healing from Both Revealed and Scientific Truths about Same-Sex Attraction

Dennis V. Dahle, JD

The authors, editors, and other contributors to this volume hope that it leads to greater understanding of the complex issue of same-sex attraction. But while understanding alone is a laudable goal, as Elder Richard G. Scott has said, “a knowledge of truth is of little value unless we apply it in making correct decisions.”¹ It is our greater hope, therefore, that this contribution to the body of knowledge will assist the reader in making correct decisions about the issue of same-sex attraction.

How can we find the truth about same-sex attraction? With so many different opinions held by so many different people leading in so many different directions, it is easy to understand why some might mistakenly conclude that finding the truth is impossible or that there is no underlying truth. Moral or intellectual relativism, however, can lead to the erroneous conclusion that one choice is as correct as another.

The issue of same-sex attraction is particularly subject to controversy. One reason for this is that it lies at the intersection of religious, scientific, social, and political debates. The multifaceted nature of the issue requires an equally multifaceted search for truth.

Distinctions between Finding Truth through Revelation and through the Scientific Method

My own search for truth about same-sex attraction began shortly after being called as bishop of a student singles ward. Prior to my call I knew very little about same-sex attraction, and in fact had not ever knowingly discussed the matter with anyone who experienced it. That changed one day when a young ward member whom I will call Michael came to see me and through many tears disclosed his struggle with same-sex attraction. I sought help from the Spirit for an appropriate response. Knowing little about the issue, I could not tell Michael why he had those feelings or give him assurance that his burden would be taken away. But I knew, and the Spirit confirmed to me, that the Lord loved this young man, and I felt impressed to say, “Michael, I don’t know very much about same-sex attraction, but I testify to you that the Lord loves you, and as your bishop, I love you too. Now, let’s see if we can find some answers.”

Michael and I reviewed the doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints relating to sexual relations, marriage, and gender, including those found in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*.² Michael understood that homosexual behavior is sinful. Michael also wanted to know if he could diminish or eliminate his feelings of same-sex attraction and whether he could acquire heterosexual feelings, marry, and have a family in this life. Understandably, Michael wanted to be free of the challenge.

I assured Michael that the Lord would help him, but I did not feel impressed to promise Michael that his prayers would be answered in the way he hoped. Further, there seemed to be two intertwined spheres of consideration involved—one spiritual and the other involving physiological, mental, and emotional issues—complicating the search for answers.

How can we find truthful answers to questions about same-sex attraction? Can we use the same methods we do in finding truth about other issues? Elder Richard G. Scott, a nuclear engineer prior to his call as an Apostle, has described two methods to find truth:

There are two ways to find truth—both useful, provided we follow the laws upon which they are predicated. The first is the scientific method. It can require analysis of data to confirm a theory or, alternatively, establish a valid principle through experimentation. The scientific method is a valuable way of seeking truth.³

Elder Scott extolled the knowledge that has been revealed by the scientific method:

Try as I might, I am not able, even in the smallest degree, to comprehend the extent, depth, and stunning grandeur of what our holy Heavenly Father, Elohim, has permitted to be revealed by the scientific method. . . . We can see the scientific method has brought about an extraordinary expansion of our understanding as the Lord has inspired gifted men who may not understand who created these things nor for what purpose.⁴

But as important as the scientific method may be, it has limitations:

First, we never can be sure we have identified absolute truth, though we often draw nearer and nearer to it. Second, sometimes, no matter how earnestly we apply the method, we can get the wrong answer.⁵

Furthermore, scientific truth is not the kind of truth that brings salvation. Elder Scott described the source of truth that redeems:

The best way of finding truth is simply to go to the origin of all truth and ask or respond to inspiration. For success, two ingredients are essential: first, unwavering faith in the source of all truth; second, a willingness to keep God's commandments to keep open spiritual communication with Him. . . .

What have we learned about truth through revelation?

Centuries ago, God the Father permitted some of His prophets to view His vast creations perfectly, through the

eye of the Holy Spirit. He also explained why He had created them: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”⁶

Both revealed truth and truth discovered through the scientific method can be valuable in making correct decisions concerning important challenges in life, including same-sex attraction. We should bear in mind, however, that as important as scientific knowledge may be, the limitations described by Elder Scott mean that knowledge revealed by the scientific method will always be subject to some uncertainty, change, and debate as scientific knowledge is advanced. Truth that comes from the Lord by revelation does not have these drawbacks. Understanding these differences can help us know whom we should look to for different kinds of guidance and what we can expect from the counsel given.

Obtaining Revealed Truth about Same-Sex Attraction

The Lord uses “divers ways” (Moroni 7:24) to reveal truth to mankind. Three of these are (1) revelation to prophets, including the general rules constituting the doctrines of the Church as taught by the General Authorities; (2) counsel and advice from parents, spouses, and local priesthood leaders who have direct stewardship responsibility for our spiritual welfare; and (3) personal revelation.

Teachings of Prophets—General Rules and Doctrines. One might wonder why the General Authorities of the Church continue to stress the importance of traditional marriage and families when so many in the world, including some members of the Church, do not live in this ideal circumstance. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, speaking in a worldwide leadership training meeting for all adult members of the Church, provided the answer to this question through the “Parable of the Homemade Shirt.”⁷ Elder Holland told how his mother made shirts for him when he was a young boy. While she could copy a shirt on display in a store or advertised in a mail-order catalog, she preferred to use a perfect pattern, which helped her to not repeat or multiply the imperfections of a replica. Elder Holland explained:

I think you can see my point and hers. We are bound to be in trouble if a shirt is made from a shirt that was made from a shirt. A mistake or two in the first product—inevitable without a pattern—gets repeated and exaggerated, intensified, more awkward, the more repetitions we make, until finally this thing I'm to wear to school just doesn't fit.⁸

Elder Holland then explained the need to teach the perfect pattern for life, even while some may need to make individual adaptations in their personal lives:

Now, I hope this helps you understand why we talk about the pattern, the ideal, of marriage and family when we know full well that not everyone now lives in that ideal circumstance. It is precisely because many don't have, or perhaps have never even seen, that ideal and because some cultural forces steadily move us away from that ideal, that we speak about what our Father in Heaven wishes for us in His eternal plan for His children.

Individual adaptations have to be made as marital status and family circumstances differ. But all of us can agree on the pattern as it comes from God, and we can strive for its realization the best way we can.

We who are General Authorities and general officers are called to teach His general rules. You and we then lead specific lives and must seek the Lord's guidance regarding specific circumstances. But there would be mass confusion and loss of gospel promises if no general ideal and no doctrinal standard were established and, in our case today, repeated. We take great strength in knowing the Lord has spoken on these matters, and we accept His counsel even when it might not be popular.

Thank you for understanding why we are concerned about protecting all members of families, whatever your age, and why we speak in opposition to trends or forces that would seek to destroy any aspect of God's eternal plan

of happiness. How grateful we are that the Lord has said, “I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived” (D&C 52:14).⁹

The ideal pattern of family life is marriage between a man and a woman who raise children together in righteousness. When individual circumstances differ, however, as Elder Holland said, “individual adaptations” must sometimes be made in our “specific lives” through the Lord’s guidance. In doing so we must bear in mind that individual applications of the doctrines often involve the timing of receiving available blessings, such as marriage. Righteous adaptation is not about whether the doctrine is applicable to us. Divine inspiration will not lead us to reject doctrinal principles or to substitute sinful counterparts in their place. While the presence of same-sex attraction may be a reason to delay marriage, the substitution of a same-sex relationship will not bring the promised blessings.

Understanding the doctrines is the first crucial step to making correct decisions about our behavior. “True doctrine, understood,” President Boyd K. Packer has said, “changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”¹⁰

True prophets teach correct principles.¹¹ True principles apply across the spectrum of individual experiences. In searching the words of the prophets, both ancient and modern, for advice and counsel regarding same-sex attraction, we should search for general principles in addition to direct references to same-sex attraction.

Counsel and Advice from Other People. In seeking the Lord’s guidance regarding how to “lead specific lives” as mentioned by Elder Holland, we can also seek counsel and advice from those whose stewardship it is to receive revelation for our benefit, including parents and priesthood leaders. Elder L. Tom Perry taught the following regarding the principle of stewardship:

There is order in the way the Lord reveals His will to mankind. We all have the right to petition the Lord and

receive inspiration through His Spirit within the realm of our own stewardship. Parents can receive revelation for their own family, a bishop for his assigned congregation, and on up to the First Presidency for the entire Church. However, we cannot receive revelation for someone else's stewardship.¹²

President Packer also counseled us to avoid those who claim to be more inspired than Church authorities:

Avoid like a plague those who claim that some great spiritual experience authorizes them to challenge the constituted priesthood authority in the Church. Do not be unsettled if you cannot explain every insinuation of the apostate or every challenge from the enemies who attack the Lord's church. And we now face a tidal wave of that. In due time you will be able to confound the wicked and inspire the honest in heart.¹³

The advice of trusted friends can be very helpful; however, it is not the same as advice and counsel from those with divinely appointed stewardships for our spiritual welfare, whose right and responsibility it is to receive revelation on our behalf. Further, true inspiration will not be contrary to the established doctrine, which is the measuring rod by which we should judge both our own inspiration and that which comes from others.

Personal Revelation. Personal revelation is imperative to making correct decisions about the "individual adaptations" spoken of by Elder Holland. However, extra care should be taken in seeking personal revelation about the powerful feelings of sexual attraction. President Packer has counseled:

Be ever on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. There are counterfeit spirits just as there are counterfeit angels. (See Moroni 7:17.) Be careful lest you be deceived, for the devil may come disguised as an angel of light.

The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual. We occasionally find people who receive what they assume to be spiritual promptings from God, when those promptings are either centered in the emotions or are from the adversary.¹⁴

Same-sex attraction is a challenge in which the spiritual and emotional parts of people are closely linked, and it can be difficult to differentiate between an emotional impulse and inspiration. A key test is whether the prompting is consistent with the established doctrines, since divine revelation will not lead us to break God's commandments.

Obtaining Truth about Same-Sex Attraction through the Scientific Method

As explained by Elder Scott, our Heavenly Father has permitted a great deal of knowledge to be revealed by the scientific method. In contrast to truth necessary for salvation, truth for the general betterment of mankind is most often revealed to inspired men and women dispersed throughout the world and through the ages, thereby providing each human being an opportunity to bless the lives of others. President Packer has said:

The Spirit of Christ can enlighten the inventor, the scientist, the painter, the sculptor, the composer, the performer, the architect, the author to produce great, even inspired things for the blessing and good of all mankind.

This Spirit can prompt the farmer in his field and the fisherman on his boat. It can inspire the teacher in the classroom, the missionary in presenting his discussion. It can inspire the student who listens. And of enormous importance, it can inspire husband and wife, and father and mother.¹⁵

While the Savior healed many people with a variety of afflictions during his mortal ministry and even restored life to the dead, insofar as our scriptures record, he did not choose to directly advance mankind's understanding of the science relating to the afflictions he healed. For example, while the Savior cured some from leprosy (see, for example, Matthew 8:2–4; Luke 17:11–19), thousands more suffered this debilitating disease until modern drugs discovered by scientists in the twentieth century virtually eradicated it where the drugs are available. These miracle drugs are the result of diligent inquiry by people of science over a long period of time and are an example of truths our Heavenly Father has allowed mankind to discover through the scientific method. Modern psychiatry and psychotherapy are relatively recent fields of science, but they too have done much to help those with challenges that affect emotional and mental health.

While truth revealed through the scientific method can be a blessing to many, it is of a different order than the saving principles and ordinances of the gospel. The distinction is important. We should not expect priesthood leaders to be scientists or clinical therapists, nor should we expect therapists to have the same spiritual discernment as a righteous parent or an ordained priesthood leader with direct stewardship for our spiritual welfare. Nevertheless, therapy can help some people overcome or moderate behaviors that hinder obtaining the full blessings of the gospel, and in this way scientific truth can help people along the way to salvation. Section III of this book contains information revealed by the scientific method, along with advice from clinical therapists who have sought to apply this knowledge.

Science can also be misused. Some who want same-sex relationships to be accorded the same legal and social status as traditional marriage between a man and a woman support their argument by appeals to scientific claims that same-sex attraction is a purely biological condition. Other research shows this not to be the case.¹⁶ Also, there are other reports of misguided and inappropriate scientific inquiries into same-sex attraction. Past mistakes should always be learned from and not repeated; however, rather

than being a reason to cease striving to learn more, they are a reminder to do so in appropriate ways.

Same-sex attraction is not the only area where revealed truth and current science have at times appeared to be at odds. The Word of Wisdom is another good example. It should strengthen our faith when later scientific discoveries confirm the wisdom of the revealed truths that preceded them. Further, as explained by Elder James O. Mason in chapter 1, the approach to a condition does not necessarily change, regardless of whether it is congenital or acquired after birth.

Same-sex attraction is a complex and multifaceted issue, one that can affect physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Eliminating and diminishing same-sex attraction and working toward developing heterosexual attractions are matters of improving one's health and well-being and can often be aided by appropriate therapy. Therapy, in turn, can be improved by careful research using the scientific method. We need all of the best wisdom, knowledge, and guidance we can obtain from all inspired sources, including appropriate scientific research.

Healing through Priesthood Power and through Professional Therapy

Michael wanted to know whether his challenge of same-sex attraction could be taken away. Could he be healed by priesthood power? Could he be healed by therapy?

The Savior's Power to Heal. With regard to the Savior's healing power, Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said:

Although the Savior could heal all whom He would heal, this is not true of those who hold His priesthood authority. Mortal exercises of that authority are limited by the will of Him whose priesthood it is. Consequently, we are told that some whom the elders bless are not healed because they are "appointed unto death" (D&C 42:48). Similarly, when the Apostle Paul sought to be healed from the "thorn in the flesh" that buffeted him (2 Corinthians

12:7), the Lord declined to heal him. Paul later wrote that the Lord explained, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Paul obediently responded that he would “rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9–10).¹⁷

Even though the Lord may not choose to take our afflictions from us, he will not leave us without comfort. President Thomas S. Monson said:

At times there appears to be no light at the tunnel’s end. . . . We feel abandoned, heartbroken, alone. If you find yourself in such a situation, I plead with you to turn to our Heavenly Father in faith. He will lift you and guide you. He will not always take your afflictions from you, but He will comfort and lead you with love through whatever storm you face.¹⁸

Some who have struggled with same-sex attraction report that mighty efforts to be free of the challenge through fasting, prayer, and living righteously have not taken the burden away. If those who are struggling understand only the Savior’s power to remove burdens, they may misinterpret the continuing challenge in their life as a sign that they are unworthy or unloved by the Lord. Understanding that the Savior has power to also strengthen us to bear them helps us to recognize and be grateful for the particular blessings given to us.

Seeking Healing through Professional Therapy. Michael began seeing a therapist, from whom I felt that Michael obtained a measure of help. Professional therapy is, however, a profession. It should go without saying, therefore, that not all therapists are equally skilled, nor do they all possess the same experience, training, values, or faith. Nor should broad assumptions about a therapist be made based solely on religious affiliation or association with a particular organization. Too often, people with same-sex attraction seek professional therapy without the information

necessary to enable them to find and evaluate potential therapists. Other chapters in this book provide advice on this subject. Also, because both priesthood leaders and professional therapists provide counseling, it is important to keep the distinctions in their roles in mind.

Finding a good therapist is important. However, no matter how knowledgeable and skilled the therapist may be, the Lord should be involved. Speaking in general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks addressed the need to involve the Spirit in therapeutic counseling by reading a letter from a man who has struggled with same-sex attraction. The man commented:

Some profess that change is possible and therapy is the only answer. They are very learned on the subject and have so much to offer those who struggle . . . , but I worry that they forget to involve Heavenly Father in the process. If change is to happen, it will happen according to the will of God. I also worry that many people focus on the causes of [same-gender attraction]. . . . There is no need to determine why I have [this challenge]. I don't know if I was born with it, or if environmental factors contributed to it. The fact of the matter is that I have this struggle in my life and what I do with it from this point forward is what matters.¹⁹

A recent study confirms the helpfulness of religious intervention in addressing same-sex attraction, rating it more helpful than traditional psychotherapy.²⁰ Dr. A. Dean Byrd,²¹ who has over thirty years of experience as a clinical psychologist treating people with same-sex attraction, reports that in his experience those who are best able to resolve their unwanted same-sex attractions also experience a deepened spiritual understanding of the Lord's love for them and of the truths of the gospel.²² If done in the right way, then, therapy may help, but it should not be used as a substitute for the Savior's healing power, nor should a therapist be expected to "fix" same-sex attraction like setting a broken arm. It just does not work that way. As in other matters, it is best to seek out the

best that science has to offer but continue to look to the Lord in all things.

Understanding What to “Heal”— Distinguishing Spirit and Body

Because sexual thoughts, feelings, and attractions are so intertwined, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between matters of body and spirit and between thoughts and feelings that are sinful and those that are not. Four important doctrinal principles can help us better understand these distinctions: (1) any sexual relations with anyone other than one’s husband or wife to whom they are legally married is sinful;²³ (2) lust is also sinful (Matthew 5:27–28), which means that sin can occur without any physical action; (3) same-sex attraction that is not acted upon is not a sin;²⁴ and (4) we are expected to bridle all of our passions (Alma 38:12). By applying these four principles, we can place sexual attraction in its proper perspective: The initial impulse of attraction is a bodily mechanism, not a sin. This impulse, however, must be bridled, for if left unchecked these feelings may lead to lustful thoughts, the beginning of sin. Sinful thoughts, in turn, are the first step to sinful conduct.

The initial physical impulse of sexual attractions that come without conscious choice or sinful conduct, therefore, is not a gauge of righteousness or self-worth. Rather, it is the choices a person makes in responding to these attractions, including the manner in which they are bridled, that demonstrates righteousness or sinfulness. Lustful sexual thoughts or improper actions, regardless of whether the attractions are directed to the same or opposite gender, are sinful and can lead to greater sin if they are not checked and bridled.

The experience of mortality requires a human body. Our bodies are endowed with appetites, passions, and powers necessary to sustain life and perpetuate the human race, including sexual desire and the appetite for food and drink. These appetites and passions play an important role, but they are not core attributes by which

we should define ourselves or others. For a variety of reasons, human appetites and passions sometimes do not work perfectly. For some, the mechanism that tells the body that it has eaten enough fails to work, and as a result they may struggle with overeating. Others are particularly prone to addiction to chemical substances such as alcohol. Others have too much or too little sexual desire. And for some, sexual attraction to persons of the same sex poses a difficult challenge. The point here is to place sexual attraction in the context of other appetites and passions and to note that failures of these imperfect attraction mechanisms have parallels and counterparts in other functions of the human body.

At the same time, however, heterosexual attractions are complementary to the divine gender roles of men and women in rearing families. "Gender," the proclamation on the family tells us, "is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."²⁵ When sexual attractions do not function in ways that are conducive to the fulfillment of these gender roles, seeking appropriate treatment should not be so different from seeking treatment for the many other physical, mental, and emotional challenges we face in mortality.

People that experience same-sex attraction, particularly if they have been mistreated by others, might be tempted to reject the rejection, so to speak, and embrace their same-sex attraction as a core part of their nature by identifying themselves as gay or lesbian. There is no need, however, to celebrate or view same-sex attraction as an element of self-worth any more than there is a need to define ourselves by heterosexual attractions. All of Heavenly Father's children are of infinite worth, regardless of whether their sexual attraction mechanisms work perfectly or not. Defining one's self or others based on sexual feelings can divide us by diminishing the value we place on our true nature as children of God. If we are unkind to those who experience same-sex attraction, they will be more likely to seek solace and comfort from those who view homosexuality as an acceptable alternative.

At the same time, however, it is also important to address same-sex attractions with wisdom and prudence. Some who

experience same-sex attraction erroneously believe they can embrace the attractions but still live a chaste life. Indulging in a fascination of same-sex attraction, however, is much more likely to lead to immoral thoughts and behavior. It is obvious that the mechanism of sexual attraction, when directed towards persons of the same sex, does not operate in a way that is conducive to the establishment and maintenance of marriage between a man and woman and to the rearing of children by mothers and fathers in a traditional family unit. For those who desire such families in this life and the next, embracing same-sex attraction as an acceptable alternative will surely lead them away from this goal.

The Importance of Recognizing What We Don't Know about Same-Sex Attraction

Finally, while a substantial body of knowledge about same-sex attraction exists, there is still much that is not known, and we should be wary of those who claim to have all the answers. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has recently written, “Unfortunately, some people believe they have all the answers now and declare their opinions far and wide. Fortunately, such people do not speak for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”²⁶

Realizing and accepting that there is still much to be learned can help us be less inclined to find fault with others about their views. Further, recognizing what we do not know is the first step in the search for additional knowledge. The worst possible course of action would be to cease searching for truth about same-sex attraction, either because we think we know it all already, or because we view same-sex attraction as a purely sociopolitical issue that is impolite to study. Either frame of mind helps no one. Surely we should do our best to continually search for and employ all of the best available knowledge and wisdom about this important issue.

About the Author

Dennis V. Dahle, JD, a corporate attorney in private practice in Salt Lake City, Utah, has served as a bishop and currently serves as a stake

president. In 2005, Mr. Dahle and others founded the Foundation for Attraction Research, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization for the purpose of creating resources and sponsoring research supportive of traditional Judeo-Christian standards of moral conduct. *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* is the Foundation's first project and brings together a distinguished group of authors and editors to address this sensitive topic. The Foundation's board of directors includes A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH; Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW; William C. Duncan, JD; Doris R. Dant, MS, MA; John P. Livingstone, EdD; and M. Gawain Wells, PhD. Mr. Dahle is also one of the editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*.

Notes

1. Richard G. Scott, "Truth: The Foundation of Correct Decisions," *Ensign*, November 2007, 92.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
3. Richard G. Scott, "Truth: The Foundation of Correct Decisions," *Ensign*, November 2007, 90.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 90–91.
7. Jeffrey R. Holland, "General Patterns and Specific Lives," World-wide Leadership Training Meeting: Building Up a Righteous Posterity, February 9, 2008, 2, www.lds.org.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Boyd K. Packer, "Do Not Fear," *Ensign*, May 2004, 79.
11. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." (*Messages of the First Presidency*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75], 3:54; quoted by Boyd K. Packer, "Teach Them Correct Principles," *Ensign*, May 1990, 89.)
12. L. Tom Perry, "We Believe All That God Has Revealed," *Ensign*, November 2003, 85–86.
13. Boyd K. Packer, "The Candle of the Lord," *Ensign*, January 1983, 56.
14. *Ibid.*, 55–56.
15. Boyd K. Packer, "The Light of Christ," *Ensign*, April 2005, 10.
16. See chapter 12.
17. Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," *Ensign*, November 2006, 7.

18. Thomas S. Monson, "Looking Back and Moving Forward," *Ensign*, May 2008, 90.
19. Dallin H. Oaks, "He Heals the Heavy Laden," *Ensign*, November 2006, 8–9.
20. Elan Yeshayahu Karten, "Sexual reorientation efforts in dissatisfied same-sex attracted men: What does it really take to change?" Jan. 1, 2006, ETD Collection for Fordham University, Paper AAI3201129, <http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI3201129>.
21. Author of chapters 8 and 18, and coeditor of this volume.
22. Personal conversation with the author.
23. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 95.
24. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 2007, 42.
25. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
26. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 2007, 43.

CHAPTER 7

Selected Quotations from LDS General Authorities and Church Publications about Same-Sex Attraction

Compiled by Richard W. Potts, PhD

This chapter reviews what the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), particularly members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, have advised regarding same-sex attraction. Statements were obtained from an extensive search of references in recent LDS literature. Sources include general conference proceedings, First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve statements, interviews posted on the LDS Church's official web site, and official Church publications that offer guidance relevant to homosexuality.

Although many leaders have discussed the Church position on topics related to homosexuality, each providing specific perspectives and insights, space limitations for this chapter prevent all the references from being presented. References were selected according to what seems to be the most representative of the major themes in Church leaders' discussions of homosexuality.

We strongly encourage the reader to consult the full text of these documents, particularly the booklet prepared by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles called *God Loveth His Children*. The far-reaching and careful discussion of relevant issues in an interview with Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman is also extremely helpful. Information on how to access these and other documents is available at the end of this chapter.

Sympathize with and Give Hope to Those Who Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction

The statements of the General Authorities provide comfort, support, and hope that change is possible.

People inquire about our position on those who consider themselves so-called gays and lesbians. My response is that we love them as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. Most people have inclinations of one kind or another at various times. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church. . . . We want to help these people, to strengthen them, to assist them with their problems and to help them with their difficulties. (Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?”)

With some few, there is the temptation which seems nearly overpowering for man to be attracted to man or woman to woman. . . . We understand why some feel we reject them. That is not true. We *do not* reject you, only immoral behavior. We *cannot* reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We *will not* reject you, because we love you. (Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God”)

Notwithstanding your present same-gender attractions, you can be happy during this life, lead a morally clean life, perform meaningful service in the Church, enjoy full fellowship with your fellow Saints, and ultimately receive all the blessings of eternal life. (*God Loveth His Children*)

Causes of Same-Sex Attraction

A review of statements of General Authorities on causes of same-sex attraction better promotes hope of healing than society’s traditional view of those causes.

Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of “nature and nurture.” All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior. (Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction”)

The false belief of inborn homosexual orientation denies to repentant souls the opportunity to change and will ultimately lead to discouragement, disappointment, and despair. (James E. Faust, “Serving the Lord and Resisting the Devil”)

Do not blame anyone—not yourself, not your parents, not God—for problems not fully understood in this life. . . . Some people have been abused during the early years of life or have engaged in sexual experimentation at a young age. If this has happened to you, please understand that abuse by others or youthful experiences should not create a present sense of guilt, unworthiness, or rejection by God or His Church. Innocent mischief early in life does not predispose a youth toward same-gender attraction as an adult. (*God Loveth His Children*)

As for why you feel as you do, I can’t answer that question. A number of factors may be involved, and they can be as different as people are different. Some things, including the cause of your feelings, we may never know in this life. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”)

Difference between Same-Sex Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior

Understanding the differences between thoughts, feelings, and behavior and their different consequences helps us see that thoughts and feelings are not condemned and behavior can be repented of.

Attractions alone do not make you unworthy. If you avoid immoral thoughts and actions, you have not transgressed even if you feel such an attraction. (*God Loveth His Children*)

There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior. However, such thoughts and feelings, regardless of their causes, can and should be overcome and sinful behavior should be eliminated. (First Presidency, “Standards of Morality and Fidelity”)

We don’t discipline for the thoughts and tendencies, but for the actions. In one way there’s little different than a heterosexual person being under terrible pressure to misuse those sacred powers of procreation immorally. And the line is drawn there. That’s the individual’s responsibility to keep the commandments. They’re free to do as they want and go their way, but that’s the cost. (Boyd K. Packer, interview transcript from PBS documentary *The Mormons*)

Let me make it clear that attractions alone, troublesome as they may be, do not make one unworthy. . . . If you do not act on temptations, you have not transgressed. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”)

With Same-Sex Attraction, Agency Is Still Intact, though Freedom Might Be Hindered

No matter how strong same-sex attraction tendencies are, the power to “act for ourselves” and change remains in force.

These temptations, which are generally uninvited, may be powerful, but they are never so strong as to deprive us of our freedom of choice. (*God Loveth His Children*)

Those attracted to the same gender face some unique restrictions regarding expression of their feelings. . . . Such feelings can be powerful, but they are never so strong as to deprive anyone of the freedom to choose worthy conduct. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”)

What Can Help

Following the counsel of the General Authorities gives strength to deal with the temptations of same-sex attraction; helps diminish, if not eliminate, same-sex attraction feelings; and helps to lead to a fulfilling way of life.

With unfeigned love we say to those who so struggle, do not forsake the Lord or His Church. The Lord’s arm of mercy is lengthened out all the day long towards [all who] put their trust in Him and seek His help in withstanding temptation (see 2 Nephi 28:32). (First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, April 1996)

Individuals and their families desiring help with these matters should seek counsel from their bishop, branch president, stake or district president. We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues. (First Presidency, “Standards of Morality and Fidelity”)

Through Christ and his church, those who struggle can obtain help. This help comes through fasting and prayer, through the truths of the gospel, through church attendance and service, through the counsel of inspired leaders, and, where necessary, through professional assistance with problems that require such help. Another important source of help is the strengthening influence of loving brothers and sisters. (Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction”)

You serve yourself poorly when you identify yourself primarily by your sexual feelings. That isn’t your only characteristic, so don’t

give it disproportionate attention. . . . Through the exercise of faith, individual effort, and reliance upon the power of the Atonement, some may resolve same-gender attraction in mortality and marry. Others, however, may never be free of same-gender attraction in this life. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”)

An understanding of eternal truths is a powerful motivation for righteous behavior. You are best served by concentrating on the things you can presently understand and control, not wasting energy or enlarging frustration by worrying about that which God has not yet fully revealed. Focus on living the simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Same-gender inclinations may be very powerful, but through faith in the Atonement you can receive the power to resist all improper conduct, keeping your life free from sin. (*God Loveth His Children*)

What about Marriage?

Marriage is not a therapeutic step to solve such problems as homosexual inclinations or practices.

As a doctrinal principle, based on sacred scripture, we affirm that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. The powers of procreation are to be exercised only between a man and a woman lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, undermine the divinely created institution of the family. (First Presidency, Statement on Same-Gender Marriage)

Recognize that marriage is not an all-purpose solution. Same-gender attractions run deep, and trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them. We are all thrilled when some who struggle with these feelings are able to marry, raise children, and achieve family happiness. But other attempts have resulted in

broken hearts and broken homes. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”)

Through the merciful plan of our Father in Heaven, persons who desire to do what is right but through no fault of their own are unable to have an eternal marriage in mortal life will have an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in a period following mortality, if they keep the commandments of God and are true to their baptismal and other covenants. . . . To achieve that destiny, an eternal marriage is the divine and prescribed goal for every child of God, in this life or in the life to come. (Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction”)

The Struggle of Same-Sex Attraction Will Be Taken Away in the Next Life

If same-sex attraction is not healed in this life, every blessing can and will be rewarded in the life to come for those who remain faithful.

Elder Wickman: What we look forward to, and the great promise of the gospel, is that whatever our inclinations are here, whatever our shortcomings are here, whatever the hindrances to our enjoying a fullness of joy here, we have the Lord’s assurance for every one of us that those in due course will be removed. We just need to remain faithful. (Church Public Affairs interview)

That may be a struggle from which you will not be free in this life. If you do not act on temptations, you need feel no guilt. They may be extremely difficult to resist. But that is better than to yield and bring disappointment and unhappiness to you and those who love you. (Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God”)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the General Authorities give hope and encouragement with the following statement.

A number of Latter-day Saints with same-gender attraction are moving forward with their lives by carefully adhering to gospel standards, staying close to the Lord, and obtaining ecclesiastical and professional help when needed. Their lives are rich and satisfying, and they can be assured that all the blessings of eternal life will ultimately be theirs. (*God Loveth His Children*)

About the Compiler

Richard W. Potts, PhD, is a licensed psychologist practicing at Utah Valley Regional Medical Center. He obtained his degrees at Brigham Young University, culminating with his PhD in 1998. He has coauthored several research articles on same-sex attraction in the professional literature. Dr. Potts has also coauthored research articles on spirituality and self-esteem and spiritual interventions in psychotherapy. He is married with four children.

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SECTION III

SCIENTIFIC,
CLINICAL, AND SOCIAL
PERSPECTIVES

“Seek ye out of the best books”

CHAPTER 8

Homosexuality

What Science Can and Cannot Say

A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH

Perhaps no subject in our society is more controversial than homosexuality. Indeed, it is difficult to talk about homosexuality objectively because it is so personal, involving as it does individuals, relationships, and families and extending to issues of marriage and the adoption of children.

Not only does the issue of homosexuality divide people of science from people of faith, but we are beginning to see strong differences of opinion among scientists themselves, as well as among people of faith. We even see homosexuality divide families: mothers from daughters, fathers from sons.

Homosexuality is further complicated by the politics of homosexuality. In the major mental health organizations, there is much activism masquerading as science. This activism is translated into sound bites for public consumption, causing much confusion and uncertainty.

Once considered a mental illness, homosexuality is now not only viewed as “healthy” but those who disagree with this notion of healthiness are labeled mentally ill or homophobic (*homophobia* is a much misused label given to those who do not support gay causes). In fact, more research dollars are spent on the study of homophobia than are spent on the study of homosexuality.

A quick review of the conducted research provides support to this last conclusion.

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to debate the politics of homosexuality, it is nonetheless important to understand the context in which this chapter is written. Some scientists, many of whom mean well, believe that even to write such a chapter is harmful to self-identified homosexuals. In the long run, however, it is hard to make a case for harm because science progresses only by asking questions, not by avoiding questions whose answers might not further a particular agenda.

Science is always relative, able only to approximate the truth. Even scientific “facts” always seem to have exceptions. For example, there is good scientific evidence that smoking causes cancer, but some long-term smokers do not die from cancer. As we explore what science can and cannot say about homosexuality, we must keep in mind that there are always exceptions to scientific observations, but science is still the best tool that we have when it comes to understanding such complex issues as human sexuality, including homosexuality.

Homosexuality and Science: The Biological Argument

For the past ten years, the biological argument—that gays are born that way—has permeated the national mental health associations and has seeped into the public domain. The advent of the Human Genome Project has added to the dominance of biological theories. Simple biological theories have become favored media sound bites, with the news reporting a gene for this and a gene for that. In fact, there has been a reported discovery of a “gay gene” as well as a “god gene.”

Upon closer scrutiny, even the lay person can see that the evidence for neither really exists. What evidence do we have for the biological explanation of homosexuality?

LeVay’s brain research. The initial “evidence” used to support a biological model of homosexuality came from Simon LeVay, Dean

Hamer, and the research team of J. Michael Bailey and Richard C. Pillard. Of the four researchers, three are self-identified homosexuals. This fact is not an unimportant consideration when issues of biases arise, as they often do in the research arena. Indeed, it is important to know that although only 2 to 4 percent of the population self-identify as homosexual, more than 50 percent of the research is conducted by scientists who are homosexual.¹

At the time of his research LeVay was a biological scientist at the Salk Institute in San Diego. He conducted research on the brains of two groups of men: homosexual men and men whom LeVay presumed were heterosexual. With fairly small sample sizes (nineteen homosexual men and sixteen presumed heterosexual men), LeVay conducted a postmortem analysis, focusing on a particular cluster of cells in the hypothalamus known as the INAH-3. He reported that he found subtle but significant differences between the brains of homosexual and heterosexual men.²

LeVay's research had a number of limitations. He had very little information about the sexual histories of the research subjects. Some of the subjects died of HIV/AIDS. Although there were differences between the two groups studied, some of the presumed heterosexual men had small nuclei in the critical areas, and some homosexual men had nuclei large enough to be included in the normal heterosexual range.

Nevertheless, based on this one study, activists trumpeted that the biological cause of homosexuality had been discovered. The born-that-way argument was touted in major media outlets. Opposing views were, for the most part, silenced. Any junior-level scientist could quite quickly see that this claim was far from accurate, but most dared not speak out for fear of being ostracized or even labeled homophobic.³

However, LeVay himself, when pressed, contradicted the media's interpretation of his research. In his own words, LeVay declared:

It is important to stress several limitations of the study. First, the observations were made on adults who had already been sexually active for a number of years. To

make a real compelling case, one would have to show that these neuroanatomical differences existed early in life—preferably at birth. Without such data, there is always at least the theoretical possibility that the structural differences are actually the result of differences in sexual behavior—perhaps the “use or lose it” principle. Furthermore, even if the differences in the hypothalamus rise before birth, they might still come about from a variety of causes, including genetic differences, differences in stress exposure, and many others. It is possible that the development of the INAH-3 (and perhaps other brain regions) represent a “final common pathway” in the determination of sexual orientation, a path to which innumerable factors may contribute.⁴

What LeVay attempted to explain here relates to a well-established scientific principle called “functionalism causes structuralism.” Translated, this means that behavior, particularly repetitive behaviors, can produce differences in the brain. Modern technology has demonstrated this nicely with the use of brain scans. LeVay continued:

Another limitation arises because most of the gay men whose brains I studied died of AIDS. Although I am confident that the small size of INAH-3 in these men was not an effect of the disease, there is always the possibility that gay men who died of AIDS are not representative of the entire population of gay men. For example, they might have a stronger preference for receptive anal intercourse, the major risk factor for acquiring HIV infection. Thus, if one wished, one could make an argument that structural differences in INAH-3 relate more to actual behavioral patterns of copulation than to sexual orientation as such. It will not be possible to settle this issue definitely until some method becomes available to measure the size of INAH-3 in living people who can be interviewed in detail about their sexuality.⁵

Finally, LeVay summarized his research results in the following way:

It is important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality was genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain. INAH-3 is less likely to be the sole nucleus of the brain than a part of a chain of nuclei engaged in men and women's sexual behavior . . . Since I looked at adult brains we don't know if the differences I found were there at birth, or if they appeared later.⁶

It is interesting that none of these limitations were offered by the activists, the academy, or the media representatives when LeVay's research was announced. In fact, LeVay made the above explanations quietly and did not appear on television to complain that his research had been misinterpreted or that the wrong conclusions had been reached.

Although media distortions of LeVay's research made the front page of virtually every mainstream newspaper, Dr. Leonard Sax, in his book, *Why Gender Matters*, noted that no such coverage was provided for the subsequent reports that LeVay had made a mistake. More recent, more rigorous research using more accurate methods has failed to demonstrate any differences between the brains of homosexual and heterosexual men.⁷

LeVay did not attempt to replicate his findings (as most scientists would be prone to do). He has since abandoned brain research and has devoted himself to political activism on behalf of the gay movement.

Bailey and Pillard's identical-twin studies. Studies of identical twins are popular ways to investigate the relative contributions of genetic factors to a particular trait. J. Michael Bailey and Richard C. Pillard studied identical twins and found a 52 percent concordance rate, which means that for every homosexual twin, the chances were about 50 percent that his twin would also be homosexual.⁸

The most fascinating question, however, is this: if there was something in the genetic code that made an individual homosexual, why did not all the identical twins become homosexual, since identical twins have the same genetic endowment? Bailey himself acknowledged probable selection bias and noted that he recruited in venues where participants considered the sexual orientation of their co-twin before agreeing to participate in his study.⁹ Such bias is not an unimportant consideration, particularly in areas where there is substantial activism. Bailey conducted a second study using the Australian Twin Registry, which had an anonymous response format and which makes such bias unlikely. From this study, Bailey reported a concordance rate of 20 to 37.5 percent, depending on how loosely one defines homosexuality.¹⁰ The first study received a great deal of press. Bailey's second study received almost no media attention.

To offer some perspective on twin studies and human traits, it might be good to examine the evidence for other characteristics. For example, the following genetic contributions to personality traits based on twin studies offer the concordance rates noted: general cognitive ability (50 percent), extroversion (54 percent), conscientiousness (49 percent), neuroticism (48 percent), openness (57 percent), aggression (38 percent), and traditionalism (54 percent).¹¹

Bailey's research far from proves a biological genesis of homosexuality. Rather, his research clearly demonstrates that biology is not sufficient to explain the genesis of homosexuality. (In fact, Bailey even suggests that homosexuality may represent a developmental error.¹²) If anything, the twin studies on homosexuality support the role of environment in determining which, if any, biological predispositions that are present in an individual might be expressed. Indeed, that the environment can even modify gene expression is a fact of science.

Hamer's genetic study. The third study, and perhaps the most sensationalized of the studies to purport a biological basis for homosexuality, was heralded by the media as the discovering the gay gene. Dean Hamer and his group attempted to link male

homosexuality to a stretch of DNA located at the tip of the X chromosome, the chromosome that some men inherit from their mothers. In his study, Hamer examined forty pairs of non-identical twin, gay brothers, and asserted that thirty-three pairs—a number significantly higher than the twenty pairs that chance would dictate—had inherited the same X-linked genetic markers from their mothers.¹³

Criticism of Hamer's research came from a surprising source: Dr. Neil Risch, the scientist at Yale University School of Medicine who invented the method used by Hamer. Risch commented: "Hamer *et al.* suggest that their results are consistent with X-linkage because maternal uncles have a higher rate of homosexual orientation than paternal uncles, and cousins related through a maternal aunt have a higher rate than other types of cousins. However, neither of these differences is statistically significant."¹⁴

The media touted the discovery of the gay gene, and trumpeted that yet another study had provided proof for the biological genesis of homosexuality. Criticism of Hamer's study was not aired. Hamer, like LeVay and Bailey and Pillard, did little to correct the misinterpretation of his research. However, when questioned directly, Hamer offered the following: "We knew . . . that genes were only part of the answer. We assumed the environment also played a role in sexual orientation, as it does in most if not all behaviors."¹⁵

Hamer further noted, "He doesn't believe homosexuality . . . is purely genetic. . . . [Environment plays a role.] We don't think there's a single master gene that makes people gay. . . . Hamer said he does not expect . . . to be able to predict who will be gay."¹⁶ Citing the failure of his own research, Hamer concluded, "The pedigree study failed to produce what we originally hoped to find: simple Mendelian inheritance. In fact, we never found a single family in which homosexuality was distributed in the obvious sort of pattern that Mendel observed in his pea plants."¹⁷

What is even more intriguing is that when Hamer's study was replicated by Rice and his associates, with research that was more robust, the genetic markers were found to be nonsignificant. Rice

and his fellow researchers concluded, "It is unclear why our results are so discrepant from Hamer's original study. Because our study was larger than that of Hamer *et al.*'s, we certainly had adequate power to detect a genetic effect as large as reported in that study. Nonetheless, our data do not support the presence of a gene of large effect influencing sexual orientation at position XQ 28."¹⁸

Overview of biological theories. The biological studies have been extensively reviewed by world-renowned research teams, including Byne and Parsons and Friedman and Downey. Both of these experienced teams reached a singular conclusion: a simple biological model does not fit the current research.¹⁹ In fact, Friedman and Downey state, "At clinical conferences one often hears . . . that homosexual orientation is fixed and unmodifiable. Neither assertion is true. . . . The assertion that homosexuality is genetic is so reductionistic that it must be dismissed out of hand as a general principle of psychology."²⁰

Dr. Janet Cummings further noted, "The belief that homosexuality is always inbred flies in the face of available evidence that genetics, childhood environment, and personal choice are all factors. Granted, some may be more salient than others, but from the genetic standpoint alone, the genes responsible would have disappeared throughout the millennia from lack of reproductive activity."²¹

Perhaps the best succinct summary of the research on the genesis of homosexuality comes from Dr. Francis S. Collins, the head of the Human Genome Project at the National Institutes of Health. He offered the following:

An area of particularly strong public interest is the genetic basis of homosexuality. Evidence from twin studies does in fact support the conclusion that heritable factors play a role in male homosexuality. However, the likelihood that the identical twin of a homosexual male will also be gay is about 20 percent (compared to 2–4 percent of males in the general population), indicating that sexual orientation is genetically influenced but not hardwired by

DNA, and that whatever genes are involved represent pre-dispositions, not predeterminations.²²

Dr. Collins goes on to say that both the environment—particularly childhood experiences—as well as the role of free will affect us all in profound ways.²³

So why all the interest in proving that homosexuality is hard-wired or that homosexuality is biologically determined? Perhaps LeVay has the answer. He noted that “people who think that gays and lesbians are ‘born that way’ are more likely to support gay rights.”²⁴

LeVay’s conclusion finds support from lesbian psychologist Lisa Diamond, who noted that “it may well be that for now, the safest way to advocate for lesbian/gay/bisexual rights is to keep propagating a deterministic model: sexual minorities are born that way and can never be otherwise. If this is an easier route to acceptance (which may in fact be the case), is it really so bad that it is inaccurate?”²⁵

The erosion of the biological argument is reflected in a recent position statement change by the American Psychological Association (APA). The former APA statement (1998) read, “There is considerable evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person’s sexuality.”²⁶ The recent APA statement (2008) reads:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons. . . . Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any factor or set of factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles.²⁷

With the erosion of the biological argument, scientists are turning toward the nurture or psychological arguments. Many are beginning to recognize that there are likely many roads that lead into

and out of homosexuality and that homosexuality is indeed more fluid than once thought. Though there may be biological predispositions underlying homosexuality as there are in many other complex challenges, it is the environment that determines if and when those predispositions manifest themselves.

Homosexuality and Science: The Psychological Argument

Psychological theories of homosexuality can be placed into one of three categories: psychoanalytic, social learning, and interactional. Each framework has made contributions to understanding possible routes to the development of homosexual attractions, and there is some scientific evidence to support each.

Psychoanalytic theory. From a psychoanalytical perspective, homosexuality emerges from a context of difficult family relationships, particularly a detached, disconnected father and an over-involved mother. Such unhealthy relationships contribute to the rejection of a masculine or feminine gender identity.

There is some research that does support the notion of disordered parent-child relationships where the child rejects identification with the same-sex parent and turns to same-sex peers or adults for love, support, and affirmation. For example, Weinstein and Hammersmith found that 72 percent of the homosexual men in their research recalled feeling very little or not at all like their fathers.²⁸ Rekers concluded that the child's relationship to the father was predictive of the sexual-identity outcome.²⁹ Dickson and associates' research also found differences between mother-child relations when comparing homosexual men to heterosexual men.³⁰

However, psychoanalysis suffers from a lack of rigorous studies to support this theory. Nonetheless, there is an abundance of clinical data via case reports in support of the psychoanalytical theory of homosexuality, particularly preceding the 1973 deletion of homosexuality from the psychiatric manual.

Social-learning theory. Social-learning theory explains how we learn through observations and adopt actions and attitudes from

significant others. In this theory, behavioral conditioning, both direct and indirect, accounts for the attractions we develop and the behaviors we adopt. From this perspective, children and adolescents learn about sexual behavior and sexual preference from parents, peers, and the media. They get rewarded or punished by significant others for their sexual attitudes and behaviors. A young boy, for example, may have been involved with masturbation activities with his peers and learned homosexual activity from such interactions. Social-learning theory suggests that peers and the media have tremendous influences on the sexual attitudes and behavior on adolescents.

Social learning can also account for the role of serious trauma, such as sexual abuse, in the development of homosexual behavior. Some researchers have found a higher prevalence of sexual abuse in the histories of both male and female homosexuals. For example, Shrier and Johnson found that boys who were sexually abused were seven times more likely to self-identify as homosexual or bisexual.³¹ Friedman and Downey found that boys who later identified as homosexual became sexually active at an earlier age than did their heterosexual counterparts (12.7 years versus 15.7) years.³² Using a nonclinical population, Tomeo, Templer, Anderson, and Kotler found that 46 percent of gay men and 22 percent of lesbians were sexually abused as children, compared to 7 percent of the matched heterosexual men and 1 percent of the matched heterosexual women. Particularly intriguing was the finding that 68 percent of the homosexual men and 38 percent of the lesbians did not self-identify as gay or lesbian until after the molestation.³³

Perhaps there is no better example of the role of sexual abuse in the lives of self-identified homosexuals than the Greg Louganis story. Louganis's history not only supports classical psychoanalytical theory but supports learning theory as well. Consider the following excerpt from his book as Louganis describes sexual abuse by a perpetrator who was the age of Louganis's father.

He put his arms around me and kissed me. I really like being held, and I was thrilled that this guy found me

attractive. . . . I thought over time that I would feel less ashamed about what I was doing, but it only got worse. The age difference bothered me more, and he couldn't exactly be a part of my life. I felt stupid telling him what I was doing at school and I couldn't introduce him to any of my classmates. I hated the separation and secrecy, but I kept going back for the affection, the holding, the cuddling—more than the sex. I was starved for the affection and he was happy to give it to me. . . . It upset me that he was so much older, not because I felt molested or anything. I had been more than a willing partner, but the difference in our ages made the experiences even more shameful.”³⁴

Louganis further wrote, “At one point he told me he was concerned about seeing me because I was under eighteen. Apparently, he'd been jailed in the past for picking up minors.”³⁵

Sexual abuse creates havoc in the lives of children through the introduction of confusion, particularly gender confusion. Social-learning theories explain how needs for attention and affection get mixed up with sexuality when sexual abuse occurs. Children can develop an affinity for homosexual relationships because physical stimulation can be reinforcing. Boys in particular are prone to cognitive errors when they confuse the physical stimulation with the sexual abuse. The physical stimulation from the sexual abuse is simply an indicator that the body is working; the body makes no judgment on the abusive act itself. It is clear that the gender confusion emerges from sexual abuse and that such confusion is often seen in the backgrounds of homosexual men.

There is evidence to support the role of peers in the development of homosexual attractions as well. The well-known psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan suggested that the lack of connections with same-sex peers sets the stage for later development of homosexual attractions.³⁶ Peer neglect or peer abuse (teasing and bullying) often results in disconnections. Such trauma, particularly during the early preadolescent years, can cause gender confusion and subsequent problems with sexual orientation. More recently,

support for the contributions of peer abuse to the development of homosexuality has emerged from the work of Pennsylvania psychiatrist Richard Fitzgibbons.³⁷

It is important to understand that the data from many such studies is correlational, and no cause-and-effect conclusions can be drawn. That is, modeling, sexual abuse, and peer abuse may be contributing factors to homosexual attractions and homosexual behaviors, but these factors do not directly cause the attractions. Such experiences often contribute to gender confusion and such confusion actually makes young boys vulnerable to a variety of challenges, including homosexuality.

Interactional theory. Interactional theory combines the indirect or predisposing effects of biology with environmental factors to explain homosexuality. Daryl C. Bem, a self-identified gay researcher at Cornell University, postulates that genes do not directly cause homosexuality but rather set the stage for homosexuality by influencing temperament. His theory, known as EBE (Exotic Becomes Erotic), suggests that when temperament is associated with gender nonconformity (where boys identify with girls and girls with boys in terms of their activities) the child is prevented from interacting with same-sex peers and thus fails to bond or identify with same-sex peers.³⁸ During adolescence, these young people sexualize “otherness,” or those with whom they are not identified. In other words, these preadolescents sexualize that with which they are not familiar. Bem’s research is supportive of a developmental trajectory where boys in particular see themselves as different from their male peers, and this difference becomes sexualized, later leading to the development of homosexual attractions.

This interactional theory seems a logical alternative to the biological, psychoanalytical, and social-learning theories. The interactional theory postulates that biologically predisposed personality or temperament traits are nurtured in relationships and environmental contexts. Thus, this model accounts for a variety of factors or what some have labeled the “conspiracy of factors” that later combine to shape homosexual attractions and homosexual behaviors. However, the primary drawback is the failure of

interactional theory to consider the role of agency or choice in the development of homosexuality.

Agency and homosexual behavior: a neglected area. Biological theory suggests the force of nature (genes, prenatal hormones) in the development of homosexual attractions and behavior. Environment suggests the influence of family and peer relationships, the importance of modeling and the media. And the interactional model posits some contribution from each. However, what is the role of agency, choice, or the person's own participation in the development of sexual preference?

Choice does not necessarily mean conscious choice. Sexual attractions may not be chosen, but responses to those attractions do involve choice. Unbidden attractions may come because of situational factors and prior sexual experiences. There may even be some kind of biological predisposition that makes such attractions more probable than not. But these attractions may be increased or decreased by the choices that people make.

Byrne and Parsons make this argument: "Conspicuously absent from most theorizing on the origins of sexual orientation is an active role of the individual in constructing his or her [own sexual] identity."³⁹ Diamond, as well, noted that while biology may predispose a person's sexual orientation, an individual is flexible in responding to such biological predispositions and environmental influences.⁴⁰ Perhaps the lesbian activist Camille Paglia said it best when she concluded, "There is an element of choice in all behavior, sexual or otherwise."⁴¹

If we are indeed free to choose, there must be choices. In some cases of homosexuality, there may be no identified antecedents such as adverse life events, no abuse, no difficult parental or peer relationships, no identifiable causes. No one knows how he or she has arrived at homosexual attractions. The answer is quite complex, suggesting that simplistic models just don't work. Research has pointed to possible biological factors, possible psychological factors, and the role of agency in the genesis of homosexuality. The interaction model, accompanied by individual choice in responding to these contributions, is the most likely scenario.

A Biopsychosocial Model Mediated by Agency Best Fits the Scientific Data

A biopsychosocial model mediated by choice best represents the current state of the research on homosexuality. Homosexuality is not explained by either a simple biological model or a simple psychological model, nor can homosexuality be reduced to a simple matter of choice. Emerging scientific evidence supports the notion that homosexuality is not easily or simply defined and that homosexuals are not a homogeneous population. In addition, the terms *homosexual attraction*, *homosexual orientation*, and *homosexual identity* refer to distinctly different realities. *Homosexual attractions* may emerge during adolescence and disappear. A *homosexual orientation*, which is a general affective response to members of one's own sex, appears to be fluid—it may wax or wane. A *homosexual identity* is a sociopolitical statement that one wishes to be gay-identified. Frequently, the three distinct categories are merged in both the media and in the academy, making it difficult to even discuss the term *homosexuality*.

The most likely explanation of homosexuality is that it results from a complex combination of biological factors (such as temperament), environmental traumas (such as those associated with sexual or peer abuse), and difficult parental relationships, all of which are likely different for different people. And we must not exclude the role of agency or choice in response to such attractions.

Perhaps a more important question is, What can scientists say about the malleability of homosexuality? Once established, are homosexual attractions modifiable or changeable? Can an individual who is predominantly homosexual become predominantly heterosexual?

Science and Psychological Care for Those with Unwanted Homosexual Attractions

One really cannot talk about providing care for those with unwanted homosexual attractions without noting something of the

history of psychological care for this population. Prior to 1973, psychological care was routinely provided for those who were unhappy with their unwanted homosexual attractions. But the American Psychiatric Association (APA) was lobbied by gay activists to delete homosexuality from the psychiatric manual. In 1973, the APA partially complied with the activists' demands but still maintained the category of "ego-dystonic" homosexuality, which meant that if an individual was distressed by his or her unwanted homosexual attractions, he or she had the right to have psychological care. However, because of pressure from gay activists, even the ego-dystonic category was deleted in 1987.

The modification of this category and the subsequent complete deletion of the diagnosis of homosexuality from the psychiatric manual resulted in a dearth of scientific studies of therapeutic outcomes. However, some efforts have been and are being made to evaluate the efficacy of psychological care in diminishing unwanted homosexuality.

Interestingly enough, the historical research that evaluated treatment success of reorientation therapy for those unhappy with their homosexual attractions is very similar to the outcome research for other difficult psychological challenges. That is, like other difficulties, unwanted homosexual attractions are amenable to psychological interventions not so unlike other difficulties.

Satinover reviewed this research and reported a composite success rate of 50 percent.⁴² Masters and Johnson, the famed sex researchers, reported a success rate of 65 percent after a five-year follow-up.⁴³ Elizabeth James conducted an analysis of over a hundred studies and concluded that when all the research was combined, approximately 35 percent of those with homosexual attractions "recovered"; an additional 27 percent "improved." She concluded that significant improvement and even complete recovery from a homosexual orientation was entirely possible.⁴⁴

More than thirty years ago, Freund, using penile plethysmography, found that some homosexual men could voluntarily alter their penile responses to respond to heterosexual stimuli without ever receiving reorientation therapy.⁴⁵

More recently, Lisa Diamond, a researcher and gay activist, concluded that sexual identity is far from fixed in women who are not exclusively heterosexual.⁴⁶ Although Diamond does not want her study to be used to support the notion of the fluidity of homosexual attractions, her longitudinal research does just that.⁴⁷ And Diamond is not alone. Researcher Ellen Schecter conducted in-depth research with women who self-identified as lesbian for ten years and were currently in a heterosexual relationship lasting for at least a year. She concluded that labels such as lesbian may oversimplify women's sexual identity and experience.⁴⁸

A published study coauthored by the current writer revealed the following: prior to therapy, 68 percent of the participants perceived themselves as either exclusively or entirely homosexual, and another 22 percent stated that they were more homosexual than heterosexual prior to therapy. After therapy, only 13 percent perceived themselves as exclusively or entirely homosexual, while 33 percent described themselves as exclusively or entirely heterosexual. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents in the study reported that they believed that therapy to change homosexual attraction can be effective and valuable.⁴⁹

A meta-analysis authored by the current writer also supported the notion of malleability of homosexual attractions. The analysis, which combined a number of studies, reached a similar conclusion: homosexuality is more fluid than fixed and reorientation therapy is indeed successful for some individuals.⁵⁰

Perhaps the single most important recent study conducted to investigate the effectiveness of reorientation therapy in changing a homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation was conducted by Dr. Robert L. Spitzer. Ironically, Spitzer was the same psychiatrist who led the charge to remove homosexuality from the psychiatric manual in 1973.

In 2000, the American Psychiatric Association was set to ban reorientation therapy. During their meeting in Chicago, the convention goers were greeted by busloads of evangelical Christians protesting this attempt to ban such care. Spitzer (along with the current author) met with some of the protestors, and Spitzer found

their stories of change to be credible and decided that he would do a study to see if indeed homosexuality was fixed in all individuals. Though skeptical, Spitzer conducted his research and was surprised at the results. He found that 66 percent of the men and 44 percent of the women had achieved good heterosexual functioning. He also concluded that after reorientation therapy 89 percent of the men and 95 percent of the women were bothered only slightly or not at all by unwanted homosexual attractions. And contrary to the assertions by some that reorientation therapy was harmful, he did not find this to be the case at all. In fact, many of the participants in his study were depressed when they began psychological care. Virtually none were depressed at the termination of the care. Spitzer concluded that changes were made not just in behavior but in core features of sexual orientation, including attraction and fantasy.⁵¹

Spitzer's research caused a firestorm of controversy, and he was assailed by many personal attacks. However, his research was rigorously and thoroughly peer reviewed and was published in perhaps the most prestigious psychology journal in the world: *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Though most of the attacks were mounted against Spitzer personally, with little or no critique of his research, there was one notable exception: the critique of Dr. Scott Hershberger. Prior to conducting his study, Spitzer had agreed to make the data from his study available for any scientist to review. Hershberger responded to Spitzer's invitation to further scrutinize the data. It is important to note that Hershberger is a distinguished scholar and statistician, as well as a self-identified essentialist (one who believes that homosexuality is biologically determined). Hershberger subjected Spitzer's data to a Guttman Analysis. Such an analysis is essentially a statistical procedure used to determine whether the changes reported by the study participants occurred in an orderly fashion (essentially to determine whether or not the participants were lying).

Hershberger reported:

The orderly, law-like pattern of changes in homosexual behavior, homosexual self-identification observed in the Spitzer study is strong evidence that reparative therapy can assist individuals in changing their homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation. Now it is up to those skeptical of reparative therapy to provide comparably strong evidence to support their position. In my opinion, they have yet to do so.⁵²

Additional research has followed the Spitzer study, such as that by Dr. Elan Karten of Fordham University, who identified factors in the change process. For example, Karten concluded, among other factors, that the development of healthy nonsexual relationships with men was an important part of the treatment process.⁵³

One of the more interesting studies to emerge since the Spitzer study was a longitudinal study conducted by the research team of Jones and Yarhouse. These researchers investigated the question of whether or not some individuals could alter aspects of their homosexual orientation through religious ministries similar to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Their conclusion was yes. Using well-accepted, standard psychological measures, Jones and Yarhouse found solid evidence that homosexual orientation could be significantly modified through Christian ministry interventions.⁵⁴

Finally, a study completed by the current author and associates was published in a peer-reviewed psychology journal this year. In the study, we determined from client reports that those factors that impacted the change process included having a support group, having a caring or nurturing therapist, and having a spiritual leader. Particularly noteworthy were the spiritual interventions that were listed as important. They included prayer, scripture study, faith, forgiveness, and a full commitment to the healing power of God.⁵⁵

Homosexuality: A Scientific Summary

Scientific study of homosexuality has not revealed that homosexuality has a single cause. It is probable that the allopathic model, or

a simple cause-and-effect model, simply does not work. Rather, a risk-factor model better fits the data. That is, there are likely many factors, the combination of which may culminate in the emergence of homosexual attractions. Simply stated, a biopsychosocial model mediated by agency or choice best fits the scientific data. Translated, that means that whatever biological contributions present are predisposing, not predetermining. Homosexuality likely results from biologically influenced temperamental factors along with environmental factors such as sexual abuse or peer abuse along with strained parental relationships (in this way, homosexuality is no different from other challenges like alcoholism or obesity). And choice—agency, or the active role of the individual in constructing his or her own identity—is an important consideration. This choice may not be a conscious choice in the development of the attractions themselves, but rather is a choice in how the individual responds to the biological and environmental influences. And even when the attractions develop, there is choice in how the individual will respond to those attractions: either to accept and act on them or to choose not to act on them and to focus on eliminating or diminishing the attractions.

The more important scientific question is this: once established, are homosexual attractions malleable or changeable? The answer is that both historical and current research demonstrates that homosexuality is not invariably fixed in all people. Perhaps the best scientific summary of the research on whether or not individuals can change a homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation was offered by Spitzer. He concluded, “Like most psychiatrists, . . . I thought that homosexual behavior could be resisted, but sexual orientation could not be changed. I now believe that’s untrue—some people can and do change.”⁵⁶

That some people can and do change should be an impetus for scientists to further investigate the agents and process of change. Whether or not the current atmosphere of activism will permit such research will remain to be seen. Regarding the study of homosexuality, Bailey, one of the more prominent researchers in the area, declared, “It would be a shame . . . if sociopolitical concerns

prevented researchers from conscientious consideration of any reasonable hypothesis.”⁵⁷

I agree.

About the Author

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CHAPTER 9

A Comparison of Counseling Women vs. Men Who Struggle to Diminish Same-Sex Attractions

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While this chapter focuses on women and their therapists, it also draws comparisons between the experiences as well as therapeutic needs of women and men struggling with same-sex attraction (SSA). While some similarities are discussed, this chapter particularly notes differences in such areas as life experiences; establishment of trust; sexual, physical, and emotional abuse experiences; participation in individual and group therapy; and counseling with ecclesiastical leaders.

Comparison of Life Experiences

Both women and men bring significant life experiences to therapy. Women struggling with same-sex attraction most often present themselves in therapy as bright, dynamic, charming, driven, physically fit, and well groomed. Therapist and teacher Janelle Hallman has described her clients as “above average intelligence,” possessing “far reaching giftedness and creativity, curiosity and keen observance, deep sensitivity and capacity to feel” and “a strong sense of justice,” high energy, natural ability, and “interests outside of stereotypical female interests (gender nonconformity).”¹ A therapist often initially wonders why these women have made an

appointment for therapy. However, in every case their life stories are wrought with emotional abuse and often physical abuse. Further, in approximately 40 to 50 percent of the cases² women report having experienced traumatic sexual abuse, usually from significant, trusted males. The reported perpetrators vary from close family members, to ecclesiastical leaders in their ward or branch, to teachers in their public school or music/dance classes, to male friends whom the women trusted and/or considered to be their friends.

Male strugglers also present themselves in therapy as bright, dynamic, charming, driven, physically fit, and well groomed. However, often there are clues to their struggles in their voice, posture, walk, or mannerisms, which open the door to the therapist's questions about macho inclinations and the possible reasons for which they have made their therapeutic appointment. (While such clues are an alert for the counselor, many clients who demonstrate these characteristics do not struggle with same-sex attraction.) Men who struggle with same-sex attraction often share stories of intense emotional abuse by male and female family members, teachers, leaders, and supposed friends. Often (in approximately 35 percent of the clients) men report significant physical abuse, much higher than for the women. And, finally, approximately 25 percent of the men have experienced significant sexual abuse (including grooming)³ by trusted male and female figures in their lives.

Establishing Trust Relationships

In the area of relationships, women and men have common human needs. Both need relations of trust with significant others, parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. Both need age- and developmental-stage-appropriate affection. Both women and men need validation, fulfillment, and respect from essential others.

The primary difference is that women usually require more time to establish a relationship of trust with others in their lives (especially male authority figures), than do men struggling with same-sex attraction. However, it is important to remember that

each individual has a different set of experiences that alters this relationship-building ability.⁴ Each individual is unique. In one case, a woman was abused by her branch president. Though her allegations proved to be true (and were, it was later revealed, much more serious than she initially reported), she had no support from her family, church leadership, or peers through the process of initial reporting and subsequent investigation. She struggled through the drawn-out period of inquiry into her allegations, alone, criticized, and attacked by all important “others” in her life. She is still, years later, struggling with her sense of self and her sexual identity.

In a contrasting case, a young woman was fondled by her piano teacher and reported the incident to her mother, who immediately confronted the teacher and supported her daughter through the tangled legal procedures, which resulted in the teacher being ordered into much-needed therapy. In this case, the young girl was quickly helped to understand that even trusted leaders and friends can do very wrong things and only a strong sense of self, as a beloved daughter of God, will protect her as she continues through life’s trials. Today she is a wonderful, knowledgeable, well-adjusted mother of five daughters and one son.

Needs in the Interview Setting

One human need, not often acknowledged but shared equally by both men and women, is that of confidentiality and a safe space to explore often-horrendous fears and feelings. Because those in the supportive counseling relationship need to put into words their thoughts and fears, it is essential from the beginning to help them find a place to protect their journaled, written thoughts. In our day, that place is usually a computer notebook site. It is imperative that this site be carefully password protected in order for them to feel safe in honestly pouring out their thoughts. The computer recording site is especially valuable because as people proceed through counseling, they undergo a change in the intensity of their emotions toward themselves and others. While the facts of what happened do not change, they often desire to modify the

description of their feelings. This secure location allows them to do that as often as they desire.

Those who meet with a counselor or ecclesiastical leader to share these most difficult emotions orally also need a physical place that will allow them confidentiality. A bishop's office, stake office, or worse yet, a home interview may not allow them that protection. At times it takes a bit of creativity to come up with a place and situation that is safe, both acoustically and emotionally, for these interviews.

Perhaps the greatest difference between men and women going through this reporting and healing process is the quick intensity of conflicting emotions felt and expressed by women. They often take immediate and full responsibility for their feelings of same-sex attractions, along with any previous or subsequent emotional, physical, or sexual abuse imposed upon them. One woman reflected a common theme: "I am, simply, a bad spirit and it's my fault my uncle abused me. I set him up. I seduced him, and Father in Heaven can never forgive me. I let Him down. I betrayed His trust. I have tried so hard over the past twelve years to prove that I am still a good person. I have achieved honors in school, in my career, and in service to others, but I know it is impossible. I can never be forgiven because I am mortally flawed. I will always end up destroying anyone who gets too close to me."

Not only are the feelings intense, often catastrophized, but at the same time, as these women report hopelessness, fear of harming self and others, and deep emotional isolation, they honestly report outstanding accomplishments in the fields of professional sport, medicine, law, business, and education. Listening and relating to the reports of these women can leave the counselor exhausted, even after years of experience and countless interviews.

These women, as described above, telescope (or greatly magnify) fears and self-doubts and then order their lives to cover or compensate for those feelings. A woman who is experiencing a hailstorm of conflicting emotions within may appear on the surface to be calm and in complete control. Though she may be experiencing loss, separation from loved ones and friends, and deep

isolation, she may superficially appear to have a dozen close friends and be sought out for dates and advice; some may describe her as “the most popular girl in the ward.” However, this same individual may be very fragile and at high risk for further abuse, loss, and isolation. Other compensations or contradictions may include extreme service to others to balance a deep sense of guilt for real or often imagined offenses; a great hesitancy to share personal information or feelings; a deep fear of public disclosure of their underlying feelings of inadequacy or same-sex attraction; apparent great optimism and positive public attitude that hides real doubt about any possibility of change in their status or feelings; and a great show of competence to balance tremendous feelings of inadequacy.

Perhaps the greatest need shared by both men and women struggling with same-sex attraction is the need to understand themselves and others and to be understood by significant others. This is the focus of the therapeutic relationship, which must be based on trust. In this environment, those in therapy can be helped to express their underlying feelings and to acknowledge difficult and damaging events that led to this point in their lives. They can begin to understand that as children of God, they have the inherent powers and abilities to survive and overcome, whatever their life situation. They can also be assisted to believe change is possible, though that belief may, initially, be founded in the belief of the counselor.

Lying should not be necessary, either for women or men struggling with same-sex attraction, whether to their counselor or to themselves, nor should it be allowed to go unchallenged. But when a suspected lie is challenged, the challenge should not be couched as an expression of censure, condemnation, or accusation, but rather as a reflection of there being no need to cover the truth. Often lying represents a need to appear different from reality. When the pressure to appear “better than” or “without flaw” is removed or demonstrated to be unnecessary, deception falls by the side and the healing can move forward.

One day Jane reported with a forced smile and optimistic mood that she had experienced a “great week,” to which her

counselor responded, "I'm sad you feel you need to put on such a good front for me. How did it really go?" Those who try to cover the truth do not need to hear an accusation that they are not being completely honest. Instead the counselor should communicate a sense of sadness that they do not yet understand it is not necessary to put on a false front because they are valued simply for who they are regardless of what may or may not have happened throughout the past week. True recovery must be grounded in a sense of eternal identity and worth.

Exploring Motivation for Change

Both women and men struggling with unwanted sexual attractions must be assisted to explore the reasons they are interested in changing their behaviors and diminishing their attractions at this time. Usually something has happened, some crisis has occurred to bring them to this point. While they are feeling the pressure to make some change, it is supremely important that the counselor not take them off the hook or reassure them that everything is "fine." It is not fine or they would not be meeting with the counselor. Now is the time to support them in expressing what they feel is not right and why. That takes great patience, restraint, and occasionally time. During the process, their expressed reasons for making changes should be noted for future reference, especially when some of the initial energy begins to recede. The recent circumstances should be described in detail, and the attendant feelings explored. This also includes the exploration of natural, and always present, contradictions.

For instance, even though Sharon knows she should break off all relations with Joan and does not want her marriage to be destroyed, she acknowledges that she loves and cares for Joan and is not sure she can live without her in her life. Gerald reports he is discouraged and tired of the superficial gay lifestyle. He wonders if he can come back into full activity in the Church and regain the peace he remembers feeling just after his mission.

Desires and motivations for positive steps forward need to be reinforced, but care must be taken not to criticize or attack the

individual's honestly expressed feelings of inability to discontinue connections or attachments to negative persons or practices. Because women tend to be over-attached out of a fear of isolation, it is important not to quickly and entirely cut away all the foundation (all emotional connections to supportive individuals) at this time, even though those connections are negative. The goal is to help the clients stop the overt behavior immediately but to delay until later in the healing process the decision to eliminate long-term emotional connections.

A counselor may acknowledge both the close connection Sharon has with Joan but, at the same time, remind Sharon of her initial, expressed desire to cut back the close emotional dependence that has become so demanding. The counselor should also remind Sharon of her desire to eliminate the physical contact, which (though it had promised great emotional support and reassurance) has definitely not provided the hoped-for support and, in fact, has gone beyond the point of acceptance within Sharon's own moral and spiritual boundaries. It is necessary to take the position that because of her stated hopes for the future, it is now important for her to stop all physical contact with her friend, Joan, while she reassesses the situation.

The counselor and Sharon then discuss how Sharon feels about the loss of her friend, why she feels it is needful to change the relationship at this time, how she will let Joan know about her decision, and how long the separation will need to be in order for Sharon to get her feelings (boundaries) back into place. During the period the physical contact is discontinued, Sharon will be able to consider what kind of relationship she will have with Joan in the future.

If an individual asserts she is capable of continuing the physical behavior (and thus overly close emotional contact) while attempting to improve her marriage or return to full activity in the Church, it is important to go back and review the individual's stated motivation to change. The overly enmeshed situation, including the compulsion to be emotionally entwined with another individual, will not improve while the behavior and intense

emotional contact continue. Care must be taken to discuss why counseling will not likely be profitable until the physical and emotional behavior change, nor can progress toward the individual's initially expressed goals be achieved. Ask her, Is this what she honestly desires as a final outcome? Or is she interested in at least a three-month attempt to realize her hopes for the future? When the relationship with the counselor or significant other is strong enough, the individual will generally risk cutting off all physical contact for this brief but critical period of reassessment and processing.

Sources of Support for the Change Process

Women and men both need the support of significant others for their journey to eliminate homosexual behaviors and to diminish same-sex attraction. However, women often need greater support than men, especially when it comes to expressing deep feelings face to face with male authority figures. Even though they may not at first appear to need this support, some women struggling with same-sex attraction see facing ecclesiastical leaders as an impossibility. Because many of these women have been earlier abused by significant male authority figures in their lives, the resultant psychological baggage absolutely must be explored prior to that dreaded interface. Ecclesiastical authorities must, therefore, be advised of the situation and encouraged to set realistic boundaries and timelines for this interview to occur in a positive and healing setting. Often a female counselor, trusted friend, family member, or Relief Society sister will need to sit with the woman as she meets with her bishop or branch president to give her the security and confidence to be open and honest regarding her situation and feelings.

If handled appropriately, this is a most positive experience for all involved, and great healing can commence. No matter how distant or recent the underlying abuse, it can and must be shared with one in authority. No matter how unsavory the sexual experiences or thoughts, they can be shared with an ecclesiastical leader and given over to our greatest source of support through the process of

repentance. When undertaken in the appropriate spirit of fasting and prayer, the light and love that mark these occasions is indescribably positive for the struggler.

Often, on the initiative of the ecclesiastical leader, the woman attempting to leave behind unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction is referred to a professional, licensed counselor. In these cases, it is extremely important that the therapist has confidence that same-sex behaviors can be eliminated and that attractions can be significantly diminished to the point that the individual can go on to live a happy and rewarding life through restored, full religious rights and privileges. Whatever the possible referral source, the potential therapist must express, in response to direct questions, a personal belief that homosexuality is neither innate (genetically fixed and predetermined) nor immutable (unchangeable or untreatable)⁵ if he or she is to be considered reliable in helping the individual through the healing process. Evergreen International (www.evergreeninternational.org) is often reported to be a reliable source of names of supportive therapists throughout the world.

Permission to Assert Self

While many men are expected to assert themselves, women often feel far less empowered and feel a need for permission to be themselves. A male struggling with this issue will often be pushed by family members and friends to be more assertive, occasionally to be seen as “macho.” A woman, on the other hand, may be advised to stand back, be quiet, run an errand, or not “trouble her head.” When a woman offers a strong response or opinion in reply to a demeaning comment, an order, or a threat, she is often seen as inappropriately aggressive or shrewish, misadvised, or, in the worst case, demented.

For women to be able to assert themselves, they often need to be assisted to get in touch with the strength that comes from understanding their divine natures and inherent worth. Their style of stating their opinions, values, and beliefs, though different from men, is important for themselves, for their children, for their extended family, for their community institutions, and for the

world. Women are more likely to write memories, thoughts, and feelings to share with peers and those coming behind. Women are more likely than men to support expressions of feeling and hopes for nonviolent change and improvement in current systems. Women are more likely to notice those in our society who are falling behind or weakening in strength.

Women struggling with same-sex attraction often have great insight into their own situations and the situations of others, and they need to be seen as women of strength and not as helpless or inadequate to deal with the difficulties confronted. They also need to be encouraged to be the best they can at whatever they undertake, from homemaking to a profession of choice.

Relationships Gone Wrong

Because of women's innate, divinely inspired natures, they often relate to each other on a more emotional than cognitive plane. Their friendships are often more involved, intense, and emotional than male friendships. They can sit for hours and relate with each other about feelings, ideas, and values. For women with a healthy sense of self and an ability to relate positively with others, this is highly positive.

For women struggling with same-sex attraction, however, this feminine relationship affinity and ability is not present. These women, who have often suffered unresolved sexual, physical, and emotional abuse or abandonment, typically express feelings of being unworthy of healthy relationships with peers they respect or would like to get to know better. They describe fear that they might be rejected and that others might find they are as inadequate and undesirable as they suspect. They suffer from a lack of appropriate self-image and struggle with ever-shifting emotional boundaries. They feel hollow and inadequate. As a result of their feelings, they often begin relationships with others who have reciprocal intense needs, often resulting in an inappropriate bonding with a single female friend, to whom they look for the satisfaction of their needs for service, affection, validation, and support.

This inappropriate, emotionally enmeshed relationship⁶ with another woman is based on the woman's own deep emotional needs and not on understanding. Because there is no innate satisfaction or peace and stability, the supposed friendship becomes more and more intense and begins a spiral effect of needing more but receiving less security and support than is deemed necessary and thus requiring the women to reach out for even more contact and reassurance. The relationship often is driven to the point of constant contact (twelve or more cell phone contacts per day) and is emotionally consuming to the point of pushing out concern for children or employment. In all cases, the relationship involves great sacrifice of time, energy, and often financial resources.

However, hovering over this negative relationship spiral (and sometimes contributing to its strength) is the constant fear of hurting significant others (spouse, children, parents, employer, or other friends) and the struggle to appear to be competent, happy, and in control.

These relations are always marked by ambivalence, as each enmeshed woman struggles to be both a model Church member and a dedicated mate and servant of the other woman, a truly impossible and terribly incapacitating goal. Because there is no innate satisfaction or peace and stability, the relationship spirals out of control. It is usually at this time that a woman goes to a counselor for assistance.

While these women may appear to be in control emotionally, they are on the verge of destruction and must be quickly and firmly helped to back away from the edge. The spiral must stop; physical contact with the enmeshed partner must cease; and the phone, email, and letter contact must be monitored carefully. A way should be agreed upon for the woman's female partner to learn of the current termination of physical contact; and a time of reassessment should be determined, usually for some months in the future.

All care must be taken to accomplish this intervention as quickly and firmly as emotionally possible. Often this initial stage takes more frequent contact with the counselor. Feelings must

be constantly explored, worries and misgivings addressed. Ways of coping with the separation must be explored, discussed, and evaluated.

Men do not, as a rule, follow this enmeshed spiral. Their relationships tend to be more fleeting as they search for an ideal partner.⁷ While their feelings are as intense as those of women struggling with same-sex attraction, they tend to withdraw and isolate more quickly. Still, they suffer feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. They reach out for and desperately need the validation and acceptance of male peers but don't know how to achieve that effectively.

Developing Genuine Friendships

Both women and men need to learn to develop genuine, healthy same-sex relationships. This process is similar for both sexes. They must learn to honestly and objectively picture their current or recent relationships and then contrast that with a picture of a more healthy friendship and draw out the similarities and/or differences between the two. The next step is to learn how to establish a genuine or healthy friendship from the stage of choosing a potential friend, to engaging in mutual activities, to staying in the relationship.

Individuals struggling with same-sex attraction are extremely self-conscious and fearful of embarrassing themselves or others. They generally have little knowledge or experience engaging in or maintaining normal, supportive (nonenmeshed) relationships and have to learn to be successful in that arena. Counseling helps greatly, as it gives the individuals a chance to explore their feelings and motivations and to learn from their early, reaching-out experiences. For men, elders quorum house-painting or yard clean-up service projects or general sports activities are a great help. These activities give those who are struggling a chance for normal association, where they are a part of a group of individuals who are mutually involved in service to others. Women, who generally have better access to ongoing and special Relief Society service projects, such as preparing Humanitarian Services hygiene kits, have

less trouble finding this group-service outlet and support. This resource may, perhaps, explain why women seem to be able to move through this stage of healing faster than do men.

Both men and women going through this healing process need to be assisted by a trusted counselor who can help them evaluate the various friendships they form. Counseling helps them to consider how they are relating as males or females and whether their feelings are healthy; it will especially help them see how dependent they are upon the other person. Counselors are useful in helping individuals determine which of their relationships may need to be discontinued and the reasons for that action. Ways and means for shaping a normal relationship, mutually enjoyable for each of two friends, can be discussed. When rejection is encountered, the reasons for it can be discussed and understood and other relationships begun, based upon increased knowledge and understanding.

Counseling also helps greatly with assessing and dealing with problems of attachment, which often stem from early childhood. Feelings of estrangement, when presented, need to be explored, along with the approach/avoidance cycle⁸ that often accompanies that condition. All people need to feel they belong and are accepted, valued members of a family group. The process of achieving this is often difficult for both men and women.

Feminine vs. Masculine Identity

Women and men struggling with same-sex attraction often differ widely in the area of feminine versus masculine identity. While women generally seek out other women for emotional support, men generally seek from others a validation of their social and physical attractiveness. In both cases, however, men and women are drawn to different social and physical qualities of others, largely dependent on their own feelings of inadequacy. For instance, a woman will be drawn to another woman because of her appearance of quiet assurance and confidence when those are characteristics the first woman feels she sorely lacks. In another situation, a woman will be drawn to a brusque, take-charge woman when the

first woman feels totally inadequate to meet the day-to-day challenges in her life. Or a man will be drawn to a physically fit male who has a physical build or ability he wished he possessed. Though different, both men and women who struggle with same-sex attraction seek to fill pockets of void within themselves through their attachments to another.

Biological Factors

It is equally unlikely in both men and women that they are biologically determined to become involved in homosexuality or to experience same-sex attraction.⁹ We do know that most individuals, as part of the normal process of growing and developing to maturity, wonder at one time or another if they might have homosexual tendencies. Research has revealed that there is no significant evidence of a “gay gene” or of any other sure predictor of who will struggle with same-sex attractions. There is also no evidence of homosexuality being inborn or of an attraction to same-sex individuals being immutable.¹⁰

Pathways into Same-Sex Attraction

As far as researchers are able to determine, there is no single set of predetermining factors for either women or men who ultimately present with either homosexuality or obsessive same-sex attraction. Numerous factors have emerged, but they have proved to be more predictive than predetermining.

While not a problem for women, one predictive factor for men is a particularly sensitive personality. However, while highly sensitive boys may be at higher risk of, and correlate more highly with, the incidence of homosexuality and same-sex attraction, there certainly is no basis on which to assert a cause-and-effect relationship.

Being a victim of sexual abuse can be a predictive factor for both men and women. However, women with unwanted same-sex attraction report sexual abuse experiences at a much higher rate than do men. About two out of three women with same-sex attraction have clear memories of sexual abuse, with resulting feelings of

guilt and fear. Approximately one in four men report experiences of sexual abuse, often at very young ages. In both cases, the abuse generally occurs within the circle of trusted family and friends.

Women more often than men see same-sex attraction as a defense. Some women report that same-sex attraction is a defense against social expectations of feminine fluffiness and posed helplessness, which would, they feel, only open them up to further abuse by significant others. Sometimes the woman reports that her aggressive same-sex attraction face to the world deflects unwanted ridicule or demands for feminine services. Also, female same-sex attraction strugglers report that their known preferences, and the alliances developed, are a sure defense against further sexual abuse by males. This often works the opposite way, however, for men struggling with same-sex attraction. Heterosexual women often see male homosexuals as attractive and desirable partners and are not as easily put off by their declarations of same-sex attraction.

Both men and women often report grooming and seduction by significant others as a significant factor in their joining into same-sex relationships and behaviors. For women, a common attraction is developed by sports coaches and fellow athletes. Men, however, are more likely to report seduction by acting coaches and artistic peers. Of course, not all men and women who are carefully groomed are seduced into same-sex behaviors. However, the consistency of these reports gives great cause to be concerned and to study further, the effects of this grooming¹¹ process.

Dealing with Discouragement

Both men and women deal with tremendous loss as a result of unwanted same-sex attraction and that struggle's contributing factors. Both genders yearn for the sense of wholeness they sense in others. They similarly talk of filling the holes and vacant spaces within.

Both sexes find solace from same-sex attraction in service to others, especially others with severe but differing challenges. They have a marked ability and willingness to give and to reach out to

others in need, which they report makes them feel amazingly better about themselves and their life situations. Occasionally, same-sex attraction strugglers will attempt, unsuccessfully, to use this reaching-out service as a substitute or replacement for undergoing their own healing process.

The struggle to forgive others who may have harmed them is equally difficult for both men and women, though the process is often different. Men have often been emasculated and need to feel better about their manhood before they can let go of the anger and forgive. Women often must forgive their own perceived wrongs or failures before they can forgive others.

Women are often best at the self-nurturing required to heal. Perhaps this is due to the permission our society gives to womanly hugs, pampering, and other forms of individual and mutual support. Men are erroneously supposed to not need that stuff to feel okay about themselves, when in fact they do.

Women also seem to have an edge in the ability to reframe or to develop a new perspective on what has happened in their lives. Springing back and other forms of resiliency may have some connection to women's eternal nature. One woman surmised this could be a spiritual gift or God-given character trait. When she asked the first therapist what it was within her that kept her from committing suicide, the therapist replied it was likely strength of character—a gift from God before she was born.

Reaction to the Therapeutic or Counseling Process

Both men and women can relate to a therapist of either sex, dependent on their early life experiences and social/cultural norms. There appears to be no difference in the establishment of the critical therapeutic relationship between men or women and their therapists of either sex. Likewise, there appears to be no difference in their speed of progress through individual therapy.

However, there is a noted difference in the speed with which women exit the group-counseling process. Generally, women will only be actively involved in a weekly group for three months. They

quickly demonstrate an ability to receive and give support to others in the group. They are able to help others process information and to accept assistance from other group members. They quickly pick up the dynamics of the dysfunctional bonding spiral and can share that with others. They learn to reflect on and accept their progress and major accomplishments. But they definitely do not want to trek in the hills or go camping with the group or attend weekend intensive sessions to get in touch with their femininity. Perhaps that is because of their divided loyalties to family, work, and others, but it may also be because they thoroughly devote themselves to the process, master the cognitive concepts, marshal support systems within their environment, adapt, and become ready to move on.

On the contrary, it is very difficult to get males, involved in the therapy group process, to move on. These males, even the most successful, seldom terminate before several years. Often the members continue to associate socially many years after their therapy group has officially terminated. This is not unhealthy nor is it due to inappropriate relationships. The male bonding reflects needed, healthy associations. The occasions when men want to (seemingly forever) socialize, process, and look to the group for ongoing support, may indicate the lack of natural healing, supportive, and accepting individuals and groups available to them outside the therapy system. (Where are the priesthood work and sports groups when we desperately need them?)

Regardless of the similarities or differences in the individuals undergoing the difficult path of healing from same-sex attraction, the journey is negotiable, and many people achieve their goals of overcoming same-sex behaviors and diminishing their unwanted same-sex attractions.¹² While healing social, emotional, and developmental wounds is unbelievably painful and difficult, it is possible and always worth the process. These triumphant strugglers, regardless of their different challenges, are my heroes.

About the Author

Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW, is a professor of Clinical Social Work at Brigham Young University. She received her doctorate in social work from the University of Utah in 1986, and her master's of social work from Howard University in 1967. Her many recognitions and awards include being recognized as the Educator of the Year in 2003 in the BYU School of Social Work, the Social Worker of the Year award in 1991 from the Nevada Chapter of the NASW, and Evergreen International's Beacon of Light Award in 2001. Her many publications include coauthoring the *Family Enrichment Manual* recently adopted by the government of Indonesia for use in their "Weekly Family Night," and coauthoring the *Evergreen Workbook for Men* and the *Workbook for Women*. Dr. Cox has many years of experience in treating patients with unwanted same-sex attractions, both in Utah and Nevada, where she was on the faculty of University of Nevada Las Vegas. Tireless in community service, she has served on a number of nonprofit boards, including Evergreen International and Foundation for Attraction Research. Dr. Cox is also one of the editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*.

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CHAPTER 10

Telling Others

Doris R. Dant, MS, MA

The secret has been carefully guarded for years. It has wedged itself between you and those closest to you. You feel isolated. The gut-wrenching fear of being outed before you are ready has been part of you for so long it almost seems natural. But wrestling with your unwanted same-sex attractions is consuming more and more of your energy. You feel exhausted and desperate. The time has come to tell others, but just the thought is overwhelming. Whom should you tell? Will they violate your confidence or start harassing you? Or worse, will they reject you?

Telling others is truly fraught with risks. But by following the advice in this article and others in this book and, above all, seeking guidance from the Holy Ghost, you can minimize the hazards and most likely have a positive experience. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has noted, “Discussing the issue [of same-sex attraction] with someone of trust is a healthy first step to dealing with confusing feelings.”¹

Benefits of Telling Others

One of the most significant results is that sharing the challenges of same-sex attraction reduces isolation, an obvious outcome, but

For some, appropriate sharing has led to a noticeable decrease in the strength of homosexual attractions. One man commented on just such an effect: “When I talk about it, it’s not as strong. Instead of a secret I keep hidden, something I’m embarrassed about and never dare bring up, being open about it has made it less of a problem.”⁷

qualitative research has also determined that appropriate sharing begins the development of healthy relationships, because façades no longer get in the way.² Additionally, research suggests that the development of healthy, nonsexual relationships with members of the same sex has the potential to diminish homosexual attractions.³

Many who have struggled with unwanted same-sex attractions were surprised that their disclosure was met with love and concern. This outpouring of support produced some unexpected results: when their confidences were not met with rejection, those with same-sex attraction had more difficulty viewing themselves negatively. The affirmation from others actually changed their self-perception, resulting in a feeling of greater self-worth as well as “more confidence in addressing the issues.”⁴ “The fact that my friend knew what I was going through and accepted it changed the way I looked at it,” one person wrote. “It made me think, ‘I am not so different, I am not weird.’”⁵

Another person gained a similar perspective: “I guess I used to identify all these issues exclusively with homosexuality, and now I don’t. Now I think they’re just part of being a person on this planet. Now I view myself as a normal person having normal reactions.”⁶

General Advice

Appropriate sharing is the key. Shirley Cox, a therapist with extensive experience, uses this analogy: “Just as surgery is performed in a sterile environment that is meant to minimize infection, the initial revealing of your inner struggles and temptations may best be accomplished in a secure environment of trust, love, good judgment, and spiritual security.”⁸ Thus, it is important that this

sharing be limited to those individuals who are unlikely to be rejecting. These would be people who have already demonstrated their love and acceptance, who have consistently supported you in other trials.⁹

After all, people have varied backgrounds, varied limitations and strengths, and varied abilities to love in a Christlike manner.¹⁰ Because of these differences, revealing is not always predictable and may not be met with a positive response.¹¹ The bottom line is that you should disclose to trusted individuals such as close friends and family members and “wise Church leaders.”¹²

In the process of considering who to tell and how to tell them, seek direction from the Lord, who will guide you according to your specific circumstances. Cox gives the following counsel:

Latter-days Saints enjoy a kind of “spiritual radar” as a result of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Listening to the Spirit may be the best course in deciding when, where, and with whom one can safely talk about same-sex attraction issues. If it does not feel right, don’t do it. If it does feel right, think through the situation as well as assess your feelings. The Lord has said, “Behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). Learning to recognize and follow the promptings of the Spirit is critical to working through same-sex attraction difficulties.¹³

Also, follow the guidance of the Spirit in determining the order in which to tell the safe individuals you have selected. The sequence of the next sections in this article is not meant to indicate what is best for you.

Parents and Siblings

Because revealing to family members or friends does not guarantee security, you need to assess the risks before telling them about same-sex attraction issues. What is the nature of your

society? Some societies have passed judgment on certain struggles, meaning that some temptations are more socially stigmatized than others. These societies may be “infected” with misunderstandings about people with same-sex attraction who, rather than surrendering to it, strive instead for holiness. This means that family and friends may have difficulty understanding your challenges.¹⁴

How has your family responded to these societal issues? They may have accepted the idea that change is impossible, or they may believe in quick “fixes.” Same-sex attraction may cause discomfort for some family members and even revulsion among others,¹⁵ or your family may have been devastated when others revealed their struggles. Even within the same family, reactions may differ.

Has your family supported you in other trials? Have they shown unconditional love? In researching the issue of disclosure, A. Dean Byrd and Mark D. Chamberlain discovered that people find it easier to disclose to those who have already demonstrated unconditional love and support. One of the participants in their study reported: “It was a risk to tell my dad, but by the time I told him I [had seen] that he had true love for me. He was a very busy man, but he took time to take me shopping and out to lunch on the spur of the moment. As we spent time together, his actions clearly

On Sunday, I told my parents and what a relief it was! I never could have expected their response. Had I known they were going to be as supportive as they were, I would have told them years ago. I guess I underestimated them. They were totally shocked, which actually surprised me, because I thought they suspected it when I was growing up. I shared with them all the things I thought about myself growing up and was surprised to find out that they were just my perceptions and not necessarily how other people viewed me, particularly my parents. My dad said that he knew he was nonemotional and that he often has considered trying to change. He said if it would help me and boost my self-esteem, then he would like to try. He then came over and gave me a big hug—the first I can remember . . . and I’m thirty-six! He even called me at work the next day, which he never does, just to tell me how sad he was and that he felt like crying, not because he was sad that I was dealing with this, but sad that I had been unhappy for so long and he never knew. What a positive experience!¹⁶

showed that he would handle it very well and still love me, so he became a safe person.”¹⁷

In contrast, another participant stated, “My relationship with my extended family is cordial, but it is not nearly as close as it was before they knew. . . . I’m trying to see it from their perspective—it must have been an incredible shock.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, the worst scenario also occurs; you may know people who are shunned by their families.

Another possible reason for not disclosing to some family members may be a concern about unnecessarily distressing them. Jason Park writes: “I disclosed my struggles to my brother who has homosexual problems himself. But since I had left home and was married before I realized that I had homosexual feelings, I chose not to tell my parents or other family members because I did not think it would be helpful or necessary to do so.”¹⁹ One man who did not tell his parents feared that his mother would feel burdened by the belief that she was responsible for the problem, and he worried that his father would be tormented by the thought that “he had failed his son.”²⁰

Once risks are assessed and you decide to disclose, take all the measures you can to minimize the possible fallout.²¹ Plan the details. Cox notes, “Just as writing calls for more precision than talking, talking requires more precision than thinking.”²² Also, planning will help you feel more in control and calmer.

Spouse

If you are married, Park counsels that you tell your spouse. The two of you, he points out, “cannot be of one flesh (see Matthew 19:5) if [you hide] such important parts of [your] life from her.” Furthermore, your spouse may already sense that something is troubling you: “wives [for example] are often in tune with their husband’s feelings before the husband ever understands them.”²³

As is the case with family members, you will want to plan the details of your disclosure. Park states, “I spent quite a bit of time preparing just how I would tell her [his wife].” He says that “it was

several hours before I ever used the ‘h’ word and I tried to help her see it as an emotional problem and not just a sexual one. I told her I could not make it on my own. I needed to share these experiences with her.” For Park, the results were positive. He was able to share his successes with his wife, and he reports, “This experience has helped us grow together in ways we never did before.”²⁴ Another person had a similar experience with his fiancée:

It was hard for her to hear. Eventually she asked, “Well, what does it mean for us?” And I said, “It doesn’t change anything, I intend to marry you and be faithful my whole life.” In the end she said, “I can’t believe you have gone through this for years and felt like you were alone. You won’t ever have to go through this alone again. Now this is our problem and we will get through it together.”²⁵

While most Latter-day Saint spouses will be supportive of a mate who is determined to deal with the issues, they may still have to work through a sense of betrayal. They may feel betrayed by how long the secret was withheld from them and may fear that the person they love does not exist, that he or she is a fake, a façade. These reactions argue for disclosing sooner rather than later and for addressing these concerns.

Priesthood Leaders

God Loveth His Children, an official statement of the Church concerning same-sex attraction, emphasizes, “It is helpful to visit with your bishop and other priesthood leaders who hold the keys of inspired counsel for the members of your local Church unit. If you approach them humbly and honestly, they will extend themselves in compassion and love as they counsel with you.”²⁶

This concise statement makes several critical points. First is the selection of which leader to tell. You are given some leeway as long as you talk to a local leader who has been called by God to serve you. The wording Elder Alexander B. Morrison uses is a

“wise Church leader.”²⁷ Like most Church members, you may want to talk to your bishop before disclosing to other leaders.

When you reveal your struggles to this priesthood leader, you should be met with love and compassion, as in this example: “The bishop had no idea what I was going to tell him, but he showed me love from the minute I walked in the door. We sat there for an hour while I tried to get it out, and by that time his love and patience showed me that he was going to love me no matter what I had to say.”²⁸

A bishop is a shepherd who, like the prophet Mormon, exemplifies the Lord’s love. Mormon loved both “the peaceable followers of Christ” (Moroni 7:3; see v. 2) and the unrepentant Nephites, “according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart” (Mormon 3:12). Through love, the priesthood leader will help those who have trouble believing that God still loves them and desires to help them in their difficulties. One man testified that his bishop “has always responded with unconditional love, support and encouragement. . . . I can imagine the Savior’s love for me because I see it and feel it when I meet with the bishop.”²⁹

Your local priesthood leader is entitled to inspiration on your behalf. When inspired by the Holy Ghost, he can literally speak “with the tongue of angels,” who speak “the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:2–3). In other words, in giving you inspired counsel and guidance, your priesthood leader says, although in his own words, what the Lord would say to you if He were sitting in the chair across from you.

However, as the Church’s statement makes clear, these blessings come only if you go to your priesthood leader with both humility and honesty. Allow your struggle to truly humble you so that you are “in a preparation to hear the word[s]” (Alma 32:6). These words will flourish if they fall upon the “good ground” of “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). In fact, in Doctrine and Covenants 8, the Lord tells us that an honest heart is a requirement for obtaining knowledge from God (v. 1).

The last consideration is not explicit in the Church’s statement, but it is implied by the very fact that most bishops are provided

an office where they can meet with ward members privately and without worldly interruptions. The recommendation arises from what Cox has learned from her clients' experiences: "Revealing to your priesthood leader should occur in an 'official' or formal office setting where there is sufficient time for discussion and understanding."³⁰ A formal setting will also be more conducive to the peace that allows clear communication from the Lord and with each other.

Children

Telling children is a sensitive matter that calls for a husband and wife to make a mutual decision about when and how to disclose. This is a decision that must be made with divine guidance. An important consideration is whether the children are mature enough to understand and accept the news. The probability of acceptance will be increased if you assure the children that you love your spouse³¹ and intend to stay married. This reassurance is important because the children may become alarmed and assume that divorce is pending. Additionally, your spouse should be careful to never demean you or women (or men) in general.³²

With the explicit portrayals of homosexuality on TV, in movies, and in some textbooks and other publications, teens nowadays know that a sizable number of citizens experience same-sex attraction. Gays and lesbians in the school population are pointed out, not always kindly. Jokes and gossip in school hallways and locker rooms perpetuate stereotypes about homosexual demeanor and appearance. For better or worse, teenagers receive an extensive, informal, and sometimes inaccurate education on homosexuality. They seem to develop antennae aimed at people who may feel same-sex attraction. Therefore, if you have teenage children, they may push the issue earlier than you planned. Be prepared in case they ask, "Are you a gay (or lesbian)?"

One father simply replied, "Yes. I have been. Does that bother you?" and his son was satisfied. Your children may want more information and probably need to have misconceptions cleared

away. But if you have consistently loved and respected them, they will likely respond the same way, although, again, their response may depend on their level of maturity.³³

Friends

You should not, Elder Morrison cautions, “feel compelled to share your challenge with every Tom, Dick and Harry.”³⁴ Rather, you should carefully select the friends you want to tell. Just as you would with family, you should assess the risks, as did this person: “My friend was pretty open-minded and I felt like she would accept it. Even if she couldn’t, I didn’t feel like it would be damaging to tell her because I knew she wouldn’t tell others.”³⁵

Although some have lost friends when they revealed their challenges, appropriate disclosure to friends is usually constructive. This comment is typical: “It was really a positive experience to tell my friend because I finally saw that people—your friends at least—can see you for who you are, can know about it, and still not look down at you because of it.”³⁶ Byrd has found that for those dealing with same-sex attraction such disclosure “often changes perceptions about how they fit into their social world and how they connect with others. They come to see that they may not be all that different from others with difficult challenges.”³⁷

Public Meetings

General authorities have advised against confessing or talking about your challenges in testimony and other public meetings.³⁸ A general principle to follow is this: if you have inappropriately acted on feelings of same-sex attraction, you do not publicly confess such “serious personal sins.”³⁹

There are good reasons for such restraint. In general conference, Elder Lynn A. Mickelsen warned against airing “dirty linen” in public because “the more widely a sin is known, the more difficult the repentance or change.”⁴⁰ This advice may seem to contradict common sense. Surely the more people who know, the more people there are to offer support. However, to the extent that the

attention generated by public disclosure focuses a person's thoughts on same-sex issues and feelings, it can interfere with filling one's life "with spiritual nourishment."⁴¹ Moreover, Byrd, who has had years of experience in helping those with same-sex attraction, has found that public disclosure may have these negative outcomes:

- Public disclosure encourages the victim role, a role that must be dropped before major growth can occur.
- It can mask the severity of the problem from the individual. That is, the attention received from such disclosures can distract the individual from actually dealing with the issues.
- It increases the possibility of additional problems, such as dealing with negative reactions from others.
- Such disclosures can result in labeling, and such labeling can interfere with moving forward.⁴² That is, some people respond to the label, not to the whole person. Also, because they tend to view the label as permanent, they do not acknowledge change or even the possibility of change.

One college student who wisely decided against public disclosure clearly envisioned how disclosure could have impeded his chosen life course:

Others on campus would encourage him to embrace his true self: They'd label him a homosexual and call him gay. But he's not—and neither does he want to be: Sexual attraction, he thinks, doesn't define a person. Indeed, he particularly fears coming out about his attractions while struggling against them, which would get him labeled a repressed homosexual, the gay-basher who himself is queer, the gay kid who thinks it's just some disorder. All he wants is to live chastely and try to make progress in addressing the causes of his same-sex attractions. But at the modern American university, this is anathema. For all their celebrations of diversity and pledges of tolerance, this choice is not to be celebrated or even tolerated.⁴³

For all these reasons, “it is not helpful to flaunt homosexual tendencies or make them the subject of unnecessary observation or discussion.”⁴⁴

While you should refrain from discussing your situation in meetings open to the public, disclosure is appropriate “in secure settings such as twelve-step groups or Evergreen International, where such revelations are understood within a context of care and support.”⁴⁵ Only in such groups will your revelation be received by people who are committed to confidentiality, anonymity, and safety. “But any other public setting,” Cox states, “can be fraught with security risks.”⁴⁶

Final Cautions

While generally a healthy thing to do, appropriate disclosure also has three possible downsides that require you to be cautious. First, the Church has warned that in seeking the help of others, you should “be careful not to become dependent on them alone for your spiritual strength.”⁴⁷ Dependency also occurs when a person tries to make the relationship with a confidant more special. Byrd’s seasoned advice is crucial:

Disclosure should always be a part of a transition to developing healthy relationships with others. It is not unusual for an individual to feel, or to want to feel, closer to the person with whom he or she has shared such a personal matter but expectations that the relationship will be more “special” now can cause the relationship to go awry. Inasmuch as possible, when such disclosures occur, the relationship should continue at the same pace it did prior to the disclosure. Individuals who have disclosed their homosexual attractions to others should resist the creation of expectations that may result in dependencies. This is why it is important to disclose to several healthy people, rather than just one.⁴⁸

Second, as Byrd points out, “Repeated disclosures are not helpful. Healthy relationships are developed on mutualities, not on repeated disclosures of problems.” Both men and women should build relationships upon nonproblematic interests and service rather than focus their interactions on the issues of same-sex attraction.⁴⁹

Third, disclosure to someone with similar temptations frequently has consequences that will degrade your relationship with that person and with yourself. In terms evoking the choices that destroyed the Nephites, Cox somberly warns:

Verbalizing our personal temptations tends to take things to a new level. When we share our temptations with others, we make our temptations somewhat public and run the risk of escalating beyond private temptation. For instance, sharing with another who struggles with the same temptation risks combining with the other to act upon the temptation. When these temptations are acted out covertly with another, it becomes a secret combination.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Telling others about your same-sex challenges does mean possible rejection by one or more people. To tell others in the face of that risk takes a great deal of courage. But if you minimize that risk through prayer and planning, you will probably find that the benefits outweigh the risks. You will no longer be alone in your struggle. You will gain a clearer perspective on your difficulties. And at last you will have hope.

About the Author

Doris R. Dant, MS, MA, holds a master’s degree in counseling psychology. Currently, she is an associate teaching professor in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Brigham Young University, where she teaches courses on editing. She has also taught technical writing and composition courses and Book of Mormon. She served as executive

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27. Morrison, "Some Gospel Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction."
28. Byrd and Chamberlain, "Dealing with Issues of Homosexuality," 69.
29. Park, *Helping LDS Men*, 208.
30. Cox, "Talking about One's Same-Sex Attraction."
31. Park, *Helping LDS Men*, 56.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Morrison, "Some Gospel Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction."
35. Byrd and Chamberlain, "Dealing with Issues of Homosexuality," 67.
36. Byrd and Chamberlain, "Dealing with Issues of Homosexuality," 68.
37. Byrd, "Telling Others."
38. Jay E. Jensen, "Bearing Testimony," *Ensign*, October 2005, 24; Morrison, "Some Gospel Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction."
39. Marion D. Hanks, "Q&A: Questions and Answers," *New Era*, January 1971, 10; also see Jensen, "Bearing Testimony," 24.
40. Lynn A. Mickelsen, "The Atonement, Repentance, and Dirty Linen," *Ensign*, November 2003, 10.
41. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 2007, 45. Elder Morrison advises, "Avoid an unhealthy obsession with the challenge of same-gender attraction, which easily can become a soul-destroying, self-fulfilling neurosis. Instead, be 'anxiously engaged in a good cause' (D&C 58:27)." Morrison, "Some Gospel Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction."
42. Byrd, "Telling Others."
43. Anderson, "Struggling Alone."
44. *God Loveth His Children*, 9.
45. Cox, "Talking about One's Same-Sex Attraction."
46. *Ibid.*
47. *God Loveth His Children*, 12.
48. Byrd, "Telling Others."
49. *Ibid.*
50. Cox, "Talking about One's Same-Sex Attraction."

CHAPTER 11

Professional Therapists

Finding, Choosing, and Changing

S. Brent Scharman, PhD

Finding help can be confusing. We live in a day of competition. Specialists abound. Consumers have many choices for whatever product or service they desire. In a way, that's good. Competition tends to lower prices and improve quality. At the same time, the abundance of resources makes decision making a challenge. Who or what is the best? Whom should one be leery of? What product will look good but will fall apart before it should? Whose advice can I trust when I ask for opinions? After all, the feedback one gets from a friend will be based on his or her experience with only a small number of providers or products. Google or Yahoo can give one a wealth of information, but it is generally skewed by the intention of the author.

The good news is that most products, produced by reputable manufacturers, give about what you would expect based on their price and producer. The same is true for professional service providers—the degree of training and experience tend to be good predictors of outcome. Of course, there are exceptions. A high-quality product can have a flaw, and a capable professional can make a mistake. A product that works perfectly in one climate might deteriorate in another. An orthopedic surgeon with excellent skill in replacing knees may be less than expert in replacing hips.

Overview

Individuals looking for a counselor to assist them with same-sex attraction face similar challenges, except the stakes are higher. Some counselors are termed “gay affirming,” others may be neutral, while still others may be confident about the possibility of change. Counselors have a right to approach their work from any of these perspectives, but it is important that their philosophy be one the client shares. It is therefore crucial that those in need of a counselor find one capable of meeting their needs. They need one with broad understanding, adequate experience, and compatible values, as well as one with whom they connect interpersonally. I think it is wise to be cautious about therapists who seem extreme on either side of the controversial issues of same-sex attraction, those who say, “Of course, you can develop heterosexual feelings and marry if you choose to,” or “You’re wasting your time. Those who promise change are simply misinformed.”

There is a tendency in traditional psychological circles to say that a person with same-sex attraction should choose a therapist who is acquainted with the latest research in the field. This is shorthand for implying that if one chooses a therapist who is familiar with the research, the therapist will understand that change is not possible, that gay parenting is positive for children, and that self-esteem will come from accepting the reality of one’s identity and giving up one’s traditional values. In reality, choosing a therapist who “knows the research” should mean choosing one who is familiar with *all* sides of the issue, including those outcomes discussed in books like this one, and which encourage client self-determination.

Impact of Societal Trends upon Latter-day Saints

Perhaps no group has been more effective in a brief period of time—roughly forty years—in having an impact on society worldwide than those who have encouraged acceptance of homosexuality as an innate, unchangeable condition. It is not my belief that there was any evil intent to this effort. Those who were feeling

disenfranchised from society rebelled at the Stonewall Inn in 1969¹ and essentially said, “We want to be accepted for who we are. We’re tired of feeling different from the rest of you.” It was an understandable reaction from a misunderstood group. Unfortunately, “We want to be accepted” came to mean “We were born this way, so we reject your narrow view of morality. You must either accept that we have a right to be married or, at the very least, that we have the right to have sex outside of marriage with no societal restrictions.”

That message had a rapid impact on all aspects of society because part of it makes sense. Gays and lesbians *have* been discriminated against and deserve to be treated with respect. When local Church leaders and members—who are exposed to the media like everyone else—hear the message that same-sex attraction is innate and no change is possible, it can be confusing. They want to be fair, but they want to make certain that what they say and do is in keeping with Church protocol and doctrine.

If the message has been widely accepted by adults, it has been almost universally accepted by youth. Recently, I asked a colleague who works in a university setting to give me his opinion about the view of LDS students regarding gay and lesbian trends. Though no expert on the topic, he expressed what I believe has become an accurate perception of LDS “youth on the street.” He said, “That battle is over. Our youth simply accept homosexuality as an acceptable orientation; kind of a ‘You are what you are’ mentality.” Nevertheless, the LDS student, he felt, still expected the same standard of morality for the homosexual as for the heterosexual.

The message’s advocates have convinced many of those to whom an individual might turn for help. When an LDS Church member enters the office of a social worker, marriage and family therapist, licensed professional counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist, he or she will be meeting with someone whose approach to understanding and treating same-sex identity is unpredictable until clarified.

When the Church member enters the office of the bishop, he or she cannot be totally certain what understanding the bishop

will have relevant to same-sex attraction issues. In addition to having listened to general conference talks, if the bishop has read Ensign articles, and listened to the Internet discussion with Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman,² he will have an accepting, hopeful, and informed perspective on which to base his consultation. Local Church leaders, like all of us, may, however, be influenced by the flood of information from caring individuals, including parents, that powerfully and consistently attempts to convince us that “no one has ever changed because change isn’t possible” and that same-sex attraction matters are simply an issue of individual rights.

An acquaintance had the experience as a bishop of referring a ward member with same-sex concerns to a respected LDS professional. He was surprised, upon follow-up, to hear that the therapist had told his ward member that he didn’t believe change was possible and that change therapy was counterproductive. The therapist had a right to his opinions, but they should have been stated as personal beliefs as opposed to “this is what our profession espouses”—and information should have been given about other therapists who could present another perspective. Regardless of his opinion about same-sex attraction issues, the therapist should have been sensitive to the importance of the client’s belief system. The bishop should have been informed by the therapist, at the time of referral or following the intake session, that the therapist’s opinions on this topic were different from what he could assume the bishop expected.

In like manner, the author of this chapter has talked with bishops, high councilors, high priests group leaders, and other active Church members who have questioned whether change is possible. I do not blame them for being skeptical. For every book or article with a theme like this one, there are multitudes with an opposing message. I cannot remember even one television show or movie that had a theme of change, but there have certainly been many in recent years that seem to glamorize, or at least normalize, same-sex attraction. Similarly, it is not uncommon to hear an interview with someone who “had therapy” and did not “change”; but I do not

remember the last interview on a national program with someone who claimed to have made some change. Under these circumstances, why should anyone believe change is possible?

Change: Possible but Not Predictable

Other chapters in this book document the benefits of counseling. Therapy for same-sex attraction does not provide completely predictable outcomes any more than therapy for other troubling conditions. Although one theme of this book is that therapy is beneficial, I do not think any of the authors would suggest that it is easy. Same-sex attraction, like most other conditions bringing one into a counselor's office, can range from mild to moderate to severe. Severe intensity means that feelings have been present as long as one can remember, that they are intense, and that there has been no awareness of heterosexual attraction. Is it surprising that something that feels "like the way it's always been" would resist change? Homosexual feelings in the moderate to severe category involve years of imprinting. If thoughts and feelings have been accompanied by action, change is all the more difficult.

Change is even less predictable because there is no standardized training in modifying same-sex attraction. Because there are no classes in university settings that I am aware of that teach anything other than accepting homosexuality as a normal sexual variant, it stands to reason there would be no classes teaching counseling students how to help bring about change. Counselors I know personally who offer clients an opportunity to explore change have learned their techniques on their own, in a small selection of workshops or seminars, or through reading. Some have received one-on-one supervision, and some have participated in group supervision.

Although individual circumstance and experiences vary, it seems clear from the narratives of those who have acted in a significant way on their feelings of same-sex attraction, but subsequently experienced real and lasting change, that each has benefited from the help of a professional counselor or therapist, in addition to other spiritual and temporal resources.

Importance of Choosing a Good Counselor for a Same-Sex Issue

Insight will take time, and change, if it comes, will most likely be slow, but the effort is worth it. As a consumer, you have a right to find the best possible therapist to help you in this effort. Just recently I took a phone call from a woman who had been married for two months. Her request was accompanied by the comment, “I want you to refer me to the best marriage counselor you know. This is really important. I can’t go through a lifetime of what I’m experiencing.” I do not minimize the importance or poignancy of her request at all. She asked for what she should have asked for. The difference in responding to that request and a request from someone asking for the best “same-sex therapist” is that I was quickly able to give her so many names that it became confusing to her—there were too many to remember.

Responding to a request for a counselor who is good with same-sex issues is easier in that the list is smaller. It is harder in that it is more difficult to respond to some of the personal preferences of clients, whether they want a younger counselor, a female counselor, one who lives nearby, one who takes their insurance, one who takes evening appointments, one who has immediate openings, and so forth.

When you visit with a potential therapist, common sense suggests that you ask about his or her experience with treating clients experiencing same-sex attraction. You want to select a therapist who reports positive experience and is able to talk knowledgeably about techniques. However, you may be surprised to hear that, while techniques are important, they are not everything. Volumes have been written about the factors determining therapeutic outcome. One reliable source, *The Heart and Soul of Change: What Works in Therapy*, points out that research has documented the following as important therapeutic influences:

- Modeling and technique factors account for only 15 percent of the change. These “factors may be regarded as beliefs and procedures unique to specific treatments.”

- The placebo effect, hope, and expectancy account for 15 percent of the change. Such treatment effects “are not thought to derive specifically from a given treatment procedure; they come from the positive and hopeful expectations that accompany the use and implementation of the method.”
- Relationship factors account for 30 percent of the change. Included in this category are such factors as “caring, empathy, warmth, acceptance, mutual affirmation, and encouragement of risk taking and mastery.”
- Client and extratherapeutic factors account for 40 percent of the change. Briefly summarized, these factors are “what clients bring to the therapy room and what influences their lives outside it.”³

The relevance of the points being made is that choosing a good counselor for a same-sex issue is important. Not only are the knowledge and skills of the practitioner important, but also critical is his or her ability to form a positive relationship and to help make the most of the client’s current social environment.

Guidelines for Finding Help

How does one go about finding the right counselor? In spite of all the challenges mentioned earlier, it is not too difficult. It is the same as finding a good counselor for depression, panic attacks, or schizophrenia. You do what good consumers do—you ask questions and gather data. This section provides crucial guidelines to follow in that process.

Initiating Help. If I were an eighteen-year-old LDS Church member and just beginning the process of exploring my sexual orientation because I am beginning to acknowledge feelings that have been present as long as I can remember, I would take the following steps, which I also recommend for you:

- Talk to my parents, if at all possible. This step will likely be uncomfortable for you and for them. Some parents have a natural way of responding with love, but many will be

shocked, confused, and hurt. Denial is a common response on the part of parents. Others will respond with, “Let’s get you to a counselor and get this changed.” Unless you expect an explosive, unreasonably angry response, beginning with parents usually helps increase the ability to share feelings and explore options at home.

- Talk to my bishop. Your bishop may or may not have much knowledge about homosexuality, but he has the right to inspiration for his ward members. He either has, or can get, information about what the General Authorities are teaching on this topic. He will reassure you that you are loved and wanted as a participating member of the ward. He can give appropriate counsel about morality and standards, which are the same for those with same-sex attraction as for those with opposite-sex attraction. He can teach doctrine, give blessings, and help you weave your same-sex feelings into a long-term plan that has direction.

Together, you, your parents, and the bishop can talk about counseling. The bishop may have ready knowledge of someone in whom he has confidence. He can direct you to LDS Family Services, who may have a specialist or who may know of specialists in the community.

- Visit with a trusted counselor.

Locating a Counselor. A counselor can be located in one of these ways:

- Obtain a referral from family, friends, or Church leaders.
- Call LDS Family Services.
- Call Evergreen International.
- Call a state organization (examples in Utah include the Utah Psychological Association or the Utah Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers; other states will have similar organizations). Such a call should be made with a request such as, “I’m looking for an LDS counselor who is comfortable in helping me explore sexual orientation.

I'm looking for someone who's in favor of client self-determination.”

Exploring the Counselor's Qualifications. Do the research to determine whether the counselor has the qualifications necessary to give you the best possible help as you work through your same-sex issues. The counselor should have the following credentials, experience, and abilities:

- Is licensed.
- Has experience with same-sex clients.
- Is willing to spend adequate time helping you decide what you want to do.
- Is able to explain what his or her treatment method is.
- Is able to provide feedback about results of previous counseling.
- Is able to give a definition of “change” that is acceptable to you. You should be able to discuss morality, reduction of same-sex attraction, development of opposite-sex attraction, and the possibility of marriage comfortably and positively, although you should be cautious about guaranteed results. There are many factors that impact therapy outcome, and the counselor should be able to differentiate what might happen from what will happen. Some discouraged LDS members who enter therapy may have been considering leaving the Church. It's appropriate to discuss this in counseling, but be cautious of the therapist who actively encourages this decision.
- Is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, if possible. Some would disagree with this requirement and say, “The LDS therapist cannot be neutral. He or she is going to tell the client that he has to change.” You need to realize that *no* therapist, LDS or not, is totally neutral. Nevertheless, there are competent LDS therapists available who will allow you to go at your own speed so you do not

feel their agenda is being imposed upon you. You do not want a therapist who guarantees you change, but you do want a therapist who lets you know that some degree of change is possible and, at times, a great deal of change is possible. You want somebody who is positive and realistic with you.

- If not LDS, has values similar to yours. You should feel comfortable asking such questions as these (of course, the same questions are appropriate for LDS therapists):
 - Have you worked with other LDS clients before?
 - Can you be respectful of my values?
 - Do you encourage sexual experimentation?
 - Would you be willing to consult with my ecclesiastical leader if requested?
 - Have you worked with clients with same-sex attraction?
 - Do you believe that modification of feelings is possible?
 - Have you had clients who were successful in this process?
 - Would you work with me individually, or do you involve family members if it seems appropriate?
 - How long does therapy usually take?
 - If my bishop is the one to help pay the bill, would you consider reducing your fee?

Professional Pressure on Mental-Health Professionals

Readers should understand that professionals willing to assist individuals in their attempts to change are under tremendous pressure not to do so—both from individuals and organizations. Some state and national organizations have even talked of taking away the licenses of those who participate in this work. Fortunately, to date that extreme measure has not been successfully promoted, but proponents continue to push for it.

For example, recent articles in *The Counseling Psychologist* express this view. John C. Gonsiorek writes, “The American Psychological Association has developed a tradition of operating with a ‘big tent’ philosophy, welcoming into its fold all psychologists. For the most part, this philosophy has served the association well.”⁴ But, he complains, “conversion therapy [a therapy that promotes

change] . . . is a kind of intellectual virus as it operates within psychology, attempting to trick a host into gaining entry so that it can attack it from within using its own mechanism.”⁵ Returning to the tent analogy, he states, “What is at stake here is who will control science, specifically psychological science. What I am suggesting is that only those who operate via scientific principles have a legitimate place in the tent, and those who aspire to manipulate and mimic science do not.”⁶ In other words, the author implies, if you are a psychologist who attempts to help a client change, you should not be allowed to be a member of the American Psychological Association.

Susan L. Morrow and A. Lee Beckstead, authors in the same journal, say it is “unnecessary and unethical to continue offering such treatments. For these reasons, we denounce the practice of conversion therapy and its underlying theories and ideology.”⁷

The authors of this book believe the client should determine what goals he or she would like to pursue and that there should be full availability of all research. Those who believe change is not possible feel a moral directive to protect the client from disappointment or harm. Those who believe change is possible, because they are the vast minority, run the risk of being viewed professionally as “out of touch” or, worse, an uninformed crusader. If you choose to meet with a therapist who responds sympathetically to your desire to change, realize that you are meeting with someone who is courageous. It is important for clients to know that national professional associations have not been successful in preventing therapists from meeting with individuals who desire to explore efforts at change and that such practice is ethical.

“Client self-determination” is the phrase professionals use as shorthand for the concepts discussed above. As a reader, who do you think should make the decision about what troubles you, what you’d like to discuss in counseling, and what goals you’d like to establish for therapy? Those who believe in client self-determination believe the client should make those decisions. I’m betting that’s what you think, too.

The Importance of Teamwork

This chapter began with an example of a bishop referring a ward member to an LDS professional and being negatively surprised at the response. One of the ways to prevent such surprises is to have the individual sign a release of information that makes it legal for the therapist to correlate proceedings with the bishop. Following a first or second interview is a good time for the therapist to make contact with the bishop and provide an appropriate assessment and recommendation summary. Giving an “appropriate” summary means that personal details of the client’s life do not need to be discussed but general impressions and future directions should be. For example, the counselor might report, “I’ve now met with John two times. He reports that he’s comfortable coming in and talking about his feelings. I think he can be honest with me. He’s reporting that his feelings are intense at times—he says they can be an 8 on a scale of 1 to 10—but he’s interested in staying close to the Church and understanding what’s happening. I suggest that we spend a few more sessions helping him understand what he’s going through and then outline a treatment plan that makes sense to him. I’ve encouraged him to stay close to you and keep you informed about how things are going. I’m comfortable working with him and willing to participate in his attempts to modify his feelings if that’s his choice.”

Other chapters of this book document that, while not all same-sex clients make the change they desire, more do than would be expected based on reports from the media and many professionals.

The Role of Ecclesiastical Leaders

I like the perspective of Peterson and Seligman, who cite Neighbors about the potential positive benefit of using clergy to assist with personal concerns of all types:

Research on the use of ministerial (and church) supports suggests that relative to their secular counterparts, ministers may be particularly effective because they are

more accessible than secular professional service providers (i.e., they are available day and night); they ground their work in a value system that their constituents find familiar and useful; they address issues that are often ignored by secular service providers (e.g., forgiveness); they often provide a wider range of supports (e.g., psychological, educational, economic); and their services are free. In addition, the fact that they are located within the community makes ministers and churches accountable to the people to whom they provide assistance.⁸

This generic comment is certainly applicable in the LDS community. Who is more dedicated and available, with a more predictable set of values, than the LDS bishop or stake president? Those with same-sex concerns need to be sensitive not to overburden the bishop with unrealistic expectations regarding time or expertise, but it is reasonable for them to expect a consistent connection and unwavering encouragement and support. Whether the issue concerns mental illness, physical illness, or same-sex attraction, it is important for all of us, bishops included, to be aware of our biases. While some leaders are not informed or are insensitive, a more common reaction is that expressed by Erin Eldridge:

I can say, without a doubt, that my bishop had more influence on my returning to the Church and continuing to seek the Spirit than any other one person. I looked forward to my visits. . . . I was spiritually starving, and the bishop provided nourishment. He was strict the few times he needed to be and always showed an outpouring of love afterwards. His love provided the power and motivation for me to continue trying.⁹

Perhaps the role of the bishop, in assisting a ward member struggling with same-sex attraction, could be summarized this way:

- Be a primary source of support and encouragement.
- Spend enough time gathering information that he can talk knowledgeably about the subject.

- Provide a safe setting where non-judgmental relationships are built and nurtured.
- Identify community resources that are safe and effective.
- Know the LDS Family Services counselor who serves his ward. While the LDSFS office may not be close enough to provide direct services it will have developed an outline of safe, skilled resources.
- Once referred for same-sex attraction counseling, establish a cooperative, legal working relationship with the counselor so that the teamwork philosophy can be fully implemented.
- Participate in his “common judge” role so that the full benefit of the Atonement can be implemented, as needed.
- Be a safe, knowledgeable contact person with extended family.

The bishop is in a unique role of helping a person struggling with same-sex attraction find peace and safety in church activity. He can be an important stabilizing factor as his ward member strives to keep gospel-based commitments, participate in a challenging therapeutic process and contend with the many confusing messages so readily available in society.

Your Role in the Therapeutic Process

Both client and counselor have important roles to play in the therapeutic process. It is the responsibility of the therapist to provide quality services that have documented outcomes. Sometimes the therapist will be warm and understanding. Sometimes he or she will be confrontive, encouraging you to explore uncomfortable issues or to try out new behaviors. It is the responsibility of you as the client to invest the time and energy that is required to bring about the desired outcomes.

What you might do in therapy. The work you will be asked to do will include such things as the following (this is not a complete list).

- Explore childhood memories.
- Reflect on the influence of family relationships.
- Seek healing from abuse issues if such are present.
- Seek recovery and healing from addictions if such are present.
- Explore friendship patterns.
- Discuss your sexual history.
- Understand the role of genetics, and other biological factors, in shaping identity.
- Understand why the issue of “change” is so controversial in the professional world, i.e., what does the research say?
- Clarify your spiritual goals and values.
- Clarify your moral goals and values.
- Understand the paradoxical nature of accepting your feelings so as to reduce their obsession while allowing other equally natural feelings to surface.
- Experiment with the formation of “traditional” adult relationships with members of both sexes.
- Explore your level of confidence with behaviors thought of as “traditional” for your gender.
- Establish and strengthen non-sexual same-sex relations.
- Formulate a picture of acceptable adult behavior for your gender that may involve challenging “traditional” views, i.e., a male may need to accept that it is just as appropriate to be devoted to the arts as it is to athletics. Encourage opposite-sex attraction to unfold in an appropriate manner.
- Make decisions about lifetime relationships based on honesty and maturity.
- Work on co-existing conditions that may be significant, i.e., depression, anxiety, personality deficits, etc.

This brief list is not included with any intent to outline a therapeutic process but, rather, to make the point that much of the process depends on the client.

How to make therapy productive. Therapy is as much art as science. One therapist might talk with you about childhood memories in a way that helps clarify a sequence of developmental stages. Another might cover the same ground in a manner that generates insight, emotion, and catharsis. Any counselor could ask mechanical questions and move you through a series of skill-development tasks. There would be benefit in completing some of the tasks if you became aware of them only by reading a book. You have a right to expect more than this. To help the therapeutic process be productive, you can take the following measures:

- Ask if the therapist uses any kind of outcome questionnaire that provides an objective measure of feelings, behavior change, or therapeutic relationship.
- Assess your own subjective feelings related to the therapy and the relationship.
- Initiate periodic progress reviews (even if these are not initiated by the therapist).
- Reflect on recommendations given to you, i.e., do they make sense, are they in compliance with your values?
- Question, as needed.
- Make sure you understand what is being said.
- Follow through on homework assignments.
- Invest the full measure of spiritual energy needed to access the gift of the Atonement you desire.
- Give feedback you think would benefit the therapist.
- Encourage consultation between your bishop and the therapist if it is part of the agreement.
- Show hope and optimism and bring energy to the process.
- Initiate relevant comments so as not to leave all the responsibility for leadership on the shoulders of the therapist.
- Let it be known if you need a break and then use that break time productively.
- Endure the discouraging times.

- Accept, and believe in, the reality of change when it happens.
- Have realistic expectations—sometimes miracles happen overnight, but most changes, even miraculous ones, take time.
- Pay your bill on time. Your therapist can genuinely care about you but still needs your payment to keep the lights on.

Occasionally a client and a counselor will not be able to form a working relationship that is comfortable and productive. If you feel that you're in such a relationship take the risk to discuss it with your counselor. There may be ways of resolving the problem. Sometimes the discomfort will come from different personal styles but sometimes it will come from your not feeling comfortable with the techniques used by the counselor. For example, your therapist may have a confrontive style that emphasizes daily accountability and you may feel that you need a therapist who is more compassionate and understanding, at least to begin with. At times you may be uncomfortable because your therapist suggests actions that violate your value system. You should not tolerate such advice.

Whatever the source of your discomfort, attempt to talk it through but don't remain too long in a situation that seems unreasonably uncomfortable. As the "customer," you have the right to shop for the therapist with whom you can work most effectively. Finding the right counselor is no different than finding the right dentist, plumber or attorney, i.e., attempt to gather information about the therapist advance of a first contact, and then in a trial and error fashion evaluate the results.

Conclusion

Making same-sex therapy work involves a unified effort between client, therapist, and referring priesthood leader (when there is one). When you reach out to your ecclesiastical leader, you have a right to expect a caring response. Your leader will have a good grounding of information on same-sex issues, or he can get it. He can help you find a competent therapist, as well.

You have a right to expect quality service from the professional you choose. He or she should be able to give you a clear understanding of his knowledge about the topic and experience in providing treatment and may have some outcome data. When you state your therapeutic goals during the intake telephone call or in an assessment session, the therapist should be able to tell you if he or she would be a good candidate for helping you reach your goals.

All the responsibility is not on your leader or therapist. Successful therapy requires honesty and follow-through on your part. It is not enough to passively show up for interviews and eventually drop out, saying, "It did not work." Your responsibility is to clarify what you want and then take charge and make it happen with a therapist with whom you have a comfortable working relationship.

I wish you well in your therapeutic endeavors.

About the Author

S. Brent Scharman, PhD, received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Utah and his PhD from BYU. He is a licensed psychologist. He has been employed by LDS Family Services for thirty-two years, where he is currently an assistant commissioner assigned to the development and supervision of international offices and where he chairs the Missionary Mental Health Committee for the Missionary Department. He is a former president of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists and Utah Psychological Association. He was recently released as the bishop of the maximum security and death-row unit at the Utah State Prison and is currently teaching the Family Relations class in his ward. He is married to the former Janet Samuelson, who is Vice President of Student Life at BYU. Brent and Janet are the parents of a blended family of ten children.

Notes

1. During a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a crowd of gays and lesbians gathered for the first time to actively protest discriminatory treatment.
2. The interview is available at lds.org, currently at <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/public-issues/same-gender-attraction/>.
3. Mark A. Hubble, Barry L. Duncan, and Scott D. Miller, *The Heart and Soul of Change: What Works in Therapy* (Washington, D.C.:

- American Psychological Association, 2003), 9–10.
4. John C. Gonsiorek, “Reflections from the Conversion Therapy Battlefield,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 32, no. 5 (September 2004): 756.
 5. Gonsiorek, “Reflections,” 757.
 6. Gonsiorek, “Reflections,” 758.
 7. Susan L. Morrow and A. Lee Beckstead, “Conversion Therapies for Same-Sex Attracted Clients in Religious Conflict: Context, Predisposing Factors, Experiences, and Implications for Therapy,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 32, no. 5 (September 2004): 757.
 8. H. Neighbors, J. Jackson, P. Bowman, and G. Gurin, *Stress, Coping, and Black Mental Health: Preliminary Findings from a National Study* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1983); as quoted in Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2004), 619.
 9. Erin Eldridge, *Born That Way? A True Story of Overcoming Same-Sex Attraction with Insights for Friends, Families, and Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 150.

Understanding the Different Types of Therapy Used to Treat Unwanted Same-Sex Attractions

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The use of psychotherapy to assist individuals struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction is recommended by general authorities for those who need and want that assistance.¹ However, it is extremely difficult to present the different therapeutic approaches in a concise, systematic outline because of the creative, even artistic, nature of therapy, as well as the sensitivity of the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client being served. Each therapist has a different personality style and preference of methodology, using that which works best with his or her personal approach to treatment. In the same vein, each client has a different style of relating to others and a different set of life experiences, same-sex attraction issues, goals, and strengths. The therapeutic work will start where the client is, will utilize the tools with which the therapist is comfortable and confident, and will move forward along a path the therapist and client jointly decide. As a result, the therapeutic pattern will differ for each therapist-client combination working on this issue.

While the therapeutic process is difficult to describe, it can be beneficial for those seeking therapeutic assistance (as well as their ecclesiastical leaders and supportive family members) to know basic information about the different types of psychotherapy and

the treatment approaches most commonly used. Professional literature suggests that “the processes of change are the distinctive contributions of a system of psychotherapy.”² However, within the therapy processes currently used to treat individuals struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions and compulsions, there are hundreds of methodologies, ideas, and theories about treatment. Because broad theories are those upon which “expert psychotherapists typically formulate their treatment plans . . . as change processes for their clients,”³ this chapter will review only the generally accepted, traditional theories and systems of psychotherapy.

Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Therapies

The purpose of *psychoanalytic* models of therapy (characterized by Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic work in the early 1900s and the follow-up psychodynamic work of his students Alfred Adler and Heinz Kohut) is to improve clients’ social functioning by helping them understand their conflicting thoughts and feelings. The therapist assumes a nondirective role while clients are encouraged to bring up feelings that may have been deeply repressed. This therapy is most successful when clients are motivated, verbal, and willing and able to participate actively in an extended series of regularly scheduled sessions with their selected therapist.

The therapeutic process is focused on helping clients become aware of their resistance to letting go of their presenting symptoms. These symptoms (usually forms of self-abuse) are used by the client to both defend against and give partial release to their more deep-seated, unacceptable impulses. In the treatment process, the therapist assists clients to utilize more constructive defenses against their impulses. These more constructive thoughts and/or behaviors are designed to assist clients keep their impulses in control, largely through the utilization of more mature and socially acceptable expressions of their beliefs, attractions, and compulsions.

Therapists utilizing the *psychodynamic* process encourage the client to experiment with new alternatives of living; for example,

they might encourage the client to live “as if” the situation were different. The *working alliance* between the teacher-therapist and the client is considered the foundation of the change process. *Psychodynamic* therapists adopt a more active and less neutral therapeutic approach than do the *psychoanalytic* practitioners.

Some psychodynamic therapists promote the value of *brief therapy* (which limits the length of treatment to twelve to forty sessions). In this treatment process, the therapist clearly outlines the beginning, process, and end of the treatment and stresses the inevitability of termination when the agreed-upon goals have been reached.

Brief therapy as a treatment approach is seldom useful for the client who has limited intellectual ability, is chemically dependent, or is overburdened by problems related to adverse social or economic conditions.

A variation of this psychodynamic approach, specific to same-sex attraction, is *reparative therapy*,⁴ developed by Joseph Nicolosi. Dr. Nicolosi based his therapeutic treatment program on the work of Elizabeth Moberly,⁵ who coined the term *reparative drive* to refer to male homosexuality. She interpreted a man’s sexual desires for another man as attempts to compensate for a lack of connection between father and son during childhood. Moberly asserted that male bonding with both mentors and peers is a way of stopping male same-sex attraction. Nicolosi extended the theory to all men and women, whom he described as struggling to fulfill a deficit in the “wholeness” of their original gender. He stated, “Each one of us, man and woman alike, is driven by the power of romantic love. These infatuations gain their power from the unconscious drive to become a complete human being.”⁶

Nicolosi is today’s leading representative of the view that same-sex desires are a form of arrested psychosexual development, resulting from “an incomplete bond and resultant identification with the same-sex parent, which is then symbolically repaired through psychotherapy.”⁷ His therapeutic intervention plans involve conditioning a man to a traditional masculine gender role through participation in common masculine sports activities, more time

spent with heterosexual men (as role models), attendance at therapy groups to discuss progress or slips back into homosexuality, learned assertiveness with women through dating, and encouragement of heterosexual marriage and the men's desire to become fathers. Nicolosi has stated that, in all cases, if a father and son have a normal relationship, the son will not be gay.⁸

Sexual identity therapy, developed by Warren Throckmorton and Mark Yarhouse,⁹ differs from *reparative therapy* in that it does not emphasize the parental relationships but rather helps individuals identify (and move past) their self-assigned labels as homosexuals to bring their sexual identity in line with their beliefs and values. Sexual identity therapy involves four phases: assessment, advanced or expanded informed consent, psychotherapy, and social integration of a valued sexual identity. Therapists utilizing sexual identity therapy also assert that this therapeutic process is not a form of religious *conversion therapy*.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Throckmorton and Yarhouse is their successful battle over whether or not homosexuality is an ethically treatable condition. They developed guidelines for practice with clients who experience sexual identity conflicts and desire therapeutic support for resolution.¹⁰ These guidelines have provided conceptual and empirical support for clinical interventions leading to sexual identity outcomes that respect client personal values, religious beliefs, and sexual feelings.

Taken together with the work of Nicolosi and A. Dean Byrd, they have established the re-clarification of the ethics of treating ego-dystonic homosexuality.¹¹ The leading text for the training of psychotherapists, *Essential Psychopathology & Its Treatment*, third edition, written by Jerrold S. Maxmen, Nicholas G. Ward, and Mark Kilgus and published by W. W. Norton (2009), states:

Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that homosexual orientation can indeed be therapeutically changed in motivated clients, and that reorientation therapies do not produce emotional harm when attempted.¹²

Existential, Humanistic, Logotherapy, and Reality Therapies

The purpose of *existential* models of therapy (characterized by Rollo May and James Bugental and demonstrated in the theories of Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher), is to help clients face aspects of their life that are awful but meaningful. The application is most successful when the client is strong enough to verbalize and relate to intense feelings of pain and alienation and then work with the therapist to extract meaning from these feelings and life experiences.

Existential therapists are uncomfortable with the term “personality” if it implies a fixed set of traits within the individual.¹³ They see life not as a process of emerging, becoming, or being that is fixed or characterized by particular traits, but rather as a process of coming to terms with one’s world situation. Therapists using this therapeutic model believe that lying and false beliefs are the source of psychopathology, and therefore, they see *authenticity* as the goal of therapy and *honesty* as the solution for dissolving symptoms. These therapists continually reflect back to the clients’ choice options without resorting to the teacher or advisor role. The therapeutic relationship is a sharing of and experiencing together (the I–thou) that leads to understanding the possible outcomes or coping process and potentials unique to their individual clients.

This existential treatment approach is, also, seldom useful for clients who have limited intellectual ability, are chemically dependent, are overburdened by problems of abuse, or have severely restricted financial resources.

Major alternatives to traditional existential therapy have evolved over time. Bugental’s¹⁴ goal for *existential-humanistic therapy* is the increase of “true livingness” of those who engage in his therapeutic process. Viktor Frankl’s “search for meaning”¹⁵ is emphasized in *logotherapy*, whose goal is a therapeutic process of warm, accepting discussions between therapist and client. During these therapeutic discussions, a variety of response options to life are considered. In this therapeutic exchange, contrary to the

position of traditional existentialists, therapists may utilize a variety of methods, including confrontation, instruction, and reason, to convince a client to take a more conscious and responsible look at the client's coping processes.

Whereas, *logotherapy* explores a lack of meaning, as the central concern in therapy, *reality therapy* emphasizes helping clients explore their avoidance of responsibility. William Glasser¹⁶ derived his principles for therapy from the existentialists but added behavioral tenets. He asserted in his *choice therapy* that change is created by responsible choices based on the awareness of the harm clients have caused for themselves and others. If clients are taking on more than they can realistically accomplish within their present limits, the therapist's task is to give feedback and to help them design more realistic plans for their existence. Reality therapists encourage a behavioral form of successive approximation. In this approach, the client gradually establishes a *success identity* by implementing weekly action plans that bring an increasing likelihood of successful thoughts and actions.

Many therapists who treat individuals struggling with same-sex compulsions incorporate selected existential elements into their treatment process. For example, a therapist might help clients face aspects of their lives that are truly awful, but meaningful; help the client process the intense feelings of pain and alienation resulting from that awful event or condition; and then work with the client to extract meaning from these feelings and life experiences. That meaning then is used to help clients reevaluate or reframe their experience and the meaning that event has for them and for their future. Therapists also often utilize selected concepts in *choice theory* as they help clients become more responsible for the choices they have made.

Person-Centered Therapy

Person-centered therapy (such as Carl Rogers's *client-centered therapy*¹⁷) is constructed to improve individual social functioning by increasing the client's self-understanding and self-acceptance

through a nondirective helping process. The therapist attends carefully to the client's statements about self and does not hurry or direct the therapy process, which may prove lengthy.

This therapeutic approach has its roots in humanistic and existential philosophic traditions and builds on a foundation of positive and optimistic beliefs that all clients are fundamentally good, pro-social people, who are striving for *self-actualization* and searching for meaning in life. Practitioners assert that all human beings are threatened by some experiences incongruent with their self-concept. The therapeutic goal is to free up the client's innate potential for positive personal regard and growth. Change occurs when the client's self-imposed psychological barriers are identified and examined. The therapist endeavors to demonstrate openness, empathy, warmth, and genuineness, making frequent use of paraphrasing, reflection, and other techniques of active listening. More specifically, the therapist strives to show "unconditional positive regard" for the client, to be nonjudgmental, to refrain from giving advice, and to avoid diagnosing and labeling. The focus of the therapy is on the here and now rather than on the client's past experience.

This model of therapy usually requires that the client be middle- or upper-class (have the necessary funds or insurance coverage), highly motivated, verbally articulate, thoughtful, and capable of considerable insight into the problem addressed.

When working with clients who seek therapy to overcome same-sex compulsions, therapists often use various tenets of the person-centered model. For example, the therapist might avoid offering advice and, instead, concentrate on expressing "unconditional positive regard" for a client who is struggling with this issue.

Gestalt and Experiential Therapies

Gestalt and *experiential* therapies (as developed by Fritz Perls)¹⁸ are grounded in the theory that all human beings are basically performing social roles that we adopt to fulfill our biological *end-goals*. Work is done individually, in family groups, or in other groups of

individuals, often in intensive weekend or weeklong sessions. The length of treatment varies—one workshop session, a marathon, or a weekly meeting for six months to a year or longer.

The model asserts that people with pathologies are those who have become stuck in the natural process of growth or maturation; they remain stuck in childhood fantasies because they do not want to be what they are now. Thinking is seen as a rehearsal for acting, for role playing, which only serves to cloak any sense of the client's real nature. In the process, they create their *phony* character, which attempts to shield them from the fact that authentic existence involves facing a continuing sequence of intrapersonal conflicts. According to this theoretical approach to therapy, clients must be helped to accept responsibility for their current life situation. Commitment can be made only to the present.

Gender wholeness therapy was designed by David Matheson,¹⁹ a licensed counselor who works only with men, to develop gender wholeness by addressing emotional issues and building healthy connections with other men. In this process, men may be involved in day- or week-long retreats to celebrate their manhood. His work is an extension of the work of Joseph Nicolosi, with whom he worked for many years, and is grounded in the early research of Elizabeth Moberly.

Emotionally expressive, experiential work such as *gestalt therapy* and *gender wholeness therapy* is not the treatment of choice for all people. Clients high in autonomy or resistance will probably respond negatively to the more directive elements. For example, they might resist participating in the *empty chair* technique, where individuals are asked to role-play discussions with a significant person in their current or past life, or in the week-long retreats, with their carefully orchestrated affective exercises. Also, words and ideas and even carefully constructed activities are typically insufficient to assist in the drawn-out healing process, where complicating factors, such as sexual and emotional abuse, often accompany the struggle with same-sex attraction.

This is often a treatment of choice for gay-affirmative therapists, who attempt to free individuals of their *phony* characters or

religious or cultural “fetters,” which shield them being “authentic,” and to facilitate their clients’ free expression of their true or “real” gay natures. On the other hand, some therapists who seek to help their clients move away from involvement in gay behaviors and feelings will use these same techniques to facilitate the clients in moving toward their authentic natures as children of God, capable of growth and exaltation.

Interpersonal Therapies

Interpersonal therapy is a short-term, problem-focused approach developed by Gerald Klerman and Myrna Weissman as a by-product of their collaborative research on depression.²⁰ Their approach is rooted in the interpersonal method of Harry Sullivan,²¹ an influential American psychiatrist who asserted that abnormal behavior is rooted in impaired interpersonal relationships. He stated that troubled attachments early in life predispose individuals to develop disorders that are later expressed through troubled interpersonal relationships. Because interpersonal life affects mood and all other human behavior, interpersonal therapy is designed to alter stable, though nonproductive or harmful, interpersonal patterns that were developed early in life. The therapist’s role is that of a participant-observer during the therapy hour, where the therapist employs a mixture of reflection and engagement.

An alternative treatment approach within this basic methodology, *transactional analysis*, was founded by Eric Berne.²² This model stems from the premise that the human personality is structured into three separate states, Parent, Adult, and Child. *Games* serve to reaffirm the *life position* that a person chooses early in his or her development. Adoption of an unhealthy life position will predispose individuals to troubled lives. For example, people who decide “I’m not OK—you’re OK” are plagued with constant feelings of inferiority in the presence of those they judge as better than themselves.

A. Dean Byrd, a contemporary therapist who practices within this interpersonal therapy approach, developed the concept of

gender-affirmative therapy,²³ based on the premise that social and emotional variables affect gender identity, which, in turn, determines sexual orientation. He states that the work of the therapist is to help clients understand their gender development and the process by which their assumptions were derived. Subsequently, such individuals are able to make choices that are consistent with their value system. The focus of therapy is to help clients fully develop their masculine or feminine identity. Therapists who practice within this model of therapy do not assume homosexuality is a mental illness and, therefore, are not considered reparative therapists. There is no set method to this therapeutic approach, and several therapists have developed their own forms of gender-affirmative therapy.

Currently, *interpersonal therapy* is often cited as a treatment methodology; it has no theory regarding the person and focuses only on the depressive grief and the role transitions of individuals. It is, by definition, time limited, and termination occurs when some amount of relief is acquired in the particular grief incident or role transition presented at the outset of the treatment process. The model does not consider family or other systems in the treatment regime.

Therapists (such as Dr. Byrd) who utilize these techniques to treat individuals struggling with depression and/or other similar mood disorders related to same-sex obsessions tend to listen deeply to their clients' feelings of sadness, inadequacy, and alienation. They seek to engage with their clients in an attempt to question the clients' ideology, derived from past experience. In that process, the therapists often suggest that clients adopt a more positive role in their present life. If necessary, mood-altering medications are encouraged, at least for a few months. There may be a considerable emphasis on encouraging clients to develop a more positive relationship with their mother, father, or other family members, by acting "as if" the relationships were positive and mutually rewarding.

Exposure Therapies

Exposure therapies, such as *implosive, exposure, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing* (EMDR), and *virtual reality*, vary considerably in the procedures used to directly confront and gradually reduce emotions experienced by clients. In Thomas Stampfl's *implosive therapy*,²⁴ clients are asked to imagine more fully the scenes that produce anxiety, anger, guilt, or other emotions, in order to extinguish the unwanted emotion. For example, the therapist might ask the client to imagine horrible scenes such as eating lunch in a sewer, being eaten by rats, or chopping up a child. During the therapeutic experience the therapist relates to the client as a kind and friendly individual, who is there to support them through this difficult experience.

Prolonged exposure therapy as practiced by Edna Foa²⁵ has far surpassed *implosive therapy* in terms of clinical popularity and now is seen as the treatment of choice across the world for anxiety disorders experienced by survivors of rape, physical assault, child abuse, and natural disasters. This method combines *imaginal exposure* with progressively intense homework assignments to render the traumatic memories routine rather than critical.

As a complicated system of therapy, EMDR,²⁶ like *exposure therapy*, is gradually becoming more comprehensive or integrative by incorporating breathing retraining, therapist support, and cognitive-therapy methods into its treatment methodology. It also is expanding into *virtual reality exposure therapy*,²⁷ which immerses patients in computer-simulated environments they find anxiety producing, such as those involving heights, spiders, or air flight.

Research reveals that while exposure therapies may assist in the extinction of some recent-onset obsessive-compulsive behaviors, the methods may actually intensify the unwanted pain, anxiety, and guilt for clients struggling with deep-seated addictions and/or compulsive feelings and behaviors. For example, a therapist utilizing a form of *exposure therapy* with a client struggling with same-sex attraction might encourage him or her to imagine the worst possible experience that might occur. As they expand and

deepen that ideation, the exposure could put the client at great risk of later committing suicide or participating in similar perilous thoughts or behaviors.

Behavior Therapies

The purpose of *behavioral therapy* is to improve the social functioning of individuals, couples, families, or organizations by helping them learn new behaviors and eliminate troublesome ones. In order to use this model successfully, the therapist must be able to specify and *operationally define*²⁸ a behavior that needs either to increase or decrease in frequency, duration, or intensity. Either the client or the professional must be able to control the consequences that follow the behavior targeted for change. This approach can be used with a non-voluntary client if the therapist has the ability to monitor the client's behavior closely and the authority to allocate positive or negative reinforcement (rewards or punishments) to the client. The method has less applicability when the client's concerns or problems are related primarily to decision making, value conflicts, and distorted thinking.

The major characteristics of behavioral treatments²⁹ are the primacy of behavior, the importance of learning, the directive and active nature of the treatments, the importance of assessment and evaluation, and the focus on induction of behavior change, the generalization of that behavior change to real-life settings, and the maintenance of the new behavior over time.

No single figure dominates *behavior* therapy. Rather, behavioral therapists vary tremendously in both theory and technique. Joseph Wolpe's *reciprocal inhibition* or *counterconditioning therapy*³⁰ was built on the work of Ivan Pavlov³¹ and is grounded in *respondent conditioning* for the treatment of anxiety-related problems. The use of *deep relaxation* to *inhibit anxiety* became the basis for *systematic desensitization*, which is of great use for the treatment of a wide variety of mental obsessions and compulsions. The use of *assertive responses* to *inhibit social anxiety* became the basis for *assertiveness training*, which can be very useful in assisting

individual clients who see themselves as helpless victims of unwanted same-sex assaults. In some instances, “the use of *sexual arousal* to *inhibit anxiety* [has become] the basis for [a new approach] to sex therapy.”³²

Research on therapy utilizing this counterconditioning “sexual arousal” methodology to either positively or negatively reinforce same-sex attraction or compulsions has demonstrated that these treatment implementations have negative results in the short term. In the long term, they have extremely negative results, often revealing serious life-affecting residual negative and phobic feelings and behaviors in treated clients.

B. F. Skinner³³ laid the foundation for *behavior modification* and focused on *operant conditioning*. Aversive techniques, sometimes called “shock therapy”, are part of this practice model. In the past, shock therapy was attempted to relieve unwanted same-sex compulsions. However, there is no evidence such practice had any positive effect on clients. In fact there is a considerable amount of evidence that shock therapy resulted in heightened and persistent fears, night-sweats, increased insecurity, and even stammering and some loss in brain capacity.

Cognitive Therapies

The focus of *cognitive therapy* is on the alleviation or modification of irrational beliefs or common thinking errors. This form of therapy tends to be more brief, interactive, directive, and structured than other therapy models. Problems are quickly diagnosed, goals identified, cognitive principles taught, and homework assigned for completion by clients. Audio tapes, books, and printed handouts supplement the formal, structured therapy sessions.

Albert Ellis³⁴ founded the *rational-emotive therapy* model based on his belief in the incredible insight of some clients, who can be convinced to use their cognitive processes to create a life that maximizes the pleasure and minimizes the pain of existence. Therapists using *rational-emotive* therapy will directly attack their clients’ *irrational beliefs* (crooked thinking) or assumptions,

helping them to *actualize* their desires but, at the same time, to avoid the irrational trap of thinking that these natural desires are dire necessities. Ellis asserted that being respected and valued by others makes life happier but that individuals must not live for the approval of others.

In the early 1990s, Ellis changed the name of his therapy model to *rational-emotive behavioral therapy*³⁵ because of the natural behavioral *consequences* that evolve from the *beliefs* clients use to process the *activating* events in their lives. Clients participating in this form of therapy must be mentally quick and capable of taking a substantial amount of direct confrontation while receiving little emotional support from the therapist.

Aaron Beck³⁶ pioneered and developed his system of psychotherapy separately from Ellis, known simply as *cognitive therapy*. Followers of Beck tend to have a more supportive relationship with their clients, helping them move through stages in correcting faulty cognitions. They also use different terminology than Ellis. For example, irrational beliefs are called *cognitive errors* (such as *overgeneralization* or *dichotomous thinking*), *maladaptive cognitions*, *dysfunctional attitudes*, or *depressogenic* (depressive) *assumptions*. Beck's initial therapeutic focus was on assisting clients suffering with depression.³⁷ His scales for assessing the degree of depression and anxiety are classics and are used throughout the therapeutic community.

Therapists utilizing *cognitive therapy* to help clients deal with unwanted same-sex attraction may follow Ellis and be extremely confrontive and denigrating of their clients. Or they may follow Beck and deal more with the reframing of cognitive errors within a supportive therapeutic environment. Either approach can leave a client feeling that his or her problems are merely mental constructions rather than results of multi-systemic, developmental, and cognitive stressors.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies

Donald Meichenbaum³⁸ provided the foundation for therapists who use cognitive explanations and techniques for producing

behavior change and draw on a diversity of procedures from such methods as *cognitive restructuring*, *stress inoculation*, and *problem solving*. Therapists who use this model focus on both thoughts and behavior. They believe that clients must learn to control their compulsive or obsessive thoughts (which interfere with their ability to use normal cognitive processes) in order to control unwanted behaviors, solve other life problems, and relate effectively within their environment. Often therapy includes helping a client to think differently about a perceived problem.

Many therapists utilize a form of *cognitive-behavioral therapy* in their work with individuals struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions. These therapists generally listen carefully as they assess the client's cognitive structures with special regard to their client's perception of their same-sex attractions and how these personal perceptions are constructed. They then develop a treatment plan with the client to protect against the behavioral triggers and loops of unacceptable behavior, while at the same time engaging with the client in a mutual problem-solving process, which involves self-understanding, stress management, and cognitive reframing.

Systemic Therapies

Systemic therapies maintain that individuals can be understood only within the social context (families, groups, or communities) in which they exist. *Communication/strategic therapy* emerged from two interrelated organizations rather than from a single individual. The (Gregory) Bateson Projects, undertaken by a group of researchers in the 1950s, during which Jay Haley studied the work of Milton Erickson, resulted in the publication of the *double-bind* communications approach (1952) posed by Jay Haley³⁹ and John Weakland, with Donald Jackson as a consultant. The second joint effort was the Mental Research Institute founded by Donald Jackson in 1958, with Virginia Satir⁴⁰ and Paul Watzlawick⁴¹ as members. What the two groups had in common was the assumption that communication is the key to understanding human behavior and thus improving interpersonal relationships. They assert that it

is not sufficient to merely help the client improve his understanding and behavior; the family system must also be helped to gain insight into the dysfunctional nature of its current rules for communicating and relating. Therapy within this model may involve relabeling or reframing the family situation, choosing to follow or reject therapeutic instructions, learning to communicate feelings directly, and helping family members identify and use personal and situational power to make their world more predictable.

Structural therapy, as defined by Salvador Minuchin,⁴² is more concerned about what maintains psychopathology than what happens within the individual client's psyche. The therapist's role is different from that found in other methods. In structural therapy, the therapist *joins* with the family system and relates as an authoritative leader, advocating for the benefit of each member against the family social system that prevents members from relating within and across clear and healthy interpersonal boundaries.

Murray Bowen's⁴³ *family system therapy* is based on the idea that emotional illness arises when individuals are unable to adequately differentiate themselves from their family of origin. In other words, they are unable to remain emotionally controlled while remaining within the emotional intensity of their family system. Therapists who use this model talk a great deal about relationship triangles between family members and their communications. Rather than focus on *why* family members say something or act in a certain way, these therapists will instruct clients to focus only on direct observations or the precise wording used. The therapist continually clarifies that the clients' goal is to become differentiated and autonomous within the family system. Clients can choose to respond differently in their family regardless of whether or not other family members choose to change their attitudes or behavior.

When individuals struggling with issues of same-sex attraction become involved in a form of systemic therapy, they may become confused and frustrated because—while they are prepared to deal with their attractions and compulsions within their family system—their family may not be in that same place or be prepared to deal realistically with the issues posed. On the other hand, a

client may be frustrated when the family has acknowledged the client's struggle, has made assumptions about the underlying problem, and is expressing a willingness, and even eagerness, to join in therapy to "support," to "help," to "fix," or to "change" the client. This client may need additional individual therapy to become ready to deal with the inclusion of members of the immediate (and possibly members of extended family systems) in their therapy process.

Constructivist Therapies

Therapists who practice within the *constructivist* approach assert that no one can attain knowledge of a reality that is objective or independent of the observer. We know only our own interpretations of the feelings and behaviors of another person and, thus, of patients and their problems.

*Solution-focused therapy*⁴⁴ begins with the assumption that people are basically healthy, competent, and capable of constructing solutions to their own problems. Though we cannot change our past, we can change our goals, which will break us out of stuck places and lead us into a more fulfilling future. The therapeutic process focuses on *solution talk*, emphasizing client strengths and the times (*exceptions*) when they have successfully created their own solutions to particular problems. For those who may be having a difficult time focusing on a positive *exception*, the therapist will ask the *Miracle Question*: "If by a miracle, you found yourself free from your problems overnight, how would things be different?"⁴⁵ If a client responds to a therapist's questions by, "I don't know," that is seen as a positive opportunity for the therapist to help the client begin constructing alternatives that may not have been imagined before. This form of therapy is usually brief, lasting only long enough to help the client construct an acceptable solution to the problem posed.

Narrative therapists such as Michael White⁴⁶ are *antirealists*, believing there is no objective reality that exists behind our stories. The "reality" in which we each exist is our own story, unique,

personal, subjective, and fortunately open to change. *Narrative* therapists help clients construct new meanings and new interpretations about who they are, who they have been, and what they can become. Clients are assisted to identify the *key character*, villain, or oppressor in their life, the individual who demands so much of their time, energy, and sense of self. The clients are then helped to rewrite the plot or story of their life with new and expansive language and new endings of their own construction. Clients may also be encouraged to keep a journal in order to record and analyze feelings that have emerged or to write (generally un-mailed) letters to parents and/or significant others.

This therapeutic approach can be very detrimental to individuals struggling with unwanted same-sex compulsions because it is based on *positive thinking* in the *here* and *now*, with no analysis of what has led up to or influenced the client's current state of mind or habitual behaviors. Simply *willing* a situation to be different, as in simply "reading our scriptures" or simply "not thinking about the problem," may work temporarily. However, the euphoric, usually short-term, effect resulting from this form of brief therapy will vanish, leaving in its wake a crushing and debilitating despair and the resulting belief that the client's case is hopeless, that he or she is not a viable candidate for therapy. Behaviors and compulsions worsen and depression takes the place of hope.

Integrative and Eclectic Therapies

*Psychotherapy integration*⁴⁷ seeks to look beyond the confines of a single-model approach to see what can be learned and how clients can benefit from other approaches and treatment techniques. The purpose in doing this is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of therapy. As unique clients struggle with their own set of emotional challenges, unique therapists attempt to assist them with their own set of individual skills and abilities. In other words, treatment for same-sex attractions and compulsions, and many other issues, is more art than science. However, this largely intuitive therapeutic process must be continually reviewed in the light

of ongoing research regarding any particular integrative method or technique utilized.

Technical eclectic therapists such as Arnold Lazarus⁴⁸ and Paul Wachtel⁴⁹ pursue the least theory-bound approach, but their therapeutic approach should not be considered as either without theory or opposed to treatment theory. They simply seek to improve their ability to select the best treatment for the person and the presenting problem. Their search is guided primarily by data on what has worked best in the past for others, with similar problems and characteristics, rather than on any particular theoretical system.

The *transtheoretical* model of therapy strives to surpass the relativism of eclecticism through a commitment to a higher order theory of psychotherapy that applies more appropriately to complex healing processes. Transtheoretical therapists⁵⁰ refer to themselves as “relativists operating under a structure of ethical and epistemological commitment”⁵¹ as they seek to draw from the entire spectrum of the major theories. Stages of change through which clients progress (and recycling or spirals of progress through the change process) are central to their methodology. In this model, therapists work with clients through *precontemplation*, *contemplation*, *preparation*, *action*, *maintenance*, *relapse*, and *recycling* toward *termination*.

Context-Specific Therapies

Context-specific therapy, launched by Jeffrey Robinson,⁵² does not follow any specific therapeutic model previously discussed.⁵³ Rather, Robinson implements treatment techniques guided by the client’s need, based on phenomenological research.⁵⁴ His approach does not seek to change a client’s orientation, but rather focuses on diminishing homosexual thoughts and behaviors. He works within each client’s own view of God, noting that individuals who are successful at overcoming homosexual problems are motivated by strong religious values.

Treatment Incorporating Spirituality

An increasing number of therapists are incorporating spirituality into their treatment methodology.⁵⁵ The assessment of “religious beliefs” is becoming a standard procedure for therapists seeking to maximize the use of a client’s potential strengths (including social support systems) to help them to move forward in the change process. In this treatment process, many clinicians are open to their clients’ desire to discuss explicit religious and spiritual issues and/or their implications for change within the clients’ life.

Therapeutic Trends

Throughout the past two centuries, therapeutic techniques have been increasing in number and variations, but during the past twenty-five years, the field of psychotherapy has exponentially expanded. There are now dozens of types of therapy reflecting aspects and combinations of the types of therapy discussed above and of new innovations from *holding therapy* to *multi-media therapy*. The therapeutic techniques have expanded from the traditional (personal face-to-face talk) therapy between a therapist and a single client, a couple, or a group of individuals to therapy by telephone, video-telephone, and videoconferencing. Despite interstate licensing and client confidentiality protection debates, it is expected that the nature and varieties of therapy will continue to expand. Self-help books, manuals, and groups will continue to increase, as will indigenous, nonprofessionally facilitated treatment-support groups. These self-help or supportive groups are often attended at the same time as (and supportive to) clients’ participation in professionally directed and licensed individual and group psychotherapy.

Conclusion

Most therapists strive to help their clients move through their own unique change process, divest same-sex (or other) compulsions, and move on to pursue their life goals. In this process, therapists

continue to utilize a wide variety of therapeutic approaches and treatment techniques, depending on the needs of the individual client in his or her unique situation. However, despite this fact, each therapist tends to identify more or less with a particular model, on which the therapist relies, or with a set of therapeutic techniques, which the therapist primarily utilizes. Usually the theoretical base of this model or particular set of techniques will have been utilized by a number of professional peers, and the outcomes will have been researched over time and demonstrated to yield positive benefits for clients.

Please ask your therapist, or a therapist you are considering to assist you or someone you love, about his or her theoretical base and the treatment model or techniques that person will utilize in their therapeutic treatment process. It may make the difference between the success or failure of your efforts.

About the Author

Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW, is a professor of Clinical Social Work at Brigham Young University. She received her doctorate in social work from the University of Utah in 1986, and her master's of social work from Howard University in 1967. Her many recognitions and awards include being recognized as the Educator of the Year in 2003 in the BYU School of Social Work, the Social Worker of the Year award in 1991 from the Nevada Chapter of the NASW, and Evergreen International's Beacon of Light Award in 2001. Her many publications include coauthoring the *Family Enrichment Manual* recently adopted by the government of Indonesia for use in their "Weekly Family Night," and coauthoring the *Evergreen Workbook for Men* and the *Workbook for Women*. Dr. Cox has many years of experience in treating patients with unwanted same-sex attractions, both in Utah and Nevada, where she was on the faculty of University of Nevada Las Vegas. Tireless in community service, she has served on a number of nonprofit boards, including Evergreen International and Foundation for Attraction Research. Dr. Cox is also one of the editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*.

Notes

1. "It is also often helpful to seek guidance from professional

counselors who are experienced in working with same-gender attraction issues and whose counsel is consistent with gospel teachings.” (*God Loveth His Children* pamphlet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2007.) “Through Christ and his church, those who struggle can obtain help. This help comes through fasting and prayer, through the truths of the gospel, through church attendance and service, through the counsel of inspired leaders, and, where necessary, through professional assistance with problems that require such help.” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 12.)

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CHAPTER 13

Practical Advice from a Therapist for Responding to Same-Sex Attractions

Jeffrey W. Robinson, PhD

During the last twenty years I have counseled with many individuals who have struggled with feelings of unwanted same-sex attraction. The great majority of these individuals have had a strong testimony of the gospel and a strong desire to live by its teachings. But many of them have become confused, discouraged, and deeply frustrated as they have struggled to reconcile their deeply held religious beliefs and values with their sometimes overwhelming feelings of same-sex attraction. They have searched for reasons why such feelings were occurring in their lives and for solutions. Many have felt confused and disappointed when the gospel, which had always been the most important thing in their lives, did not seem to be sufficient to help them overcome this, their greatest challenge.

As I have sought to help these individuals, my understanding of this issue has been transformed and my faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ has been greatly strengthened. I would like to share with you some of the things I have come to understand about this issue. I want to explain why I believe that the gospel, properly understood and applied, is the key to dealing with this issue and that it has the power to make “weak things become strong” (Ether 12:27) in the lives of these men.

Some years ago as a graduate student at Brigham Young University studying marriage and family therapy, I was troubled by an article written by a prominent Latter-day Saint psychiatrist which made what seemed to be a convincing argument: that individuals struggling with unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction had no real possibility of changing or significantly diminishing those feelings. It struck me that if this were really true then there were many individuals, who through no fault of their own, lacked the ability to live one of the most critical parts of the gospel as I understood it. This observation presented a challenge to my own faith. I wondered, "How could this be? Would the Lord not prepare a way for them to accomplish the things that He had commanded them? (1 Nephi 3:7) Would He not offer help to those who sought Him as diligently as many of these individuals had?" I worried that if the promises of the gospel were not true for these individuals then perhaps they were not true for me either.

At this time I was working as an intern in the campus clinic. My fellow graduate students and I had received no instruction on helping individuals who struggled with same-sex attraction. This very difficult issue had not been mentioned in any classroom discussion. While I was sitting in the intern's office one day, the intern who assigned cases walked into the room. He held up an intake folder and said, "Anybody here want to talk to a guy who thinks he's gay?" Everyone seemed to look at the floor in an uncomfortable silence. Homosexuality seemed to be too far out of our range of experience for us to comfortably deal with it. The silence continued for a few moments until finally, I volunteered to talk to him because I had been troubled by some of the doctrinal and philosophical issues surrounding this difficult question.

On the day of the appointment, I sat down with this young man and listened to his story. It was a story similar to many I have heard since then. He described how early in his teenage years he began to recognize that, unlike the other young men around him, his feelings of physical attraction were not directed toward girls. He described the fear and confusion he felt. He talked about his inability to control or suppress the strong physical desires he felt

toward men. Finally, with tears of frustration, he told me he was trying to decide whether to enter into therapy and try to overcome his same-sex attractions or to leave the state to pursue a homosexual lifestyle and never again contact his family or anyone he knew. He asked me, "Can you promise that if I enter into therapy and try to overcome this problem, I will never have any of these feelings again for the rest of my life?" I looked him in the eye, and with more honesty than confidence I said, "I don't know." He didn't seem impressed. Sensing his deep anguish, however, I blurted out, "But I'll find out."

Following that session I went to the university library and started searching for information as quickly I could. I also talked to other people to find out anything I could about treating this problem. I found a doctoral dissertation that summarized many years of research on this topic that seemed to indicate that many men with same-sex attractions can be successful at significantly altering their sexual desires. I photocopied some pages out of this dissertation, took them to our second session, and showed them to him. I'm guessing it doesn't inspire a lot of faith when your therapist shows up in your session equipped only with information he found in the library the day before. As he looked over those photocopied pages, I thought, "Well I won't be seeing him again; I've really blown this."

But to my surprise he made another appointment. During that week I worried that he wouldn't show up to his next appointment, but he did. He sat down across from me and said, "I have made up my mind that no matter how long it takes and no matter what I have to do, I am going to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I am going to overcome this problem." I was stunned. I knew that nothing I had said to him could have generated this kind of commitment.

In my life I have had a number of experiences in which I was confident that the Spirit was speaking to me. This was one of them. As I sat and looked at this individual, the impression came to me that "this young man's parents have been praying for him. That is why he has made this decision. You are to be part of the answer to their prayers. So you be careful." This impression came so strongly that

it affected me deeply. After this experience, we began working together, and through his sincere efforts he made significant progress.

I soon began to work with a number of other men struggling with same-sex attraction, and I became increasingly interested in helping those dealing with this issue. Before long when individuals dealing with this issue came into the clinic, they were routinely referred to me.

As I counseled more individuals dealing with this issue, I decided that I would do my doctoral dissertation on the topic. I was particularly interested in whether or not men who struggle with same-sex attraction could truly change. It seemed that if it was really possible for these men to change, I should be able to find some who had actually been successful in completing that change. I reasoned that if I couldn't find anyone who was successful at changing, it would be hard to make the argument that change is possible. Clearly, people would not be impressed if I sat down with them and said, "As far as I know no one's ever done this successfully, but I'm confident that you'll be the first one."

In completing this research I was able to interview a number of men who reported having successfully dealt with same-sex attraction. They reported that their feelings of physical and emotional attraction toward men had changed significantly enough that they were able to enter into and sustain successful heterosexual marriages. Each of them was interviewed in detail about what they meant when they said they had changed. I recorded and compiled their responses; then I took a careful look at what those responses had in common. I asked myself, "What are the common elements in each description of change?" One of the first things I noticed was that when you ask someone, "How have you changed?" the first thing they tell you is how things used to be. So, without intending to, I compiled a very rich description of how the challenge of same-sex attraction developed in their lives. Much of what follows comes directly from that doctoral dissertation. I believe their responses can help us better understand what many men experience.

Common Traits Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction

Researchers commonly look for shared traits as they try to understand why some men struggle with same-sex attraction. They look specifically for shared traits that are different from traits of men who do not have same-sex attractions. The popular media sometimes highlights studies that purport to show differences in brain structure, hormone levels, kinship ties, and so forth. Such reports may contribute to the popular idea that science has conclusively shown same-sex attraction to have a direct biological or genetic cause. This is simply not true. While some correlations have been found, these correlations are too weak to be conclusive. It is also often the case that such research simply cannot be replicated enough to substantiate a direct biological cause. (See chapter eight for a detailed analysis of what science has not shown.)

While I have been unimpressed by the evidence for a direct biological cause, I am however, interested in correlations. It has been my experience that men who struggle with feelings of same-sex attraction consistently share three significant personality traits. These traits are almost universal among these men; in fact, when one of these traits is not present, there has generally been some sort of strong introductory experience, such as sexual abuse, that may have contributed to their feelings of same-sex attraction.

The first characteristic shared by men who struggle with same-sex attraction is that they tend to be unusually emotionally sensitive. They say things like, “I have always been more tenderhearted than other people,” “I have always felt things more deeply than other people,” “I have trouble controlling my emotions,” “I get my feelings hurt easily,” or “I cry more easily than other people.”

The second personality trait shared by these men is that they are unusually introspective. They are often very intelligent, they do a lot of thinking, and much of their thinking is self-analytical. They often make statements such as, “People tell me I think too much,” “I analyze things to death,” “I think myself into circles,” “I think myself into knots,” or “I’m always trying to understand myself.”

The third and perhaps the most ironic trait that these men have in common is that they have an unusually strong sense of right and wrong, coupled with an unusually strong desire to be right. I use the term right very broadly: to be right is to be worthy, to be righteous, to be normal, to be popular, to be liked, to be attractive, to be okay, to be helpful, to be talented, to be good looking. They just want to get things right—to be good. When parents find out they have a son dealing with this issue, they will sometimes say, “This was my best child. He was the most devout, the most obedient, the most helpful, and the most tenderhearted.” It is not unusual for these men to have had outstanding histories of activity in the Church and to have held positions of responsibility and leadership in their Aaronic Priesthood quorums, in their seminary classes, or in their missions.

These three characteristics—emotional sensitivity, introspection, and the desire to be right are each good attributes. The world needs more men who are sensitive and thoughtful and who want to do good. Yet I believe that these three characteristics are the single most significant reason why these men “get stuck” in same-sex attraction. It is a great irony that these three positive characteristics play a prominent role in such an agonizing difficulty. It is as though Satan says, “Here is a group of men who could do great good in this world. What can I do to stop them?”

How could this be? How could three positive characteristics lead to such a difficult problem? In order to understand the answer to this question, we must first understand how the very language we use to describe same-sex attraction in our culture shapes our understanding of this problem.

The Ways Culture and Language Affect Our Views of Same-Sex Attraction

Some of the ways we use language in our culture create false ideas about same-sex attraction. To illustrate, if I hold an object out in front of me and drop it, it will fall. Why does it fall? You would probably say it falls because of gravity. So would I. But the fact

of the matter is that we do not really know why things fall; all we know is that everything that is not supported falls. Gravity is one of the four fundamental physical forces of the universe. All observable events in the universe can be explained in terms of these four forces: gravity, electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force, and the weak nuclear force. These physical forces explain everything we see, but so far nothing has fully explained them. It is important to note that each of these forces is really a description or a label that tells us *how* things behave, *not* a cause or an explanation of *why* they behave. The word *gravity* then is really a description of what things do; they fall. So we put a label on what things do. We call the fact that things fall gravity. We then do a very interesting thing; we talk as though we have explained it when all we have really done is labeled it:

“Why do things fall?”

“Well, they fall because of gravity.”

“But how do you know there is gravity?”

“Well . . . because things fall.”

“But what makes them fall?”

“Well . . . gravity!”

See how language can simply go in a circle? Using the word *gravity* really adds no new information to the fact that things fall. It simply makes it more convenient to talk about that fact. The problem then is that we pay a price for the convenience of labeling things. We sometimes begin to believe that we have explained something when all that we have really done is labeled it.

We use language to label many other things in our culture and then describe them as having occurred as a result of the label. This a common practice in the social sciences. The concept of self-esteem is a good example. Self-esteem began as a description of people's behavior. People who said or thought *good* things about themselves were described as having high self-esteem, and people who said or thought *bad* things about themselves were described as having low self-esteem. But what began as a description of what people were *doing* came to be talked about as though it was the reason they were doing it.

“Why does that person say such bad things about himself?”

“Well, he must have low self-esteem.”

“How do you know he has low self-esteem?”

“Well, because he says such bad things about himself.”

“Why does he do that?”

“Because he has low self-esteem.”

The language we use creates the idea that we have something inside us called “self-esteem” that can make us do things. Our words can create the impression that we do not have much choice in the matter. When asked why we are so down on ourselves, we say that it is due to our low self-esteem. And so we have created a *cause* called self-esteem, when in reality the word is simply a label for something that people do. Such ways of talking and thinking quickly become accepted as common knowledge. Most of us have grown up simply accepting the idea that we have something inside us called our self-esteem and that this thing has the power to make us think and act in certain ways.

The way we use language has real consequences. The way we talk about things soon becomes the way we think about them, understand them, and respond to them. I believe that this is particularly true in the lives of individuals who struggle with unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction. We may ask:

“Why is that man sexually attracted to other men?”

“It is because he is homosexual.”

“How do you know he is homosexual?”

“Because he is sexually attracted to other men.”

“But what makes him sexually attracted to other men?”

“Homosexuality.”

Our language then has created a condition, a trait, or a sexual orientation called homosexuality, and we talk about it as though it has the power to make people do, think, or feel in certain specific ways.

Our language can have an even more profound influence on individuals who are unusually emotionally sensitive, self-analytical, and perfectionistic. People who experience same-sex attraction often say things like, “When I found out I was gay . . .”

The implications of this simple phrase are critically important. It literally means that *before* a person had any homosexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, he was *already* a “gay” person. Therefore, when homosexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviors began to occur in his life, they were perceived as *symptoms* of a deeper condition that *already* existed in him, the condition being “gay” or “homosexual.”

People who are unusually emotionally sensitive, intensely introspective, and highly perfectionistic are especially distressed by the idea that their homosexual feelings are caused by an innate condition, and this idea can greatly influence how they respond to those feelings. As an example, I had a client many years ago who had no homosexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviors until he was in his early twenties (this is unusual; most men experience these feelings by early adolescence). To support a friend who was dealing with same-sex attraction, he attended a fireside for men struggling with this issue. During the fireside a number of men gave testimonials describing their struggles and what their lives had been like. Hearing these testimonials, this young man began to think, “That sounds a lot like me! I wonder if I might be gay.” Well, he had to know. It would be bad enough to be gay, but he certainly didn’t want to be gay and not know it! So in order to find out if he was gay, he tried fantasizing sexually about men, and, sure enough, he found that it could be very arousing. Now he knew the truth; he knew that he, too, was gay.

He never thought to himself, “I just taught myself to do something; I have taught myself a new pattern of arousal; I just trained myself to respond in a new way.” Thoughts such as these never crossed his mind. Why? Because such explanations were simply not available to him; they were not part of his culture’s language. He had grown up in a culture that had taught him very clearly that there were basically two kinds of people; straight and heterosexual or gay and homosexual. He further understood from his culture that if you became aroused by sexual thoughts about other men you fit into that category called homosexual. Not only do you *belong* in that category, it is *being* in that category that is causing

you to become aroused by men. Therefore, the only explanation available to him was, "I just found out who and what I am, and I am gay." This false idea became a critical factor in this young man's life. I believe this same false idea has unfortunately influenced many other young men to interpret their emotional or sexual responses in the same way.

Another mistake we make as a result of the way we use language is that we take metaphors too literally. We use metaphors when we speak of things that are not directly observable by our senses, such things as our emotions, urges, and desires. The "need" metaphor is often used as people talk about same-sex attraction. There is a lot of talk about "unmet emotional needs." The word *need* once indicated a necessity, such as a physical resource that we must have in order to live. A need is often evidenced by continued urges and cravings until we get enough of *it*. So when we speak of "emotional needs," we elevate our desires beyond the level of a want, wish, craving, or hope to the level of *necessity*.

"Orientation" is another metaphor that we use when we talk about same-sex attraction. *Orientation* began as a geographic term. A person was "oriented according to the direction he was facing and his position relative to the geography around him." In our culture we speak of individuals as having "a sexual orientation." This sexual orientation is perceived as a very powerful, innate cause that determines what we will be sexually attracted to. A "sexual orientation" is not something you *do*; it is something you *have*. Great importance is sometimes placed on knowing what your "sexual orientation" is.

"Drive" is another metaphor often used in reference to sexual feelings. The word *drive* originally referred to the act of impelling, forcing or urging forward, with specific reference to cattle or other livestock. As such it referred to something being urged forward by an agent outside of and therefore out of the control of the thing being driven. This sense of being pushed, prodded or forced against one's will, or at the least without consent, was retained when the word *drive* was later adopted to refer to various physical or psychological cravings, including sexual desires.

Do we really have a sex drive? I often talk to young men who struggle with various kinds of strong sexual impulses prior to serving a mission. Then, right at the peak of their supposed sexual drive, many of them choose to serve an LDS mission, and often these impulses create little if any problem for them for two years. I wonder, "Where did that incredibly powerful force that 'drive,' go for two years?" Perhaps that sexual drive was not simply something they *had* but more something they *did*. Perhaps they had simply chosen to do something different for two years.

A few years ago, a newspaper columnist suggested that abstinence is not a realistic expectation because the sexual drive is the strongest drive in nature, next to hunger. That comparison allows me to introduce a different way of thinking about same-sex attraction, using the example of hunger. I experience hunger as a pain in my stomach, a very unpleasant sensation. For me, that sensation happens to be very similar, if not identical, to the sensation I feel when I'm nervous or anxious about something. There have been a number of times in my life when I have said to my wife, "I'm really nervous about something. My stomach is in knots. I don't know why I'm so uptight." My wife will then turn to me and say, "Have you eaten today?" I will then look down somewhat sheepishly and mutter, "No, I haven't had time." She will then roll her eyes, shake her head, and say, "Sit down at the table." She will then feed me, and guess what? That uncomfortable feeling in my stomach goes away. What happened? I had a physical sensation in my stomach, but in and of itself, it had no meaning until I assigned a meaning to it, or interpreted it. Sometimes we say, "I told myself a story about it." I told myself a story about nervousness when really a story about being hungry would have been more helpful in eliminating the painful sensation.

Now if I had told myself a story about hunger, what would have come into my mind? Well, most likely it would be food. For me it might be pizza. I love pizza, with lots of cheese, pepperoni, sausage, and ham. I don't remember ever choosing to love pizza, and I've really tried to not love pizza. I've been trying to lose some weight, and I have a family history of heart disease. So I tell myself,

“Yuck, that stuff is disgusting; all that fat and grease is just revolting.” Well, that might work for a while, but when that pain in my stomach returns and I get within smelling distance of a hot pizza, watch out! At times like that that, I begin to believe that I really have a “pizza drive.”

I don't believe that food, and specifically pizza, are the only possible stories that I could tell about the pain in my stomach. Certainly if I had grown up in another country I might not think of pizza when I feel the pain in my stomach. When I feel that sensation, I might also think, “I'm fasting. I'm trying to become closer to my Heavenly Father.” I might think, “I'm on a diet and I'm going to lose weight.” Maybe I am on a hunger strike and the pain in my stomach represents defiance or anger. On the other hand, I might interpret those feelings and say, “My life is completely out of control and hopeless. I have no control over anything. The only thing I can really control in my life is what I eat. In fact, when I feel anxious and out of control, I can feel that sensation in my stomach and it soothes me. It gives me a sense of control in my life until it reduces my anxiety and I literally become addicted to that feeling in my stomach.” In an extreme case that thinking might lead me to starve myself to death. This process is a major cause of anorexia.

I use this example because when we talk about issues of sexuality involving interpretation or assigning meaning, people are sometimes offended. They experience their sexual desires and cravings as very real and very powerful. To say that these desires are the result of interpretation or “telling a story” seems to be dismissing their struggle as somehow their fault and as something that it should be easy to change. But this is not true. Our interpretations, “our stories,” are incredibly powerful and often very difficult to change. Try to not like your favorite food; try to not have feelings about your country or your home; try to have no emotional response to your parents; try to not care if a friend snubs you. The meanings we make and the stories we tell about our world *are* our world. They are the means by which we understand what we experience, who we are, and what we are.

When we talk about hunger in this way, it feels a lot less like some innate, physical “drive” and more like an experience that involves meaning making and interpretation. The same thing is true when it comes to sexuality, except that instead of having an unpleasant physical sensation, we have the ability to become strongly sexually aroused, an incredibly pleasant sensation. But I believe that, like hunger, this sensation, in and of itself, has no meaning until we interpret and place meaning upon it.

The meanings we place upon our sexual arousal vary greatly between individuals and cultures and over time. These meanings are greatly influenced by the culture around us. For example, if I grew up in the South Pacific a hundred years ago, what physical attributes of women might I have been attracted to? I would likely be attracted to heavy women, because being heavy meant that women were healthy and well off. In fact, the same thing is still true today in some places. In some places men are sexually attracted to women who stretch out their necks with brass rings or shave their heads or stretch out their earlobes or scar their faces. These forms of beauty have no real attraction for men in our culture, but because many in those cultures tell a different story, the men in those cultures can be strongly aroused by those things.

Again, if I took a beauty queen of today and entered her into a beauty contest back in 1930, the audience might view her as comic relief. She would look strange and out of place—too tall, gangly, and so skinny she looked half starved. Not only that, she would have too much of a tan, like a common field laborer. Spectators might just hoot and holler and slap their knees. On the other hand a beauty queen from 1930 would be perceived today as too short, pudgy, and pale. Understanding the strong cultural influences that shape our sexuality helps us to see sexual desire not as simply some innate and unchanging physical drive or orientation but as something that develops through meaning making and interpretation.

This understanding helps us to see the mistake that some who struggle with same-sex attraction make by overinterpreting themselves as being vastly different from other people. All of the men I know who have been successful in overcoming homosexual

behaviors say that they first had to learn they are not as different from other men as they thought they were.

Sometimes I am asked, “If you think we can become straight, do you also think you could become gay?” My response is, “Probably. I would prefer not to—it seems to cause a lot of hassle in people’s lives. I’ve got my own hassles.” But I do believe that most people can probably significantly alter their sexual desires. That’s the good news.

There is some not-so-good news, however. Over the years I have often told my clients that the only real difference between them and me is that they can remember how to be sexually attracted to other men and I can’t. They can remember the story or interpretation of same-sex attraction. This is the hard part. If we saw same-sex attraction as a disease we would talk about a cure. If we saw it as a condition, we would seek to find ways of treating the condition. If we thought of it as a wound, we would talk about helping it to heal. But if sexual attraction is a memory, if it is something that you know and can remember how to do, how do you get rid of any memory? How do you forget; how do you make amnesia happen?

The powerful memories of sexual attraction can be compared to learning a language. If I grew up speaking English but wanted to learn Spanish, I might study very hard, immerse myself in the Spanish language, and avoid speaking and thinking in English. I might even move to a Spanish-speaking county. But how long would it take for English to be completely eradicated from my memory? Would it ever happen? If this high standard of complete eradication were the definition of “change,” no one could change their language or much else about themselves.

I tell my clients, “For you to completely lose the ability to ever be sexually aroused by another man”—now losing the ability is different from losing the compulsion or the habit, and here we’re talking about losing the ability so that you just couldn’t do it—“to do that would be about as easy as if I were to say, ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed . . .’ and for you not to think ‘Reindeer.’” Is that even possible?

For most of us who grew up singing “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” this is simply a well-established pathway among the neurons in our brain. It is something we know how to do, and it would be very difficult not to do it. But what if you were highly motivated? What if someone offered you one million dollars on the condition that in one year you could hear the words *Rudolph, the red-nosed* and *reindeer* would *not* be the first thing to come to your mind? How would you try to accomplish that? Well, many people say that they would try to substitute some other word for *reindeer*. So you could sing “Rudolph, the red-nosed buffalo” a thousand times, then a hundred thousand times, then a million times. Eventually *buffalo* would come into your mind more readily than *reindeer*.

But every once in a while, seemingly out of nowhere, through some random firing of neurons in the brain, *reindeer* may come back into your mind. Now how would you respond? If you were emotionally sensitive, very introspective, and strongly perfectionistic, you might react like this: “*Reindeer*, . . . oh, no, *reindeer!* I said *reindeer* again; I can’t believe it! I still have this *reindeer* orientation! It’s always going to be *reindeer!* I can’t believe it! All of my prayers, all of the therapy, all of the work, it’s ruined—it’s *reindeer, reindeer, reindeer!* I’m always going to be a *reindeer* guy—it’s *reindeer!* It’s going to be *reindeer* my whole life! I can’t believe it. I’ll never know anything but *reindeer!*” Now what did I just do? (One client said, “Lost a million bucks!”) Instead of saying *reindeer* once, I have said it a dozen times with great emotional emphasis. That is what many who struggle with same-sex attraction do. In therapy, we try to help them interpret their memories in different way, something like this: “*Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer*. . . . Oh, I used to do that a lot. . . . *Rudolph, the red-nosed buffalo*,” and then move on.

Using the language metaphor again, while I’m speaking Spanish an English word might pop into my head, but instead of having a strong emotional reaction and feeling that all of my efforts to learn and speak Spanish have failed, I might think, “Oh, English, I remember what it was like to speak English, but I’m speaking

Spanish now, and that suits me just fine,” and then move on speaking Spanish. This metaphor helps decrease emotional reactivity to the continuing memory of same-sex attractions.

Defusing emotional reactivity is a key component in treating the issue. Doing this, however, can be difficult. Since same-sex attraction is a condition these individuals strongly want to overcome, they believe that they are supposed to fight it with all of their heart. They also believe that if they have a strong emotional reaction against their feelings of same-sex attraction, they are doing what any good person would do. But the strong emotional reactions just dig them deeper and deeper. Like a man struggling in quicksand, they are pulled lower and lower.

Development of Same-Sex Attraction

If what I am saying is true, if same-sex attraction is an interpretation, a story someone tells himself, then how does this story develop? Why do some men find themselves sexually attracted to other men? How does it get started? While no two men have exactly the same experience, there are some fairly common patterns. I want to describe two of them.

First Pattern

The first pattern I will describe is somewhat less common. It fits for only about half of the clients I talk to. But when it does fit, it is very important to understand. It begins when a boy is very young, in pre-adolescence or early adolescence. This young man, who is unusually emotionally sensitive, self-analytical, and perfectionistic, begins to hear about chastity, sexual morality, purity, and moral cleanliness. He makes up his mind, at a very deep level, that he is not going to think sexual thoughts about girls. He sees them as too pure, too sacred to think about in that way. It is likely however, that he has heard little if any discussion about not thinking sexual thoughts about other boys. He may also assume that since he is allowed to see other boys in locker rooms or other situations and that he himself is a boy and can look at himself in the

mirror, that seeing or thinking about other boys must not be that bad. As a result, when this young man hits puberty and begins to have the experience of strong sexual arousal, he is actually less resistive, feels less guilt, in thinking sexually about other boys than he would thinking about girls.

I commonly asked clients which they would feel most guilty about: having an explicit sexual fantasy about a woman or having a similarly explicit sexual fantasy about a man. About half of them tell me that they would feel more guilt fantasizing about a woman. The majority of those who feel that way say that they would feel two to three times more guilty fantasizing about a woman. So when this pattern fits, it often fits very strongly.

Second Pattern

The second pattern I would like to describe in the development of same-sex attraction is more common than the first one. It fits for a significant majority of men. It is a little bit more complex, and it sometimes goes hand in hand with the first pattern.

The men I counsel who experienced same-sex attraction often say something like “from an early age I have always felt different from or rejected by other men or boys.” For some men, this has to do with their relationship with their father; they felt distant from their father or felt that their father didn’t approve of them. Some did not like their father and did not want to be like him. But for many other men, same-sex attraction does not seem to have much to do with their father at all. Some people believe this problem is always about the father, but many men I have counseled say they had good, often very good, relationships with their fathers.

Instead, for many individuals I counsel with, feeling different or rejected had to do with peers or sometimes siblings. Some men were made fun of or teased. They may have been called “gay” or “fag” or other kinds of names when they were growing up. Some were left out of activities; some simply did not like traditional activities like sports or cars or other kinds of things that boys are supposed to like. Some were more drawn to artistic endeavors,

and many have been more expressive and more verbal. They may have excelled in art, music, drama, or other less stereotypically male activities.

So from a very young age, they felt different or rejected by other males. Because of this, they began to focus on other boys or men very intensely, almost obsessively. That intense focus most often took one or more of three different forms.

First, they may have focused on other boys with envy and comparisons to themselves: “Why can’t I be like other guys? I am so different. Why can’t I have that guy’s good looks, that guy’s muscles, that guy’s body, that guy’s sexual development, that guy’s popularity?”

Second, they may have focused on other boys through their desire to belong. They saw other boys in groups of friends and buddies laughing, talking, and roughhousing, and they wanted to belong, to be included, to fit in. They wanted to be liked and cared about.

Third, they may have focused on other boys with fascination and curiosity. They found them intriguing. They may have been intrigued by their masculinity or by their sexual development. They may have been intrigued by them aesthetically—they simply found them to be beautiful. So in one or more of these three different ways—and often in all three—they became very focused on other men.

Next came puberty. I’m sorry for being a little bit explicit here, but this is an explicit topic and to really understand what happens in the lives of these young men, we need to be specific. Young adolescent boys are very easily sexually aroused. Usually by the age of twelve they are becoming aroused many times each day. They may become aroused by any change in their physical environment, by any significant shift in their emotions, or for no reason at all. They may think, “I’m hot, I get aroused; I’m cold, I get aroused; my pants are too tight, I get aroused; my pants are too loose, I get aroused; I need to use the bathroom, I get aroused; the car ride is bumpy, I get aroused.” Or maybe they think, “I’m nervous, I get aroused; I’m excited, I get aroused; I’m relaxed, I get aroused; I’m

happy, I get aroused.” Or for no reason at all they just get aroused multiple times during the day. I had one sixteen-year-old client say to me once “I’m doing much better at not having sexual fantasies, so I just have the normal arousal, about every forty-five minutes.”

At this stage in their lives, this arousal is what I would call “undifferentiated.” It is not connected to any particular gender or even to other people in general. They simply get aroused a lot. The majority of boys at this stage of life are almost bored with other boys: “I’ve been playing football with these guys; we’ve been hanging out together; there’s nothing new, exciting or intriguing there. But those girls over there, they’re shaped differently, they talk differently, and most importantly, my culture sends me all kinds of messages about sexuality, romance, girlfriends, marriage and sex” — and so this arousal, which is frequent and strong but which up to this point has been undifferentiated, soon begins to focus on girls.

Most boys become sexually attracted to girls for the same reason they speak English: it’s what their culture trains them to do. As in language acquisition, a growing child eventually acquires the ability to speak or, in the case of sexuality, to get aroused, but the specific ways in which these general abilities will eventually be expressed is most strongly influenced by their cultural surroundings.

So what happens in the life of young men who begin to struggle with same-sex attraction? What happens differently for them? Well, for a significant minority of boys, their focus at this stage isn’t on girls; instead, their focus is still on other boys because of envy, wanting to belong, fascination, and curiosity. It is the other boys they want to be like. It is the other boys they want to be close to and accepted by. It is the other boys they are fascinated by and have strong emotional reactions to. So eventually it is the other boys they begin to be aroused by.

In my experience, these are the two most common ways that a young man begins to experience sexual attraction to other young men: anxiety or guilt about having sexual feelings towards girls and intense focus on other boys at the onset of puberty. It is not uncommon for significant numbers of adolescent boys to experience some sexual arousal towards other boys. But for most boys

this experience of same-sex arousal has little lasting significance. They may notice it, but they quickly shrug it off as unimportant, not worth worrying about.

Who we are concerned about are the boys who get stuck there; the ones for whom this experience of same-sex arousal becomes increasingly frequent and intense during their adolescent years. To understand why this happens for some young men, it is important to remember that we are talking about those who have three characteristics in common: they are unusually emotionally sensitive, they are extraordinarily introspective or self-analytical, and they care intensely about doing things right. When these young men notice that they are beginning to be sexually aroused by other men, five things happen. For some, these things happen very quickly; for others they may occur slowly over a period of years.

Overfocus and Overinterpretation. First, these young men overfocus and overinterpret their experience of sexual arousal towards other men. Thinking about their attraction to men becomes a huge part of their lives. They think and worry about it constantly. They worry about the future, they worry about what will happen to them, they worry about why they feel this way, they worry that they are evil, they worry about whether other people can tell, they worry about their standing with God, they wonder if it will get better, they worry that it will get worse, and they spend an enormous amount of time trying to figure it all out.

Eventually, at some point during their adolescent years, they reach the point that their thinking and worrying about this issue consumes more of their focus and mental energy than every other thing in their lives combined. They worry more about this than they do about school, church, family, friends, hobbies, interests, recreation, and other activities all put together. When I describe this level of worry to my clients, they often nod their heads, their eyes tear up, and they say, "Yeah, absolutely, absolutely; it concerns me more than everything else combined."

When you focus that much on something, does it get larger or smaller? It gets larger. Here is another metaphor that I use with clients. I hold up my clipboard and suggest, "Let's say that this

clipboard represents the fact that you get aroused by other guys, and let's say that everything else in this room represents all the other things in your life: church, school, family, friends, etc. Here's what you've done." I then look carefully around, noticing all the different objects in the room, and then suddenly, when I notice the clipboard, I grab it intensely with a look of shock and horror on my face. I stare directly at it, as if studying it in terrified amazement, while moving it slowly but steadily closer and closer to my eyes. Finally I smack it against my face, covering my eyes, and hold it there. Then I say "Suddenly this is the biggest thing in the room. I can see the other things out of the corner of my eye, but this is the biggest thing in my world. This is the central fact of my life. This is what I wake up to every morning." I then tell them, "This is what you have done with the issue of same-sex attraction in your life." At this point many men begin to understand for the first time the role that overfocus and overinterpretation have played in making this problem the thing that dominates their lives.

Self-Loathing. The second thing that happens when young men begin to feel sexual attraction towards other men is self-loathing. They develop strong negative feelings about themselves. From their earliest years they have wanted to be as good as possible, to get everything right. Now they feel as though they have the worst thoughts, feelings, and behaviors they could possibly have. They tell themselves things like, "This is disgusting; I am disgusting. If anyone knew what I have been thinking and feeling they would find it revolting; they would find me revolting. If anyone knew this about me, they could not possibly love me."

Isolation and Secrecy. The third thing that occurs when young men begin dealing with feelings of same-sex attraction is isolation and secrecy. They think, "Nobody must know about this; I cannot tell anybody. I will make it go away by willpower; I will pray it away; I will force it out of my heart and my mind—but I cannot tell anybody." I have talked to many men who have kept their feelings a complete secret for years or even decades. Not only do they keep the attraction a secret, but they also expend a great deal of mental and emotional energy in creating a social façade. Some

of these men begin to act shy or withdrawn, but in my experience the great majority of them become what I call “world-class fakers.” They walk down the halls at school or at church smiling and greeting people as though nothing were wrong. If you ask their bishop or their seminary teacher, “How is that kid doing?” he would respond, “What a terrific kid! I wish we had a dozen kids just like him. If only all these kids were as on top of things as he is.” No one has any idea of the intense emotional pain and turmoil that this young man walks around with every day of his life.

Such young men suppose that if anyone really does love and accept them it can only be because that person doesn’t know the real truth about them. They feel they have to be very careful about how close they let other people get to them because those people might figure out the “secret.” So the weeks and the months and the years go by and life goes on. At church everybody’s complimenting them and telling their parents how wonderful they are. Nobody knows what this young man thinks about himself: how bad he really is.

Compulsive Sexuality. The fourth thing that occurs in the lives of these young men is some level of compulsive sexuality. For some young men this may simply mean indulging in sexual fantasies about other men. But for most of these men it includes masturbation to homosexual fantasies, often the use of gay pornography, and for some, acting out sexually with other men. Why does this happen? I believe that for most of these men the answer can be given very simply: “I’m having some sort of negative emotions—I’m feeling lonely; I’m feeling guilty; I’m feeling unworthy; I’m feeling tired; I’m feeling anxious; I’m feeling bored; I’m feeling some negative emotion—and I know how to make it go away. I know something that will replace it with feelings that are exciting and intensely pleasurable and intriguing to me, that make me feel close to other men, if only in my fantasies.” That is why many turn to fantasy, masturbation, pornography, and, sometimes, sexual activity with other men. This scenario is very common; some spend many of their waking hours in sexual thoughts and fantasies.

The use of sexual arousal to medicate the emotional pain of life can soon become an addiction. When they try to overcome these compulsive sexual thoughts or fantasies, they become like an alcoholic trying to give up alcohol while walking around with a bottle of whiskey open in front of him, a straw in the bottle, and the other end of the straw in his mouth. This young man doesn't have to go anywhere or purchase anything to obtain the pain-killing pleasure; he just turns his mind to it and he can experience that rush of pleasant feeling again and again.

The problem with this kind of self-medication is that it often creates a self-perpetuating cycle. I often ask clients to think about an alcoholic sitting on the street corner. He looks down in the gutter and says to himself, "Alcohol has ruined my life, my family has all left me and won't speak to me, my career has been destroyed, my health has been ruined, and I have no friends. I think I need a drink!" In this way most addictions create their own need. But in the case of addictive same-sex behaviors it is as though a man says, "I'm evil, I'm unworthy, I'm a fag or I'm a queer, and no one would love me if they knew this about me. I think I need a fantasy!"

When discussing the role that this compulsive sexual behavior has played in their lives, I often ask clients if they play a musical instrument. Many will say something like "Yes, I play the piano." I will then ask them, "If you had spent as many hours practicing the piano in the last ten years as you have spent thinking sexual thoughts about men, how good would you be?" Most of them laugh and respond, "I would be famous" or "I would be playing in concerts all over the world." I then point out to them, "So you practice and practice and practice sexual thoughts and feelings towards men, and then wonder where these strong feelings and desires are coming from."

Religious Turmoil. Lastly, these young men experience some sort of religious turmoil or crisis as a result of their struggle. Typically, they have been extremely devout, but they become hurt and wounded. They wonder, "Why have my prayers gone unanswered? Why, when I needed it the most, has the gospel not been there and saved me from this problem?" Some lose their testimonies and leave

the Church; some become ultra-orthodox and try very, very hard; and some switch back and forth between faith and hopelessness.

Can you see why a young man who is emotionally sensitive, introspective, and wanting to be good gets caught up in this pattern? It is the introspective young man who overinterprets what is happening to him and focuses on it incessantly. It is the perfectionistic young man who wants to be good but who loathes and hates himself because he believes he is not good. It is the young man who is emotionally sensitive who isolates himself because he cannot bear the thought or the pain of anyone else knowing about this problem. He shields himself from all kinds of healthy, intimate relationships, as well as from those who might help him.

To review this second pattern, imagine a young man saying, "I felt different from or rejected by other men. I focused on other men because of envy, wanting to belong, or fascination and curiosity. I hit adolescence when I was strongly and easily aroused by all kinds of different emotions and feelings. I was having strong emotional responses to men, and so I focused on men more and more and became aroused by them. When that happened, I over-focused and overinterpreted. I hated myself because of it. I isolated myself socially and emotionally and kept it a secret. I developed some compulsive sexual behaviors to medicate all of this pain, and I then developed a religious crisis in my life."

Steps to Change

Now the question is what to do about it. How do these men change? Men who are successful at overcoming this problem do so by reversing the five characteristics described above.

Stop Overfocusing and Overinterpretation

Men who are successful stop overfocusing and overinterpreting. In discussing how to do this, I typically use another metaphor that often rings true to them: "When people begin this battle with same-sex attraction, they think it's going to be like this: There's a terrible dragon over here. He has caused untold pain and misery in

my life. I must kill him. So I draw my sword and I go to do battle, and he knocks me down, and I knock him down, and we fight and we fight, and it's a terrible battle, but finally, because I'm so valiant and so diligent, I get a couple of good blows in, I drive my sword into his heart, and he goes down. Then I collapse in exhaustion, covered with dirt and mud and blood and sweat, but finally victorious." That's how they picture the battle, and that's how they've been trying to fight it.

Unfortunately, this approach never seems to work. The dragon never seems to die. Those who are actually successful would describe the battle very differently; they would say, "There's a terrible dragon over there; he has caused untold pain and misery in my life. I draw my sword, he lunges at me, and I fend him off. I keep my eye on him, he is dangerous, but then I start to back up a little bit, I back up some more, I back up some more, and I keep backing up, and finally I turn and walk away from him; I walk and I walk and I keep walking, and the farther I walk, the smaller he becomes in the distance until he becomes irrelevant in my life—he just doesn't matter anymore."

While the idea of walking away may seem very logical and practical, many men who struggle with same-sex attraction are very uncomfortable with it because *if you walk away the dragon is still alive*. Remember my first client who asked, "Can you promise me that if I enter into therapy and try to overcome this problem, I will *never* have any of these feelings again for the rest of my life?" Those who want to conquer same-sex attraction want it to be gone completely, vanquished, and completely destroyed. They want to see the dragon dead, its head mounted on the wall; they want to read the coroner's report and know the exact time and cause of death. They cannot tolerate even the slightest remnant of it in their lives, and that desire simply keeps them there, fighting the dragon. For many men who deal with this issue, their attitude has been, "If this is still a problem for me, I must not have focused on it enough, analyzed it enough, worried about it enough, felt enough guilt about it, been upset with myself enough." So they keep fighting the dragon.

I had one client who had not seen me for several months when he called and made an appointment. He sat down in my office and said, “Days go by, sometimes even weeks, without my even thinking about this problem. Then I feel guilty and think I need to go back and see Jeff again and work on that problem some more.” I responded, “Really, what would happen if you never thought about it again?” He thought for a moment and said hesitantly, as if wondering if he could possibly be correct, “Well, I . . . I suppose that would be good, wouldn’t it?” I said, “Yes, I think that would be very good.” Remember the clipboard? Remember *Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer*? Men who are successful at dealing with the issue of same-sex attraction move on with their lives by not focusing so intensely on the problem.

Decrease Self Focus

These men must give up self-loathing and in general stop focusing so much on themselves. I have never met a man who successfully hated himself out of homosexuality or compulsive sexuality. In fact, those who hate themselves the most are universally the ones who are most stuck. People who successfully deal with this challenge stop worrying so much about themselves. They develop not what I would refer to as high self-esteem but something like self-forgetfulness, or perhaps the gospel virtue of hope. They hope and have a belief in the redemption of Christ, and they stop trying to earn their way into heaven.

Connect with Others

These men must also give up their isolation and secrecy by telling significant people in their lives about their challenges. It is not necessary or helpful to tell lots of people, but telling a handful of significant people is valuable—usually parents or a spouse, a bishop, a counselor, maybe some close friends. It is essential to have somebody else know about it; then they can talk to someone else about it.

This act alone is incredibly agonizing for many of them, and yet it is incredibly liberating. They say, “I cannot believe people could

respond so positively to me. I cannot believe they still care about me or love me or like me.” They were quite certain they would be rejected because they had rejected themselves for so long. To a large degree their fear of others’ response to this problem was a direct reflection of their own response. In order to respond differently to themselves they had to first experience the compassion others would offer them.

For some this is the most difficult step they need to take. Once they talk openly about it, however, the nature of the problem changes; it can no longer be a secret so deep and so dark that it is unspeakable. Those who are successful also develop or expand healthy, nonsexual relationships with other men and women, and they become more socially comfortable, more open and honest, more direct, and more caring.

Restore Chastity

In order for men to succeed in overcoming same-sex attraction, they must overcome compulsive or addictive sexual behaviors. For some this is the greatest and most difficult challenge of all. For some it becomes the major focus of therapy for a significant period of time. At times our Father in Heaven seems to be stingy about taking this problem away from people, but He is often very generous in showing them the very next step they should take, so long as they humbly and consistently ask. Depending on the length and severity of the sexual addiction, this issue becomes a significant problem in and of itself. Little lasting progress can occur unless this issue is dealt with.

Spiritual Growth

Finally, those who are truly successful in this process of overcoming same-sex attraction experience a spiritual change in their lives. Men who are successful attribute it to having been spiritually born again. I tell my clients, “Your goal has got to be nothing more or less than to be born again through the Holy Ghost and to have the desire for evil removed from you.”

Of course, then the question arises, “Well, that’s great; I’ve been praying for that. So can’t we just skip to that part and forget all the stuff about getting on with my life and not focusing too much on the problem, and learning to stop hating myself and to love other people, and being honest and open, and overcoming the compulsive sexual behavior—let’s just skip all that and jump to the born-again part and we’ll be done with it.” But it doesn’t work that way. These efforts *prepare* them for that final step in overcoming. These changes soften their heart, open their understanding, and increase their compassion and their humility. They create the necessary space in their lives that allows this final change to happen.

Changing these patterns is difficult, but it is possible. I have seen many men do it and move on with lives that are filled with happiness and joy, but it is not easy. It is a difficult trial. These men are in the same position as everyone else: they must rely on our Father in Heaven and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, or they will not be successful. But they have to change the way they think about it. They have to change their perception of what living the gospel means, because simply hating themselves and striving so diligently has not worked for them, but understanding mercy and moving away from these behaviors, walking away from the dragon, seems to be helpful and has been for many, many men.

I have seen men express gratitude for the growth and understanding that has occurred in their lives as a result of their faithful efforts in overcoming this problem. Many of them at one point will say, “This was the problem that drove me to my knees, which humbled me and made me realize that I stand redeemed by Christ or I do not stand at all.” In order for this change to happen, most men who struggle with same-sex attraction need to develop a deeper and broader understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For most of them, and for many of the people who love them and want to help them, the problem of same-sex attraction often seems to be “off the edge of the gospel map.” It can be very confusing. It seems to contradict our understanding of agency. It appears to be a cruel thing to have to endure. It often seems to run contrary to our ideas of who and what we are. In order to make sense out of this painful

and confusing issue, we may need to expand our understanding of many issues: the gospel, the nature of agency, what it means to be redeemed, the role of sexuality in our lives, and what it means to love and support one another in this lost and fallen world.

For example, it is important for these men to understand *both* justice *and* mercy. It has been my experience that men who struggle with same-sex attraction are sometimes men who comprehend justice but who fall short in their comprehension of mercy. They understand the parts of the gospel that say, “Be perfect, obey every commandment, be valiant, repent of every sin, take responsibility, don’t make excuses, etc.” These principles resonate in the hearts of many of these men. What they do not understand as well are the parts of the gospel that deal with mercy, grace, redemption, the Atonement, and the love of Christ. These key principles are more difficult for many of these men. Mercy simply doesn’t resonate as deeply for them as justice does.

Ironically, these men could give a great Sacrament meeting talk on mercy because they are generally smart and they know how all the words fit together, but in their own lives accepting mercy is often very difficult. Sometimes their approach seems to be, “I can accept the Atonement of Jesus Christ after I’ve repented and overcome this. After I’ve finally and completely repented, then I can accept the Atonement to clean up the mess I made along the way. But not right now, not while I’m so bad. I’ve got to overcome this on my own, and then the Atonement will be available to me.” It’s the equivalent of saying, “I can accept the Atonement as soon as I prove I don’t need it.”

I sometimes tell clients that there are two possible errors that can result from spiritual perfectionism. The first is that they will become very discouraged and hate themselves for their repeated failures. This is bad, but the second error is even worse. It is to believe, to some degree, that they have succeeded; to see themselves as in some way less in need of forgiveness and redemption than others. Sometimes I wonder about the role that same-sex attraction plays in the spiritual lives of these men. Many of them are men who are intelligent, talented, and gifted in many ways.

I wonder if it were not for this problem whether they might have been men who would have been in serious danger of committing this second error. But here in the middle of their often well-organized and high-achieving lives, the Lord allows an overwhelming problem to develop. Sometimes these men wonder if they can be saved *in spite* of this problem. I tell them that they may be saved *because* of this problem or at least through their response to this problem.

I often joke with clients as we read the Lord's words to Mormon "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness." I tell them, "I don't know about you, but to me that sounds more like a threat than an invitation." But then we move on and read what is probably one of the most beautiful and hopeful verses in scripture:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before from me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

I have had the privilege of seeing these words become a reality in the lives of many men. In the process my own faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ has been strengthened.

About the Author

Jeffrey W. Robinson, PhD, is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice in Orem, Utah, specializing in the treatment of individuals struggling with homosexual problems or other compulsive sexual behaviors. His counseling often includes parents, spouses, and other family members of those struggling with sexual issues. Dr. Robinson received his PhD from Brigham Young University. His doctoral dissertation was an in-depth study of change in Latter-day Saint men who have successfully overcome homosexuality. He served for three years as the facilitator for the Provo affiliate of Evergreen International. In addition to being a frequent presenter at conferences, he has presented numerous workshops, firesides, and therapist training sessions in a variety of settings. Dr. Robinson serves as bishop of his ward in Orem, Utah.

CHAPTER 14

Sexual Addiction and Same-Sex Attraction

Todd Olson, LCSW

Sexual addictions occur across the spectrum of society and are troublesome for anyone who experiences them. They can be especially troublesome for people who experience same-sex attractions. One reason for this is that a person who experiences same-sex attraction already has feelings that much of society and many faith traditions view as taboo. Those with same-sex attractions may already experience feelings of shame and unworthiness, even without the presence of any addictive behaviors. If individuals who experience same-sex attraction do develop sexual addictions, they are often unable to distinguish between the powerful feelings associated with the addictive behavior and the feelings of same-sex attraction.¹ A second reason sexual addictions are particularly troublesome is that they can complicate the resolution of all other challenges in life, including the challenge of unwanted same-sex attractions. When sexual addictions are present, therefore, a critical first step in resolving same-sex attractions is the resolution of the addictive behaviors.

Sexual addiction has not always been recognized as a disorder. Until about forty years ago, it was generally assumed that the human body could get addicted only to mood-altering substances, ingestible items like drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. But in 1970,

scientists John Hughes and Hans Kosterlitz discovered that addiction was related to biochemical changes within the brain. These scientists targeted tiny amino acid molecules in the brain that are responsible for manufacturing potent, mood-altering chemicals. Known as endorphins, these molecules bear striking similarity to opiates. Hughes and Kosterlitz had discovered that the brain could produce its own opiates.² Because of this ability, a person can become addicted to mood-altering behaviors. In the last decade we have seen great progress in the treatment of sexual addiction and other compulsive disorders.

The emotional preoccupation and sexual acting-out experienced by many of those struggling with same-sex orientation meet the criteria for addiction. In fact, the majority of individuals who come to our clinic for help dealing with same-sex attraction also struggle with some type of sexual addiction or compulsion, including compulsive masturbation, Internet pornography, and habitual cruising behavior (seeking out anonymous sexual encounters).

What, exactly, is addiction? A good practical definition of addiction that we use at our clinic is this: "Addiction is the use of a substance or activity for the purpose of lessening pain or augmenting pleasure, by a person who has lost control over the rate, frequency, or duration of its use, and whose life has become progressively unmanageable as a result."

In more simple terms, if an individual cannot control when they start or stop a behavior and if the behavior causes problems for them and those close to them, they are addicted.

The brain contains billions of nerve cells known as neurons, which use electrical signals to communicate with each other and keep the body functioning. Special chemicals called neurotransmitters help these electrical signals move along the neuron pathways. There are many different types of neurotransmitters, including epinephrine (adrenaline), endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine.

Each neurotransmitter has different functions, and each causes different reactions within the body. Adrenaline, for example, stimulates heart activity and increases the body's metabolic rate,

causing responses such as a pounding heart and sweating. Endorphins are connected to relaxation and sedation, while dopamine leads to a “spaced out” fantasy experience.

By repeatedly activating these particular neurotransmitters in the brain through sexual stimuli or acting out sexually, a person creates memory patterns in the brain of pleasurable sensations, and, in turn, pathways are laid down in the brain conducive to the replication of the desired sensations. Once these memory patterns and pathways are laid down, the brain will seek out and lead a person to the rush of adrenaline; the calm, peaceful feeling of endorphins; the “otherworldly” escape of dopamine; or all of the above.

People generally fall into three types of addiction, categorized by the neurotransmitters associated with each type:

- *Arousal.* Individuals who lean toward arousal dislike boredom and crave the rush of adrenaline that accompanies certain activities. Sex is often used as power by them, and there is usually a strong need for control. Chatting online with a potential contact, cruising and looking for contacts, or searching for pornography on the Internet can be examples of the arousal style.
- *Satiation.* This group seeks calm and sedation, and their goal is to reduce the discomfort stemming from either external events or internal conflict. Endorphins supply the neurotransmitter boost for this type. The desired effect is the relaxed, secure feeling found, for example, after a good meal, an alcoholic beverage, or a sexual release. This group will often use masturbation to help them get to sleep.
- *Fantasy.* The neurotransmitters dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin are associated with fantasy-seeker addicts, who are characterized by preoccupation with fantasies and dreams, compulsive artistic expression, or various forms of mystical experience.

Those who are addicted to drugs and alcohol typically fall into one of the three styles as their “drug” of choice, although there are

some who favor multiple styles of addictive behavior. In contrast, people with sex addictions typically take on different styles at different stages of the addiction cycle. Many different brain chemicals can be involved because all three styles are used. This explains why sex addictions can be so powerful and why it takes such a concentrated effort to overcome them.

We were meant to feel the joy and pleasure that these different neurotransmitters provide. They are God given. Addiction, however, involves the misuse of these neurotransmitters, with impossible attempts to maintain them at an unrealistic level.

The Addiction Cycle

The addiction cycle progresses through different stages and builds on itself over time.

- *Preoccupation.* This is the trance or mood that people experience when they are in search for the “fix.” During this stage the chemical change is starting to take place in the brain. A person can stay in this stage for days at a time or go through it many times during a day.
- *Ritualization.* After time, addicts usually develop certain routines and behaviors that seem like habits or rituals. These behaviors intensify the preoccupation. Sometimes it is disturbing to the addicts when these routines are broken. The routines can be very subtle or very sophisticated. Most people will not even realize they have rituals related to their acting-out behavior until they are educated about them.
- *Acting Out.* The third stage of the addiction cycle is the acting-out stage, which is the end goal of the preoccupation. After the preoccupation and ritualization, there comes a point when addicts experience internal conflict (especially if they are trying to quit acting out), in which they may say to themselves, “I really shouldn’t be doing this. I don’t want to, but I can’t help it, so here I go anyway.” Then they act out and continue with the cycle.

- *Pain/Despair.* The fourth stage of the addiction cycle is full of pain and despair. The addicts feel bad about what they have done again, and feelings of hopelessness can start to creep into their thoughts. It is important to remember at this point what addiction is used for. Recall that our definition of addiction is “the use of an activity for the purpose of lessening pain.” Thus, the pain of the last stage of the addiction cycle can make the brain want to alleviate the pain by getting right back into the cycle again. Also recall that the repeated activation of pleasure-inducing neurotransmitters have laid down pathways in the brain that seek out the sensations that alleviate the pain.

When people begin to develop an addiction, they usually experience a very powerful or intense feeling associated with the new-found activities (masturbation, cruising, etc.). They go through the stages of the addiction cycle, but when they reach the fourth stage (pain and despair), they experience it as more of a wish or a hope for a better experience. They may become “preoccupied” with a “better” experience next time, and the cycle repeats itself.

Looking at pornography and chatting on the Internet are two ways that those struggling with same-sex attraction can act out. An added danger of the Internet is that it is so expansive and unending that people can be on the hunt for a “better” experience continually. The Internet will keep them captivated until their life becomes progressively unmanageable. This, in turn, triggers the compulsion to alleviate pain by beginning the cycle again.

Theories as to the causes and the most viable treatments of sexual addiction are varied. But those who study addictions generally agree on one concept: low self-worth is a common factor in all forms of addiction. To better understand the role of self-worth, consider the following four common core beliefs of addicts and how those beliefs develop. Individuals’ core beliefs determine how they establish the most important tasks in their life, which in turn determines how they make choices. To the addict, these beliefs are shame-based, fueling the fire of low self-worth.

The Core Beliefs of an Addict

Individuals' core belief systems usually originate from experiences and pivotal events in their family of origin, religious upbringing, neighborhood, elementary school, and other life experiences. If people have developed faulty negative beliefs about themselves, and hence, low self-worth, such beliefs may have arisen from early childhood experiences, possibly in a dysfunctional family, or those individuals may have had a perfectly acceptable childhood but developed a faulty belief system as adults through unhealthy relationships or sexual acting out. While it may be insightful to understand the origins of one's faulty beliefs, it is much more important to be willing to face them and take the steps necessary to start down the path of recovery.

Most sexual addicts experiencing same-sex attraction have woven a complex set of faulty beliefs around the following four essential anchor points of human behavior.

- *Self-Image.* Most addicts see themselves as bad or unworthy. When they act out in a sexually inappropriate way and are unable to stop or control it, they feel guilt and shame, which they interpret as a confirmation of their faulty belief that they have little or no self-worth. They may spend an inordinate amount of time maintaining their image and overcompensating for their perceived deficiencies. Many sex addicts are perfectionists who play the exhausting game of overachievement, with the debilitating fear that they will be found out.

Those who struggle with addiction allow their addictive behaviors and feelings to define them. They do not allow all of the other positive traits of their life to influence their perceptions of self-worth. The sex addiction overrides it all. The addicts feel "bad and unworthy" to the core.

- *Relationships.* A faulty belief system often contributes to the lack of true emotional intimacy in the sexual addict's relationships. In fact, sexual addiction is often seen as an intimacy disorder—an inability to love or be loved. Since most addicts feel unlovable, they believe that no one could

ever love them as they really are so they must hide their real self. These secrets become the lifeblood of addiction. The fear of being rejected by those closest to them can be so strong that sex addicts retreat into their own private world. When same-sex attraction is also present, addicts will generally also become more secretive about the same-sex attractions, making resolution of both problems seem even more hopeless. Addicts feel that “no one would love or accept me as I am.”

- *Needs.* As a rule, the addict feels that no one else can be depended on, and it is easier and safer not to rely on anyone else. Sex addicts commonly feel that they can heal themselves, and that they do not need a therapist. In their minds, they are certain that they can either handle the addiction on their own, or they think they are so unique that no one could really understand their situation. Some addicts often stop believing that God can help them. Many have tried to ask God to take their feelings away, and they make resolutions and promises to themselves and God, but the pressure continues until they give in to the compulsion. Often, then, a belief that not even God can help them—or that they have let God down and He won’t help them—starts to develop. In summary, the addict feels that “my needs will never get met if I have to rely on others,” including God.
- *Sexuality.* Addicts often confuse sex with love. Those struggling with same-sex attraction will believe that if they connect to the right man or woman they will be made whole. It becomes a most important search. The addict feels that “life without sex is impossible” or terrifying, so the addict must keep access to sex. A sex addict’s life becomes unmanageable when sex is more important than anything, including family, friends, or job.

These four core beliefs keep building on themselves and are reinforced by each other. The internal dialogue of an addict may sound something like this: “I feel bad and unworthy about what I have

done or how I feel. No one would accept me; therefore, I will not tell anyone, which means I am a liar and liars are bad people. I will just stop the behavior and become a better person. I will do this on my own. But the pressure builds inside until something has to give. I have to act out to get the release I need. I have not been able to stop. I don't think I will ever live without this, which makes me feel flawed and defective, and so I will just keep this to myself." This internal dialogue is not uncommon for those struggling with sexual addiction.

In the treatment of sexual addiction, these core beliefs must eventually become the focus of treatment. If the core beliefs do not heal, there will be no lasting recovery. The first two core beliefs are very shame based. And since shame drives addiction, we need to treat the shame.

Treatment

Because addiction is a cover-up or a mask, and a way to cope, the acting-out behaviors of the addiction are only the visible manifestation of the problem. The development of the addiction can be very subtle for some, while for others it is very strong and obvious. Because addiction is used to augment pleasure and to deaden pain, it is very important to treat addiction issues in the correct order. The development of shame in the addict's life is usually very traumatizing and can be a painful process to discuss in therapy. Therapists may in fact inadvertently contribute to the addictive cycle by attempting to continually bring the client back to these painful "core issues" without first aggressively addressing the client's addictive world, head on, in the beginning phases of therapy. In other words, addressing the issues below the tip of the "iceberg" too soon, before the addictive behaviors are arrested, can actually make the problem worse because the client will turn to the addiction to alleviate the pain brought up by the core issues.

The genesis of addictive behavior springs from clients' early attempts to cope with life challenges and trauma. Clients use the sexual behaviors as an escape from those difficulties or as a form

of self-nurturing. Therefore, if the deeper psychological issues and trauma are addressed prematurely, before the clients have established healthy coping strategies to replace the addictive behaviors, the result is usually an inflammation to the trauma and an increased drive to return to the learned coping behaviors of the addiction. The acting-out behaviors may continue and even increase. Clients may associate therapy or participation in support groups with making their behavior worse and then drop out of treatment, which would confirm their faulty core beliefs. Their internal dialogue continues as it has throughout their life: “I am bad and unworthy; therapy and groups don’t work; they really don’t understand me; I am on my own to solve this; there is no hope; and I will just go do my best.”

Just the process of “opening up” in therapy or just sitting in a room with a group of other men or women can dredge up all kinds of internal trauma—feelings of anger, inadequacy and fear—and can therefore trigger learned, coping, addictive behaviors. It is not uncommon for addicts to stop by the park or other cruising haunts on their way home from a support group or therapy session. For a new client, sometimes just the thought of going in for therapy will escalate the acting-out behaviors.

For chemical addictions, effective treatment cannot occur while someone is actively “using” the drug. The same is true with sexual addictions. Healing will not take place as long as the addict continues to act out the addictive behaviors.

The first step in the treatment process is *assessment*, to determine to what degree the client is involved in addictive behaviors. If the client is addicted, the following order of treatment is recommended:

1. Stop the addiction (learn strategies and tools to establish sobriety).
2. Develop a network of support
3. Build self-worth.
4. Do trauma work.
5. Engage in couples therapy.

1. *Stop the Addiction.* Treatment for addiction, not same-sex attraction, becomes the focus. The first step in this process is to help the client acknowledge and define the addiction, understand the nature of the addiction, and learn recovery techniques to achieve a solid sobriety. The goal is to establish a substantial period of sobriety wherein the client gains experience and confidence in his ability to create an addiction-free lifestyle. This sets the stage for the client to deal with the deeper therapeutic work (the other 70 percent of the iceberg). Once sobriety is achieved, the client gains greater clarity of thought and has developed strategies to better cope when difficult emotional issues surface.

Most clients, when presented with this approach, will acknowledge the unmanageability of their addictions and the need to address them. Even those who are confused and undecided as to whether or not to live a homosexual lifestyle come to realize that that decision is best delayed until after they have gained clarity of thought created by their recovery and freedom from addictive behaviors.

2. *Develop a Network of Support.* Stopping the addiction is not an easy task; it takes hard work and concentrated effort. Isolation is part of the lifestyle of someone struggling with sexual addiction. Isolation and secrets allow the addictive patterns to continue. Because of faulty core beliefs, developing a network of support is difficult to do for the addict. In treatment, the addict is encouraged to come out of hiding by telling a trusted friend, clergyman, or a licensed therapist, or by joining a support group. For many, this is the most significant part of early recovery because it is where hope is kindled.

Since addiction is driven by shame, it is generally shame that keeps addicts from letting others know about their secret lives. But ironically, attending a support group reduces shame because addicts will find freedom and a sense of positive identity through meeting with others who are struggling with the same issues. Support groups give addicts an opportunity to become acquainted with others who have walked a similar path and are ready to reach back and help. The benefit of a support group is not only about

receiving hope, positive feedback, and energy from others, but it is also about giving it back.

3. *Build Self-worth.* Recovery is not only about being sober; it is also about changing the core beliefs. Recovery from an addiction is about a lifestyle change, a new way to think about one's self and about life. Being around supportive people, learning to use solid affirmations, and correcting irrational thoughts and patterns becomes part of the new way of life for the recovering addict. Becoming active with hobbies, nurturing self-care behaviors, and connecting with others in recovery are just a few ways self-worth can be restored.

4. *Do Trauma Work.* When the addiction is arrested and the client has a solid recovery program in place, it is then time to do the trauma work.

We stress the importance of lifestyle change, with the understanding that in order to accomplish a lifestyle change addicts must address their core beliefs regarding self-esteem, relationships, emotional needs, and sexual behavior. Without a change in core beliefs, there really is no true recovery. A person can stop the behaviors for a time, but unless the faulty beliefs change, the compulsive behaviors will continue and/or new compulsive behaviors will emerge. In other words, it is important to address both the toxic shame and the origin of the shame.

Therapy in this stage of treatment focuses on the underlying trauma, continued lifestyle changes, and addressing the faulty core beliefs. One way to address the belief system is to bring to light the causes of these beliefs. Those treating addiction realize that where there is addiction, the individual most likely has suffered some sort of trauma in his childhood or background. And those treating childhood trauma realize that where there is childhood trauma, the client has usually developed compulsive behaviors to help him survive into adulthood. By the time the client reaches this stage of treatment, the compulsive behaviors have been addressed and arrested to the point that childhood trauma can be addressed.

As we noted earlier, the most appropriate time to work on the root causes of addiction is after good sobriety has been established,

which is why trauma work is one of the last steps in the order of treatment. When you are working on stopping the addiction (or any compulsive behavior), identifying the cause is not important. After a person is successful in stopping the acting-out behavior and developing healthy coping strategies, then it is time to start on the final phase of treatment, where underlying trauma issues are addressed and shame-based beliefs are corrected.

5. *Engage in Couples Therapy.* For married addicts, couples therapy should probably be the last stage in the order of treatment. The therapist might meet with the couple regularly in the beginning, not to do couples therapy, but instead to act as a case manager and deal with any damage-control issues that may surface. When marriage issues arise at that point, addicts tend to focus on the marriage and get sidetracked from focusing on their own recovery. It becomes a convenient way to avoid dealing with their addiction. When the addiction is arrested and the trauma work is done, the marriage issues usually become a pleasant part of the treatment protocol.

Conclusion

Sex addicts often lack any hope of recovery. In resolving unwanted same-sex attractions, it is important to first determine whether addictive behaviors are also present. If so, the addictive behaviors must be addressed before substantial progress can be made in resolving same-sex attractions. Successful treatment of sexual addictions includes helping patients understand the nature of their addiction and its connection to their core beliefs. As they begin to change their core beliefs about themselves, they also gain hope, without which no healing occurs. By resolving the addictive behaviors, they greatly facilitate the healing process and their lives are blessed.

About the Author

Todd Olson, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker specializing in the treatment of sexual addiction, sexual anorexia, codependency, and

trauma survival. He has a master's degree in social work and is a CSAT (Certified Sexual Addiction Therapist). His private practice includes individuals, couples, and group therapy, and he is frequently called to lecture nationwide on codependency, relationships, and sexual addiction. In addition to his private practice, he has been an instructor of psychology on a college level. He is also the program director of LifeSTAR Network, which provides help for individuals and couples who are dealing with problems related to sexual addictions and compulsive behaviors. Starting his career out as a juvenile probation officer, Mr. Olson went on to found an adolescent drug and alcohol program offering three- to five-day wilderness trips and parenting classes for individuals, families, and groups. He is married and the father of five children. His favorite pastimes include supporting his kids in their sports activities and doing anything outdoors, especially training and riding his horses.

Notes

1. In this discussion we will often refer to the individual struggling with addictions as "he." The English language provides no grammatically acceptable alternative that is not at the same time quite awkward and intrusive. However, the use of "he" is not to suggest that only men struggle with addictions or that only men can be benefited from the concepts in this chapter.
2. For more information, see Harvey Milkman and Stanley Sunderwirth, *Craving for Ecstasy: How Our Passions Become Addictions and What We Can Do about Them* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

CHAPTER 15

The Questions of Traditional Marriage, Dating, and Intimacy for Those Dealing with Same-Sex Attraction

Dorothy Maryon, LPC, and Daniel D. Gray, LCSW

In addition to providing the appropriate means by which children are brought into this world, marriage also provides for each partner an opportunity for maturity and growth, both spiritual and emotional. A healthy marriage begins in the dating and courtship phase of the relationship. At that point, love and trust are nurtured, setting the stage for a sense of safety and well-being that will sustain the couple throughout life's challenges. In both courtship and marriage, people with same-sex attraction and their fiancés or spouses will need to address issues specific to that challenge. If the couple has nurtured love and trust, however, they are more likely to navigate those issues successfully.

This chapter is primarily for individuals dealing with same-sex attraction who are looking at the possibility of marriage, for those considering a relationship with someone who experiences same-sex attraction, and for dating and married couples in which one partner experiences the attractions.

Marriage Is Not a "Cure"

In dealing with issues of same-sex attraction and/or sexual addiction, one must first understand that marriage will not fix or resolve

those feelings. Same-sex attraction or sexual addiction ideally should be addressed before marriage and as separate issues. Some individuals with same-sex attraction feel an attraction to the opposite sex sufficient that they are able to commit to and be satisfied within a heterosexual relationship. However, a heterosexual relationship will not diminish same-sex attraction for either a man or a woman with same-sex attraction. Jim addressed this by stating, “This is very important. No matter how attracted you are to your wife or girlfriend, that in and of itself is not going to compensate or cure any same-sex feelings you may have.”¹

Likewise, marriage does not cure sexual addiction, and in many cases it can exacerbate the addiction. Compulsive sexual behavior can distract from and distort any efforts to create a meaningful relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Getting addiction under control before considering marriage is an important first step in building a marriage of trust and safety.

Overcoming Fear of Intimacy

The basic fear of heterosexual intimacy, emotional as well as physical, is a major hurdle to overcome when considering marriage. It is natural for an individual to have fear in an area where he or she has little experience, and anxiety around one’s sexuality tends to intensify and exaggerate this fear. But while the sexual side of intimacy may appear to be an overriding factor, it is just one aspect of a serious intimate relationship.

In the dating context, it may be helpful for the individual who experiences same-sex attraction to mentally set the fear of sexual intimacy aside and focus instead on other parts of a possible relationship. It can be helpful to approach dating with a playful and light attitude; otherwise, dating may feel like a burden. For example, dating can be viewed as an experiment, where the individual is trying different ingredients to find the right mix. Developing a healthy relationship will take time, and rushing things can make matters worse. Patience with one’s self and with others will be critical. If the couple reaches a level of trust and confidence in each

other, the individual with same-sex attraction will likely feel more at ease in assertively engaging with his or her companion and initiating physical contact.

Trevor summarized his experience this way:

Sarah and I dated for three years on and off. I knew that I was emotionally connected to Sarah, and I loved her. We had a bond, but the physical aspect didn't come in for quite some time. It scared me. I thought while I dated different girls that I would find the girl that would fix me. I just had to find the woman I thought was most beautiful and finally would feel an attraction for her. But that turned out to be the wrong answer (and a waste of money). The turning point for Sarah and me was when I realized that there was just a spark—one little bit of attraction in things Sarah would do or say. There was just this little bit of 'I love her,' and that's all it took. Every fire has to start somewhere.

Disclosure in Dating

For the person with same-sex attraction issues, deciding when to disclose that fact to his or her companion is an important consideration. The couple's relationship should be mature enough that each individual feels comfortable openly discussing his or her opinions. Each person must be sure that he or she can be heard and judged fairly. On the other hand, it is important not to delay and wait for "just the right moment" to disclose the issue—fear should not govern the timing of disclosure.

Others who have gone through this experience can be very helpful as one prepares to make this disclosure to one's partner. Talking with an experienced therapist can also be helpful.

A potential marriage partner has a right to know about issues of same-sex attraction, as well as have an opportunity to understand and address these issues prior to the marriage. Partners who are aware of the same-sex attraction before marriage are able to

build on a strong foundation of trust and respect. Partners who find out after they are married that their spouse experiences same-sex attraction often must work through feelings of betrayal, anger, and loss of trust.

If there has been prior sexual activity outside of the relationship, it is imperative that the risk of disease be ruled out. If disease exists, it should be disclosed and necessary precautions taken to protect the other partner. If the couple has engaged in sexual activity, both should be tested for disease.

Sometimes the individual who experiences same-sex attraction is tempted to minimize or omit important facts about his or her condition when disclosing, usually out of fear of rejection, being judged, or breach of confidentiality. Minimizing, omitting, or choosing not to disclose lays a foundation of secrecy and deceit in a marriage. That choice often leads to serious marital problems down the road, problems which may eventually destroy the marriage. Jim addressed the issue of disclosure:

Should you tell? Of course you should tell, but I wanted to marry someone that I knew would be supportive. Some people have said they're afraid that if they tell her, she'll run away. But for me I figured this would be something with me for a long time, maybe my whole life. So I needed to tell her, because I wanted to make sure she was someone who was going to be supportive and it was really that that helped me take the plunge into marriage.

The individual disclosing his or her same-sex attraction should be prepared to answer questions and offer resources to the potential partner. Disclosure should be a starting point for many open and frequent discussions. Disclosure is not a one-time experience. Jim stated:

You need to make sure she has someone to talk to because she is going to need some support—you need to plan that. I remember after I told her it was a huge relief. It was a huge weight off my shoulders. I finally got that out of the way. And that's when she started freaking out.

One must be prepared for all sorts of emotional responses. Partners need accurate information, support, and time. In relation to disclosure, Alice, Jim's wife, said:

Send your partner home with some information. Jim was nice enough to give me two books, and I sat up all night reading. If I had not had that I would have been going crazy because I would have been thinking the worst things, but instead I got to constructively read. So, if you are going to tell somebody, please have some resources to give them when you tell them.

Challenges to Expect in Marriage

Marital issues for a couple dealing with same-sex attraction are in many ways no different from those in other marriages. Couples have many adjustments to make in this new experience. If there are communication problems or issues with in-laws, money, or sex, the couple who is also dealing with the same-sex attraction issue should not assume their other problems are caused by the same-sex attractions.

However, the marriage may not feel like the typical marriage, either. The process of dating and considering marriage can hold disappointments for both partners. A woman who expects to be pursued and receive attention in terms of physical attraction may be disappointed when her partner doesn't seem as interested in physical affection. Men with same-sex attraction can be disappointed when the attraction is not strong, even when they are very interested in a woman. As Jim pointed out, "There are a lot of great people out there that you're not going to want to marry. And that's okay—you only have to find one."

Many couples find in their marriage that they need to make adjustments to their expectations. The attraction and intimacy issues may need to be balanced or offset by strong relationships and good communication. Couples should look for the many qualities in their spouse, other than intimacy, that are deeply attractive and

that they can build the relationship upon. In looking at marriage over many years, Trevor mentioned the difference in when intimacy is established and how that timing can be an advantage:

I think that typically we are kind of different. Heterosexual relationships begin with this giant sexual attraction that starts to fade away, and then they have to build the friendship and the emotional connection and learn to rely on each other. I feel that our relationships [where one partner feels same-sex attractions] are the opposite. All I experienced initially was just a spark, and I'd felt that spark. It was minimal, but that was enough for me to know that there was something there and I could work with that. And I feel my sexual attraction towards my wife growing the longer we're married.

Haylee, who experienced same-sex attraction, described a similar experience:

I remember sitting down and thinking, could I spend my life with a man, and if I could, who would I want it to be? I definitely would want it to be my best friend. I couldn't imagine a day going by without Marc in it. So I thought, Okay, that's a start. I have been married for twenty-one years, and they've been really wonderful years. I have loved being married to this man. He's still my best friend. We have so much fun together, and I can't imagine life without him. So, there are a lot of ins and outs of intimacy. No matter how difficult the physical part of my marriage was, I could still remember—this is my eternal partner and I love him and want to be with him.

Partners typically need to find ways to make their marriage work without expecting their relationship to be just like the stereotypes they grew up with. Jim said, "When you start feeling like you are doing things because you have to, because you have to fit some mold, because you have to conform to some societal expectation, that's the wrong way to go down, and it's going to be tiring."

Each individual must find the things that bring the couple together, and each one needs to communicate well to maintain all aspects of a relationship. Marc said of his marriage:

The intimacy itself isn't enough. There is another aspect that I think is extremely important and that is the desire and feeling that you want to be with that person forever. If you share those feelings and make that the center of your relationship, that will help the intimacy issues work themselves out.

As a couple dealing with same-sex attraction issues work together on their marriage, each person must educate himself or herself and work on healthy identities that both partners are comfortable with. Men should learn about the female sexual response, and both partners should communicate needs and frustrations. If both partners can identify with and respect each other's roles in the marriage, over time those roles can develop into a mutually satisfying marriage.

Getting Help with Courtship and Marriage

For an individual struggling with same-sex attraction, the issue typically leads to feelings of isolation and a sense of fear that others will be judgmental. Many men and women with same-sex attraction have grown up feeling that they must hide their true selves and have literally never spoken to anyone about their deepest fears and concerns. As they work toward preparing for marriage, support from trusted friends, mentors, counselors, and priesthood leaders can be critical. Support after marriage is also needed.

A close friend who can listen and provide support can help, but it may be more useful to find a mentor—someone who has worked through many of these same struggles, someone who can listen without judging, and can offer advice or simply empathize. Trevor's advice is that "having a mentor, having somebody you can talk to very frankly and very honestly can make a world of difference for us. You can feel validated in your fears and at the same time you can get help and guidance to move past them, to see past

your fears.” As a person works toward marriage and disclosure to a partner, it will be helpful for the partner to meet the mentor and have time to talk with him or her as well. This can help build trust in the relationship.

A professional counselor who has experience working in same-sex attraction issues is an important resource for learning and progressing. A therapist can help the individual to learn about himself or herself, can provide education about the realities of marriage, and can give a context for the challenges facing the individual and couple. Therapists can coach the individual along as he or she makes decisions and plans for the future.

Priesthood leaders can also be a valuable resource. Not all priesthood leaders have been educated on issues specific to same-sex attraction, and they may not have the same level of basic understanding as a mentor or counselor. However, because a priesthood leader can assist with spiritual growth and with understanding fundamental, guiding gospel principles, he should be a part of the individual’s and couple’s support team. Of course, issues related to worthiness need to be resolved with the appropriate leader.

Finally, both partners should cultivate healthy relationships with friends of their respective gender. Friendships outside of marriage and relationships with other couples are an important source of support.

Ramifications for Your Family

If one partner in a marriage experiences same-sex attraction but has not disclosed it, it is important to obtain support and coaching from a mentor or therapist in making the disclosure. The disclosure can be traumatic and disorienting for the other spouse as his or her initial impression will be that the basics of the marriage relationship have suddenly changed very dramatically. The spouse to whom disclosure is made will need accurate information, support, and time to react and understand the issues. As described above, it is very helpful to have friends and mentors talk to the spouse and provide printed information. Time with a counselor will help

the spouse understand the new information and deal with the issues involved.

If the couple has children, it may or may not be appropriate to disclose to them. Depending on the spouse's reaction to the disclosure and the age and maturity of the children, the parents may determine that it is best not to say anything to them or to wait until a more appropriate time. Children should generally not be burdened with an imposed sense of obligation to provide emotional support to a parent experiencing trauma. If disclosure is made to children, which sometimes cannot be helped, the children may also need professional counseling to deal with their own emotional trauma. In some situations, children will know that something is going on and they will need information. For example, Marc and Haylee have disclosed to their children: "We have many friends now that deal with SSA, and our kids have gotten to know them and love them. They have an understanding now. And it's helped us with our children to be aware of certain things, of their needs and what we should be doing and how we can help them." If disclosure is made to the children, be watchful to identify changes in their emotional and behavioral responses. They may experience emotional trauma, even on a subconscious level. Listen carefully to their feelings and help them feel the unified love of two committed parents.

About the Authors

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Notes

1. The supportive quotes in this chapter come from a panel discussion presented at the Evergreen International Conference in September 2007. The panel's topic was "Developing a Healthy Intimate Relationship with the Opposite Sex." The entire transcript of the panel discussion is available from the authors. The names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. The quotes have received minor editing for grammar and flow.

CHAPTER 16

Helping Children and Adolescents Develop Healthy Sexual Identities

Douglas A. Abbott, PhD

Children face tremendous pressure and enticements to participate in premarital sexual behaviors. Too often peers, schools, the media (in all its varieties), and role models (such as movie stars, athletes, singers, and even politicians) promote promiscuity by word or example. The worldly message is clear: premarital sex is normal, healthy, and morally acceptable. For many Christians, however, premarital sex is unacceptable. The Latter-day Saint's proclamation on the family is equally clear: "We . . . declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."¹ Thus, sex is appropriate (healthy, purposeful, and uplifting) only in a legal, heterosexual marriage.

In the recent past, most parents worried primarily about children engaging in premarital heterosexual behaviors, but today some parents must worry about children's participation in homosexual activities. Parents who encounter children's curiosity or involvement in homosexuality do so, in most cases, without accurate information and resources. This difficulty occurs because most academics, doctors, and mental health professionals believe and teach that homosexuality is normal, healthy, and morally acceptable.² Thus, if parents want to foster heterosexuality in their children, they have no support or guidance from such professionals.

There are, however, many in the Christian (and Muslim) community who do not accept homosexuality as a “normal and healthy” alternative to heterosexuality. They encourage premarital chastity and a traditional heterosexual orientation in children. President Boyd K. Packer asserts that the scriptures “plainly condemn” homosexual behavior; “those who ‘dishonour their own bodies between themselves . . . ; men with men working that which is unseemly’ or ‘women [who] change the natural use into that which is against nature’ (Rom. 1:26).”³ This chapter will provide informational assistance to parents, ministers, youth leaders, and counselors on how to encourage heterosexuality in children.

I am a developmental psychologist and an active Christian. I have studied the scientific research regarding homosexuality for several years. In this position paper, I combine this secular information with my Christian beliefs and values. Social scientists, however, will criticize my effort, for they believe religion and science cannot be mixed. I do, however, assert my right to make such a decision and will set forth my assumptions.

I believe that heterosexuality is the divine design for human sexual expression. Heterosexuality is part of our spiritual and genetic makeup. The environment can shape its expression and can aid or hinder its development, but heterosexuality is basically innate and develops quite naturally on its own in most cases. Homosexual behavior is not determined absolutely by genes and hormones, though a child may inherit some personality traits toward gender-nonconforming behaviors. It is these behaviors—effeminate behaviors in a boy or too much tomboyishness in a girl—that may, in certain family and social environments, put a child at greater risk for homosexual behavior.

But whatever these predispositions may be, they do not determine one’s sexual orientation. Heterosexuality is the automatic, default program for humans unless something in the child’s environment interferes with its expression. Common environmental factors are unhealthy parent-child bonding, sexual abuse, sexual seduction, or extensive exposure to immoral and promiscuous media and peers.

Though homosexual behavior probably results from a complex interaction of biology and environment, it is the environment and moral agency that determines sexual orientation. Dr. A. Dean Byrd, an LDS psychologist, has studied the research for years and has counseled people who have come out of homosexuality.⁴ He states unequivocally, “Homosexuality is not innate and unchangeable. Research has not proved that homosexuality is genetic.”⁵ Elder Dallin H. Oaks describes how homosexual feelings may be difficult to explain but can be controlled by agency:

Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of nature and nurture. All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but . . . we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings . . . to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior.⁶

The LDS Proclamation on the Family inspired by prophets of God asserts that humans are born with gender: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual . . . identity and purpose.”⁷ Thus, God would not predetermine any individual to be homosexual because that behavior stands in opposition to God’s divine plan for heterosexual family life. God would not use immutable biological processes to doom (or predestine) any individual to a life of homosexuality since homosexuality is not a Godly outcome. “God wouldn’t create us with homosexual thoughts and desires, and then turn around and condemn us for having them! That’s not within the character of a just God,” explains Jeanette Howard in her book *Out of Egypt: One Woman’s Journey out of Lesbianism*.⁸ President James E. Faust declared:

There is some widely accepted theory extant that homosexuality is inherited. How can this be? No scientific

evidence demonstrates absolutely that this is so. Besides, if it were so, it would frustrate the whole plan of mortal happiness. . . . The false belief of inborn homosexual orientation denies to repentant souls the opportunity to change and will ultimately lead to discouragement, disappointment, and despair.⁹

My belief that heterosexuality is the intended form of sexuality is a matter of faith and science. My opinion is grounded in reason and inspiration and not on bigotry or intolerance. I have no antagonism or hostility towards those who practice or promote homosexual behavior. Gays and lesbians should not be harassed or persecuted in any way in public or in private. Yet we can calmly and quietly promote heterosexuality in our homes and churches without making disparaging statements about homosexuals.

There are very few resources to help parents encourage heterosexuality in their children, though there are notable exceptions such as the *Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality* by Joseph and Linda Nicolosi. Homosexual behavior is not considered a problem by most doctors and mental health professionals, so there is no research or treatment plans on how to prevent it. And research on prevention of homosexuality would be unethical and impossible anyway. To do so, a scientist would need a large group of young children that can be randomly assigned to one of two groups. Children in group 1 would be exposed to factors that might promote homosexuality (e.g., sexual abuse, incompetent parenting, promiscuous media), and the children in group 2 would be exposed to factors that encourage heterosexuality (e.g., a functional marriage or religious education). Then in ten years the scientist would evaluate the sexual orientation of all the children. As you can see, such harmful research cannot be done and will never be done.

However, there is some information that can be used to glean ideas about how to encourage heterosexuality. There are three resources. One is from the limited scientific research on ex-gays.¹⁰ Another is from the personal stories or autobiographies

of those who have purposefully quit homosexuality.¹¹ A third source is articles and books from the relatively few psychologists, family therapists, and ministers who have helped people come out of homosexuality.¹²

The experience of ex-gays gives insights into what may have contributed to a homosexual outcome and how to prevent it. For example, many but not all gay men report an unhealthy and traumatic relationship with their fathers.¹³ Thus, in the converse, if fathers maintain a healthy, supportive, and caring relationship with their sons, heterosexuality will likely emerge.

Researchers have found that many lesbians, but not all, were sexually molested in childhood or early adolescence. The abused girls grew up fearful of or hateful of men and turned to women for comfort and intimacy.¹⁴ Thus, in the converse, girls who do not suffer sexual molestation and have loving and nurturing fathers are much more likely to grow up with a heterosexual preference.

My suggestions for encouraging heterosexuality, therefore, are primarily gleaned from the personal accounts of ex-gays and the therapists who have worked with them. Also, some of my ideas come from my own insights and intuition and from the small, quiet voice of God's Spirit, which can whisper truth and light on any issue or topic.

Readers should be cautioned that my recommendations are not fool-proof; *following my suggestions may only reduce the likelihood of a homosexual outcome, not completely prevent it*. Second, most of the suggestions are for parents, but this does not imply that parents are primarily responsible for their children's sexual orientation. Homosexual behavior is caused by a complex interaction of many forces, most of which are not well understood and many of which parents cannot control.

While parents can greatly influence the healthy gender identity of their children, it will always be true that some children will experience the challenge of same-sex attraction despite their parents' best efforts to help them. Parents cannot block every circumstance or outside influence that might affect a child and parents should not consider themselves "responsible" for their children's challenges nor for their children's reaction to the challenge.

A child's sense of connection to his or her mother and father will go further than any other factor in helping the child navigate the challenges of developing and acting on a sense of the worth and value of their gender and identity. A parent can cultivate this connection by developing and showing sincere interest in the child's personality, interests and accomplishments.

For example, parents cannot take away a person's moral agency, and I believe agency is a key factor in explaining homosexuality. In addition, parents cannot entirely limit the influence of peers and the media, both of which contribute to premarital sexual behavior and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, parents are not off the hook, and they must evaluate what they have done and what they can do to encourage heterosexuality in their children.

Nine Ways to Encourage Heterosexuality

1. Build healthy parent-child relationships

One psychological theory suggests that a cold, rejecting father, and an over involved and excessively sympathetic mother may predispose a male child to homosexual behavior.¹⁵ The opposite parent characteristics may prevent homosexuality. This has implications for both fathers and mothers.

Advice for fathers helping sons. Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, who has counseled hundreds of men out of homosexuality, asserts that boys need salient fathers: "'Salient' means two things: strong and also benevolent. [A child] needs to see you as confident, self-assured, and decisive. But he also needs to see you as supportive, sensitive, and caring."¹⁶ If fathers provide appropriate affection, attention, and support to sons, then sons will respect, emulate, and identify with fathers. Sons will develop a masculine gender identity. After working with hundreds of homosexuals, psychoanalyst Dr. Irving Bieber said he has never met "a male homosexual whose father openly loved and respected him."¹⁷ He earlier wrote that a constructive, warmly supportive father precludes the possibility of a homosexual son.¹⁸

Second, fathers may want to help sons become at least minimally proficient in one physical activity. This could include soccer, bowling, football, swimming, skateboarding, wrestling, karate, or Scouting. A boy does *not* need to be an athlete to develop a heterosexual identity, but it may be helpful if a boy displays some sports skills. Cruel peers may make fun of a boy who is uncoordinated and fearful of rough-and-tumble play. As Fitzgibbons points out, "In a sports oriented culture such as our own, if a young boy is unable to throw, catch, or kick a ball, he is likely to be excluded, isolated and ridiculed."¹⁹

A father may have to work harder with a less active, uncoordinated, or artistic son. Alan Medinger warns of this situation: "If a boy is born slight of build, poorly coordinated, and without the typical male right-brain visual-spatial specialization, then he is apt to do poorly in the activities that prompt affirmation [of his manhood] from men and other boys. If he is born with a passive rather than aggressive nature, the first experience of rejection may send him into withdrawal from the world of men rather than lead him to try harder."²⁰

Dads need not go overboard in sports and should not force a son into athletics, especially if the son lacks the talent or disposition. Sports are only one way (but a good way) for fathers to affirm manhood in their sons. Affirmation can also occur when a son cares for younger siblings, receives a Boy Scout award, or wins the school reading contest.

The sensitive boy is especially susceptible to the emotional feelings flowing within the family system. He is finely attuned to negative feelings and is easily hurt by shame, ridicule, or even mild rebuke. Criticism (e.g., "You need to grow up and be man!"), even well-intentioned, is taken to heart. The child's strong feelings may be evident, not in outward behavior, but in more subtle signs of moodiness that can range from quiet withdrawal to outbursts of destructive action. With a sensitive son, a father can make a determined effort to share feelings about what is going on in the family system. The father can help his son identify and manage both positive and negative emotional states.

With the sensitive son, look for ways to build up and reinforce the boy's masculinity. Include him in your activities and in your associations with other male role models. Do not leave him out or leave him behind even if he is somewhat hesitant to join in. When you tackle jobs like changing the car oil, mowing the lawn, fixing the toilet, shoveling the snow, or building the birdhouse, get your son involved. On a regular schedule, take your sensitive son on special "father-son" outings that you both enjoy such as a trip to a museum, a movie, a hike in the woods, rafting on a river, dinner at his favorite fast food joint, or soccer in the park. A sensitive son may be helped by the companionship of a pet, especially a male dog that can be a regular buddy and an affectionate friend.

A father should not worry if such a child occasionally displays gender-atypical activities such as cross-dressing, playing with dolls, or trying on mom's jewelry. This is normal if not carried to excess. The problem is not that the child has some feminine traits but that his masculine characteristics need bolstering.²¹ Thus, a father should not rebuff the shy, sensitive, musical, or artistic son. "Every boy," Nicolosi and Nicolosi advise, "has a deep longing to be held, to be loved by a father figure, to be mentored into the world of men, and to have his masculine nature affirmed."²²

Advice for fathers helping daughters. Many scholars believe a daughter's gender identity is greatly influenced by the presence of a warm, supportive, and affectionate father.²³ Fathers should love their daughters and show them appropriate physical affection. But any type of sexual abuse can be devastating and may misdirect the natural and normal development of a heterosexual orientation. Jeanette Howard, an ex-lesbian, suggests that "one of the father's main roles is to affirm his daughter in her femininity. . . . His opinion of his daughter provides affirmation or disapproval in a way that a mother cannot. . . . Dad can bring confidence into his daughter's sense of feminine identity."²⁴ If a daughter feels safe, secure, and protected by her father, then she can later transfer these feelings into adult heterosexual relationships.

Advice for mothers helping sons. Mothers should develop warm, affectionate, and nurturing relationships with sons. A boy's

closeness to his mother also fosters his masculinity. Mothers should give love and kindness but must not pamper or mollycoddle sons. They should remember that many homosexual men report mothers who were overprotective and too sympathetic. When a son is injured, frightened, or weak, it is the mother's job to find the balance between cuddling compassion and providing a tough, detached encouragement that will allow him to face his fears, pain, and discomfort.

With a son, a mother must learn to tolerate typical boy behaviors: running, jumping, fighting, and getting into things. Within limits, he should be allowed to get dirty and to roughhouse. These are natural proclivities for his gender. Of course, the mother must set limits and redirect destructive play, but boys play differently than girls and a mother may need to tolerate more aggressive attitudes and actions from sons. A mother might prefer the quiet demeanor and nondestructive play of a little daughter, but she needs to resist the thought and take joy in a son's energy and activity.

Mothers should not favor a son over his father, even if the son is more responsive and compassionate than the husband. If mothers do this, sons may identify with the mother (i.e., emulate and model after) and not bond with the father.²⁵ Joseph and Linda Nicolosi explain, "If a single mother has no emotionally secure relationship with a man, she may unconsciously seek to satisfy her emotional needs with her son, maintaining an unhealthy, overly intimate connection that may seemingly meet her own needs but that will not be in the best interest of her son."²⁶ Even if there are marital problems, a mother should not turn to a sympathetic son to meet her deep-seated intimacy needs.

Divorced or never-married women may have had bad experiences with men—men who were brutal, controlling, and unfeeling. In such a case, a mother must refrain from demeaning and disparaging all men ("men are so callous," "men are stupid," etc.). If a mother does this, she may undermine her son's masculinity. Moms, please note: single parenting, in and of itself, does not increase the risk of a son becoming homosexual. It has more to do with how the mother portrays men and how she fosters her son's masculinity.

In other families, the father may be physically present but psychologically absent; the father is detached and uninvolved. This presents an even bigger challenge for a mother. She must try to stay positive about men in general—and project that to her son—even when there is an incompetent and ineffectual father in the home. There is no quick and easy fix to such a situation. All a mother can do is to support her son's masculinity and let go of her anger and disappointment in her husband. This is not a great solution but may be the best that can be achieved.

Advice for mothers helping daughters. There is much less research on the development of homosexuality in girls than there is on boys. Thus, there is less information from which to glean practical advice on reducing the risk of homosexual behavior in daughters. Nevertheless, defensive detachment (i.e., rejection of and hostility to the mother) can occur with daughters as it does between fathers and sons. Anita Worthen and Bob Davies, who have counseled many women with homosexual attractions, found that “the lesbian daughter often senses something missing in her relationship with her mother. The little girl grows up without a true sense of nurturing. For a multitude of reasons, she and her mother don't make a strong emotional connection. So the daughter begins an unconscious search for a woman to nurture her.”²⁷

Worthen and Davies continue, “Many lesbians see their mothers as weak, ineffective and unaffirming [*sic*] of the daughter's femininity. . . . The mother's passive ‘peace-at-all-costs’ type of behavior can give the daughter wrong ideas about a wife's role in the home. The young girl thinks, *If that's what being a woman is all about, I don't want any part of it.*”²⁸ The implication of this finding is obvious: mothers must lovingly nurture their daughters as well as model femininity, psychological strength, and practical competence in daily life. If the mother is passive, withdrawn, or depressed, the daughter may not identify with her, and this will hamper the daughter's gender-identity development and may influence her sexual orientation.²⁹

A mother can also strengthen the heterosexual orientation of daughters by demonstrating a loving relationship with her

husband. Girls' sexual identity and their sexual preference are modeled after the parents' marital relationship. If the parents are comfortable and happy with their marriage and their masculine and feminine roles, then the daughter is more likely to develop a normal gender identity and heterosexual orientation.³⁰

2. Create a happy marriage

In general, a happy and healthy marriage has a salutary influence on the sexual orientation of children. A couple who shows love and respect in marriage presents a powerful example of traditional gender identification and heterosexuality. But this does not mean that husbands and wives must be completely traditional in their own lives. For example, the wife may be the athlete and a civil engineer while the father may be a musician who cannot throw a spiral pass. The spouses in this case display somewhat gender-atypical behaviors, but this is no cause for alarm. What makes the difference in the child's development of a heterosexual orientation is the fact that the parents love one another and are comfortable and confident in their respective feminine and masculine roles.³¹ If parents would live a normal and happy heterosexual married life, very few children would be attracted to homosexuality.³²

The impact of a dysfunctional marriage on a child's sexual preference is articulated by Howard:

How a child sees her parents relating has a lasting impact. If they fail to show affection and attention toward each other, the daughter soon picks up on their subliminal messages. If the mother is critical and disrespectful of her husband, the daughter may accept that as the normal and correct attitude to have toward all men. If the mother is downtrodden and weak, the girl might reject anything feminine as being 'second class' and not worth embracing. If the father is abusive to his wife, the little girl may soon learn not to trust men, and will possibly find ways to live without them. If the father leaves his pornography around the house, or leers at the women on television,

the child deduces that men ‘only want one thing,’ and she may detach herself from any emotionally intimate relationship with them.³³

Thus, it is the influence of a loving and affectionate married couple that will help insulate any child from the forces of promiscuity and from a desire to experiment with homosexual behavior. Parents should not underestimate the power of marital love in making a child more “sin resistant” and less vulnerable to a variety of sexual sins and temptations.³⁴

3. Encourage healthy same-sex friendships in childhood

Your child’s interaction with same-sex friends has a lot to do with sexual orientation. Peers are powerful socializing agents. When boys play with boys and girls play with girls, their peers reinforce traditional gender identity and gender roles. Boys bring out the boyish nature in boys, and girls elicit feminine thinking and behavior in other girls. At times and in certain places, it may be difficult to find appropriate playmates for your children. It may take time and effort to find a friend for your son or daughter, but the effort is worth it. Same-sex friends will strengthen a child’s gender identity and promote a heterosexual orientation.

As adolescence approaches, the focus naturally shifts to opposite-sex relationships, but this is good and natural. Group dating is probably the best method of mixed gender socialization, and it avoids the temptation and pressure of sexual intimacy. Nevertheless, same-sex friends are still valuable during the teenage years to promote the process of sexual identity development.

Caution: if there is concern about the sexual orientation of a teenager, early dating is not endorsed by this author. Teenage single dating and tacit approval of premarital sex is *not* a recommended strategy to ensure a teen’s heterosexuality! Untimely premarital sexual experience will not solve the problem of homosexuality but will only confuse matters. Inappropriate sexual experience encourages more improper sexual experimentation.

4. Prevent the sexualization of children

Popular media (music, television, DVDs, the Internet, and teen magazines) will attract and tempt any youth into premature sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.³⁵ American media saturate youth culture with sexual images, sounds, and feelings, portraying homosexuality and early sexual expression as attractive options. A dominant theme is the “sexualization” of American youth. To sexualize is to make a child seem sensual and sexy and ready and willing to engage in sexual behaviors. The culprits include Hollywood producers, movie stars, advertising agencies, fashion designers, magazine editors, rock musicians, and even some parents who permit their children to dress and act in sensual ways.

The obvious consequence of the sexualization of children is an increase in their sexual thoughts and desires. Half our adolescents have had sexual intercourse by the end of high school and another 25 percent have engaged in “non-coital” behaviors including oral sex, anal sex, nude fondling, and mutual masturbation. Yet youth are absolutely ill-equipped to deal with the personal and social consequences of premarital sex in any form. They lack adult-level forethought, judgment, and understanding of future consequences. Parents can do several things to reduce child sexualization.

Teach and model modesty in dress and fashion. Discourage or forbid early use of make-up, earrings, and other jewelry that can make a child appear older and sexier. Feminine dress should not expose the breasts, upper thighs, stomach, or buttocks. Sloppy, low-rider jeans are not appropriate for boys.

Restrict children’s viewing of TV, DVDs, and the Internet and even their listening to music CDs that promote sexual immorality. For example, the TV shows *Will and Grace* and *Two and a Half Men* are not cute comedies but model promiscuity and sexual irresponsibility that can change children’s thinking, emotions, and even behavior.

Expose a child to wholesome and appropriate music, movies, books, and TV early in life. If you do, the child is more likely to be offended by immoral portrayals and reject them when he or she does eventually experience them.

Do not permit early dating or any unchaperoned mixed-sex interaction. Group dating at age sixteen may be permissible, but single dating should not be allowed until age seventeen. If parents restrict opportunities for sexual interaction, there will be less of it. The popular youth culture of immorality and promiscuity is so potent that parents must defend against it. Parents cannot stand idly by and hope children will be unaffected by the juggernaut of media immorality.

5. Remediate sexual abuse

Children who have suffered sexual abuse should receive professional assessment and therapy. Sexual abuse derails the normal development of a heterosexual orientation.³⁶ A sexually abused child is more likely to experiment with early sexual behavior and is more likely to question his or her sexual orientation. Pick a therapist carefully. Interview the counselor before treatment begins and agree upon the goals of therapy. Find a religious or secular therapist who has similar Christian values and beliefs regarding the importance of heterosexuality. Dr. James Dobson, a Christian psychologist and founder of *Focus on the Family*, gave this warning:

Be very careful whom you consult, however. Getting the wrong advice at [an early] stage could be most unfortunate, solidifying the tendencies that are developing. . . . Most secular psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors would, I believe, take the wrong approach—telling your child that he is homosexual and needs to accept that fact.³⁷

6. Provide value-based sex education at home

Parents must provide accurate and timely sex education to their children over a period of many years. The problem is this: most parents do a poor job of sex education.³⁸ Parents are often afraid, confused, and uncertain about *when* to provide sex education and *what* to say. It should not be a topic of constant conversation, but one little talk when the child is eight or ten is not enough.

By the time a child is twelve or thirteen, parents should discuss the concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Parents should not mince words; they should tell the child what they believe and what the Lord expects regarding premarital sexual behavior of any kind. They should do so in a matter-of-fact way without strong emotion or preaching. They can say something like this: "Here is what the Lord expects of you. If you do this, you will find peace and happiness. If you disobey, sadness and unhappiness will be the end result. You will have temptations and choices in the future, but with the Lord's help you can choose the right!"

Adolescence is a time of confusion about many things. Teens question who they are and what they want to become. They test and try out various ways of thinking and acting. Teens ponder their possibilities. Fears and doubts about their sexual attractiveness and their sexual attractions are not uncommon. Some youth may be puzzled by their strong emotional bonds to same-sex friends, and some may experience momentary feelings of same-sex attraction. This is not unusual and is no time for parents to panic. Explain to the child that feelings of close friendship may seem sexual at times but are not. Dr. George Rekers comments, "By itself, deep caring for a person of the same sex is no indicator of homosexuality. Parents should not suspect their child is homosexual merely because of a close friendship with someone of the same sex. . . . Parents [can] teach their children the distinction between close emotional attachments and sexual relationships."³⁹

7. Discuss "sexual preference uncertainty"

This is my phrase and is not used by doctors or psychologists, who, in general, believe that one is born gay, straight, or bisexual. *Sexual preference uncertainty* occurs when an individual has concerns or questions about the object of his or her sexual desires but has made no firm, committed decision about what to do. The boy or girl is unsure whether he or she is sexually attracted to same-sex individuals, to opposite-sex persons, or to both.

Most mental health professionals consider any uncertainty as a sign of latent homosexuality or bisexuality.⁴⁰ Some well-intentioned

teachers and counselors may attempt to stay neutral and help a youth work through ambiguous feelings, but their underlying assumption is likely to be that the child is probably gay or lesbian.⁴¹ They are unlikely to consider that the youth is just a “confused heterosexual” in need of nonbiased, accurate information and moral guidance. This situation is alarming but reflects society’s widespread acceptance of premarital sex and homosexuality.

8. Explain moral agency to adolescents

Initiate pointed discussions with your teenage children on the role of agency in human sexual behavior. Explain what moral agency is and give examples of how youth (and adults) use their agency for positive or negative choices. For example, in traditional Christian, Muslim, and Jewish theology men and women are free to choose right behavior that conforms to God’s will or to choose evil. Something evil is innately hurtful to the individual and harmful to society. Obedience to God’s laws leads to inner peace and personal growth. Disobedience leads to remorse, unhappiness, and developmental regression.

Sexual urges are natural during adolescence, but premarital sexual behavior (heterosexual or homosexual) is not irresistible and inevitable. President Boyd K. Packer explains to Christian youth:

Normal [sexual] desires and attractions emerge in the teenage years; there is the temptation to experiment, to tamper with the sacred power of procreation. These desires can be intensified, even perverted, by pornography, improper music, or the encouragement from unworthy associations. What would have only been a more or less normal passing phase in establishing gender identity can become implanted and leave you confused, even disturbed. . . . [But] the gates of freedom, and the good or bad beyond, swing open or closed to the password *choice*. You are free to choose a path.⁴²

The path “may lead to despair, to disease and even to death,”⁴³ or the path may lead to hope, happiness, and life eternal. Thus, teens must understand they are moral agents, free to choose and manage their sexual thinking and behaviors. Teach them that no predisposing factor (biological or environmental) can override one’s freedom to make moral choices about sexual behavior or any other moral issue.

If a child seems confused or uncertain about sexual orientation, parents need not criticize, condemn, or shame the child. This approach will only backfire and inflame rebellion or lead to a child’s withdrawal and depression. Agency is not fostered by rejection, by censure, or by force. Read Dr. A. Dean Byrd’s article in the September 1999 *Ensign* entitled “When a Loved One Struggles with Same-Sex Attraction.”⁴⁴ He explains ten principles for providing loving support to a family member who has homosexual thoughts and feelings.

9. Parental fasting and prayer

For most Christians, Muslims, and Jews, fasting and prayer have real power. Things *can* happen, and people *can* change. The scriptures are replete with such examples. Jesus healed the man possessed by an evil spirit after the failure by his Apostles to do so. He exclaimed, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). In the Book of Mormon, the efficacy of Alma’s many prayers for his wayward and wicked son is demonstrated. Eventually a miracle happened. An angel appeared to Alma’s son and said:

Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith. (Mosiah 27:14)

Alma's son did repent and return to the Church and became a great force for good the rest of his long life.

The blessings and counsel of Church leaders can also be utilized both by parents and by the one who struggles with same-sex attraction. God's love and tender mercies, and his untiring patience when we repent, are true and amazing facts. Real stories of faith and repentance for homosexual behavior have been published in the *Ensign*: "My Battle with Same-Sex Attraction,"⁴⁵ and "Becoming Whole Again."⁴⁶ Such testimonies will strengthen the struggler and give hope to parents.

Summary and Conclusion

Heterosexuality usually develops naturally on its own, without specific direction or guidance from parents, but in today's promiscuous society there is cause for concern. A few children may need extra help to guide them into heterosexuality. The critical components that will strengthen a child's heterosexual preference are (1) the parent's relatively happy and stable marriage, (2) healthy parent-child relationships (especially father-son and mother-daughter bonding), (3) helping the child avoid the evil influences in society that promote sexual experimentation and promiscuity, and (4) teaching the child true principles of human sexuality and moral agency.

Encouraging heterosexuality is probably something parents wish they did not have to worry about. Not so long ago this aspect of a child's development was taken for granted, but not anymore. Children, in general, are sexualized at an early age by our liberal and licentious society, and homosexuality is a growing threat to their health and emotional and spiritual well-being. Thus, parents can and must become involved in the debate. Formal discussions with children regarding premarital sexual behavior, including homosexuality, are required. Accurate information, clearly and concisely presented, is mandatory. Do not assume children are getting the right information from schools, the media, or peers. The Lord requires you to teach your children correct principles in light and

truth (D&C 68:25–28; 93:40). Then, in time, they will govern themselves. With pure hearts and clean hands they will “ascend the hill of the Lord” and enjoy the blessings of heterosexual marriage and family life (Psalm 24:4).

About the Author

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CHAPTER 17

Understanding and Helping Teenagers Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction

David C. Pruden, MS

Over the past thirty years it has been my privilege to spend countless hours working with, participating in the raising of, and studying academically those who in our culture are commonly known as teenagers. I have invaded their conversations, observed their interactions, participated in their activities, served as the butt of their jokes, asked for their viewpoint on many issues, and listened one-on-one to their worries, hurts, desires, dreams, and hopes. Gradually they have revealed to me the challenges that individuals their age experience. Having been blessed with these opportunities, understanding how adolescents develop, and protecting their right to grow, discover, and ponder their evolving sense of self in a safe environment is for me more than an academic exercise. It is personal.

In 1902 developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall published his celebrated manuscript *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relationship to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*.¹ He became known as the “Father of Adolescence” because he recognized and popularized the concept of adolescence as a formative period in the developmental life span of an individual from ages eleven to twenty-two.

Hall identified the developmental issues that create the transition from childhood to adulthood. Noted psychologist Eric

Erickson² later added to Hall's concepts about adolescence when he identified specific stages throughout the life span that mark healthy growth. Erickson suggested that during adolescence the individual is called upon to develop a secure self and move toward a positive adult identity by seeking answers to some important questions. A few examples of the questions Erikson identified were, Who am I? What makes me special? What am I going to do with my life? What kind of person do I want to be?

Finding answers to these questions commonly takes many years. That is why many of us didn't begin to get some idea of what sort of career might interest us or what kind of partner we were looking for until we were well into our twenties. Identity formation is a complex integration of cognitive, emotional, and social factors that will eventually make up a person's sense of self. Each individual develops this sense of self in a specific historical time period and in a particular cultural context. A young person growing up in seventeenth-century China, for example, had a very different experience than does a teenager growing up in modern Western culture. This differentiation in context has an effect on how each of us will develop. In simple terms, what is happening around us will affect how we develop our sense of identity.

Growing up in the first decade of the twenty-first century is considerably more complex than it was only two generations ago. Today an adolescent in modern Western culture is exposed to many more stimuli, almost limitless opportunities, and a wide variety of ways to go wrong.

Most scholars would agree that for adolescents to develop a healthy identity, they must undergo a natural growth process that is permitted to take place over time, particularly given the complexity of contemporary society. Social pressures requiring or even encouraging adolescents to assume an identity long before they are competent to consider the range of alternatives open to them, or before they are able to fully investigate their personal distinctiveness, can lead to what Erikson called identity confusion. We live in complex times, and developing a healthy sense of self takes time—and rushing that process can produce some unpleasant results.

Those who have raised a teenager or can candidly remember being teenagers themselves know that it is fairly common for adolescents who are still actively in the process of identity exploration to insist that they know exactly who they are and what they want. Precisely because they are still in this identity development stage, only a few weeks later this same self-assured adolescent will declare proudly a completely new-found, and often completely contradictory, vision for his or her life. For example, schoolmates who often occupy a large portion of our teen's emotional energy and much of his or her leisure time can be almost forgotten over the few short months of a summer vacation as new friends take their place and now dominate our adolescent's attention. Hurt feelings can easily ensue, telephone calls fly back and forth between friends, and a major teen crisis is now underway. Wise adults understand that this is just a normal situation born of the identity-exploration process and don't take it too seriously. Teens, of course, may imagine that this is the calamity of the century.

Taking these developmental patterns into consideration and knowing what you know about teenagers, imagine what could happen if in the course of this normal identity-exploration and development process someone were to decide to actually seize upon one aspect of this discovery process and encourage this questioning teen to declare the examination process complete. For example, imagine someone recklessly telling a teen, You said you wanted to be a fireman and so you now shall be one. Adolescent daydreaming now becomes adult reality. The prospect of this actually happening in someone's life seems absolutely ludicrous, and all of us recognize that the results of such thinking could even be disastrous. A teenage whim now becomes a life course. Yesterday this adolescent was a junior or senior high school student wondering and wandering, but today someone has declared that the search is over. No more investigation is necessary. As crazy as it sounds, this is exactly what is happening to far too many teenagers who may be questioning their personal and gender identity.

There is a growing fad in the popular media to publicize and identify teens as young as twelve years old who have chosen to

“come out” as gay to their junior high friends. Not long ago I appeared on the national Fox network broadcast of *The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet*. I was a guest appearing with just such a group of students who “came out” to their junior high school peers as gay or lesbian. These kids had been flown in from all over the country to talk to millions of viewers about their experiences and why they believed this public declaration was a healthy decision to make. When I cautioned the audience that this premature self-labeling could be fraught with danger, the mother of a fourteen-year-old lesbian daughter invited to be on the television panel responded that her junior high child was very mature, and she was sure her daughter knew what she wanted for her life. The mother stated this calmly, and the hosts accepted her statement without further questioning.

Sadly, this kind of rhetoric has become all too common in the popular media. We have listened to it so often and heard it said with so much confidence that many normally logical adults are beginning to buy into the concept. Yet if we were to apply this irrational belief to almost any other aspect of adolescent thinking or behavior, other than the politically charged issue of homosexuality, almost everyone would agree that it is preposterous, including many experts. Dr. Chuck Nelson, a well-respected neurologist at the University of Minnesota, cautions, “Parents want to be friends with [adolescents]; they don’t set good boundaries. I don’t think that a fourteen-year-old has what I would call consequential thinking. They just don’t.”³ Teenagers often don’t know who they are or what they want, and they certainly aren’t able to comprehend the lifelong consequences of premature sexuality.

A few years ago I would receive a handful of telephone calls each month from adults expressing their concern about what they perceived to be homosexual tendencies in children or teenage family members. At that time, almost all of the common information available concerning homosexuality was directed toward adult feelings or behaviors. Today, fully half of all the requests for help or information come from individuals under the age of twenty, their parents, or their ecclesiastical leaders. Sometimes parents are calling about children who are showing signs of gender

nonconformity. In other words, young boys are acting like girls or are attracted to clothing, dolls, or other items normally associated with girls, or young girls are acting like boys.

Sometimes well-meaning adults overreact to the normal but different ways children go through the early gender-identity process. Children typically grow out of these nonconforming stages or their attraction to the things that may interest their opposite-gender parent or siblings. But some children are correctly identified as having the psychological problem called childhood gender identity disorder (GID). Research demonstrates that, left untreated, the vast majority of these children will develop homosexual attractions.⁴ When we have reasonable questions about the behavior of gender-nonconforming children, competent mental health assistance is available.

Once adolescent sexual attractions arise, the teens that call me looking for help usually describe what they are experiencing as more than gender-identity challenges; they identify what they are experiencing as same-sex attractions or homosexual feelings. In everyday conversation or in media presentations, these questioning teens are usually referred to as gay or homosexual. The very language implies that individuals either are gay or they are not. This is incorrect. *Homosexual* is not something you are; it is something you feel. However, explaining the difference can be difficult when adults are made to feel that anything other than complete acceptance of homosexual behavior identifies you as homophobic. Most of our teens have been conditioned to believe that people are born gay, that gay sex is the moral equivalent of heterosexual marriage, and that to suggest otherwise clearly identifies you as a Neanderthal. Having a sensible conversation about same-gender attraction even with our own family members can be a challenge. That is why most adults just avoid the subject completely and the impression that people are born gay persists.

Before we begin to celebrate the enlightened environment that allows junior high school children to declare themselves to be gay, we need to remember that homosexuality at any age is fraught with serious mental health and physical consequences. The most

current meta-analysis done at the Royal Free and University College Medical School in the United Kingdom clearly demonstrates that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are at higher risk of suicidal behavior, mental disorder, and substance misuse and dependence than heterosexual people.⁵ This meta-analysis is a scientific review of more than twenty-five research studies that investigate the increased health hazard in the lives of those individuals who have self-identified as gay. The core reason why these individuals are at greater risk than the general population is certainly open to debate, but the risks are not.

The serious physical and emotional illnesses associated with homosexual behavior are well documented. Increased rates of drug and alcohol abuse, anxiety, depression, suicide, eating disorders, and intimate partner violence are more prevalent among homosexual men and women than among their heterosexual counterparts.⁶ Another study showed that “psychiatric disorders were more prevalent among homosexually active people compared with heterosexually active people. Homosexual men had a higher 12-month prevalence of mood disorders . . . and anxiety disorders . . . than heterosexual men. Homosexual women had a higher 12-month prevalence of substance use disorders . . . than heterosexual women. . . . More homosexual than heterosexual persons had 2 or more disorders during their lifetimes. . . . The findings support the assumption that people with same-sex behavior are at greater risk for psychiatric disorders.”⁷

This study is particularly significant because it was conducted in The Netherlands, arguably the most gay-affirming country in the world and the first to create same-sex marriage. Understanding the added health and emotional challenges of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, why would anyone encourage a questioning and often a confused teenager to declare a premature sexual identity?

Hope in the Midst of Challenge

If you have a teen who believes he or she is experiencing same-sex attraction or if you know of someone who is facing this special

hardship, you recognize how much pressure there can be to assume a gay identity.⁸ You want to help this teen and are seeking information on alternative perspectives. Be assured that there are constructive measures that informed families, friends, and local Church leaders can take. No matter what you hear, homosexuality is not fixed and unchangeable. Teens, however, are living in a difficult cultural environment, and their neurological immaturity can hamper their ability to make sound decisions. They are also attempting to overcome these feelings in a world where they will seldom hear that erotic attractions often change and are redirected during an individual's lifetime.

As we examine some of the challenges that teenagers face when they are required to struggle with gender-identity confusion or homosexual attraction, we will have an increased appreciation for them as beloved children of our Heavenly Father. With this increased knowledge, our natural tendency to be unduly judgmental will decrease and our desire to assist them will intensify. I believe that some of the keys to helping adolescents diminish their same-sex attractions and eliminate a desire for homosexual behavior lie in the characteristics of the developmental process and the environment surrounding them. That is why giving up or giving in before the fight has even begun is a mistake. My clear message to struggling teens, concerned parents, caring friends, and dedicated ecclesiastical leaders is that, in spite of the daunting challenge, there is hope. Everyone, regardless of the nature of their difficulties, can live a full and happy life observing the standards of the gospel.

The Theft of Innocence

Healthy sexual development was designed to take place over an extended period of time as teens are allowed to move naturally from one stage to another. Most experts agree that a normal developmental process for children would begin with building healthy same-gender relationships, shifting in their preteen years in the direction of experiencing nonsexual friendships with those of both genders, and ultimately toward an adolescent discovery of initial

sexual promptings. These early teen attractions would then grow and change and crystallize in a very natural way over the teen years before adult behaviors would ensue. Most experts agree that this measured and natural pattern should be our aspiration for all children as they move into adolescence. Sadly, these instinctive processes are all too often compromised when a child is needlessly and prematurely sexualized.

Take a moment to consider what is taking place in our modern world. Advances in communication systems have brought massive amounts of information into every home. In western culture, to cite an obvious example, sex is used to sell everything from cars to toothpaste. Common blue jeans and basic automotive transportation are now “erotic.” Common forms of entertainment have been sexualized and are now available to children from a very early age. Erotic messages and innuendos clutter almost every television program and movie. Nudity and sensuality that were once reserved for R-rated movies have found their way into prime-time television broadcasts. Media researchers now calculate that the average teenager watches about five hours of television each day, which exposes them to nearly fourteen thousand simulated sexual encounters annually. At the point in time when their physical development is first awakening to an awareness of themselves as sexual beings, they are at serious risk of being bombarded with far more information and stimulation than they can responsibly handle.

In Stanley Hall’s era, when he was constructing his theories about adolescence, puberty was usually thought to begin at about the age of eleven or twelve. Today, for a variety of reasons, puberty is starting for many children as early as age nine or ten. On the opposite end of this developmental progression, Hall suggested that adolescence ended with the autonomy of the individual marked by certain adult-like accomplishments such as marriage, career selection, starting a family, or financial independence. Today, a desire for advanced educational opportunities, concerns about financial stability, and a trend toward delaying marriage make it evident that most individuals would not be truly autonomous by Hall’s definition until far beyond age twenty-two.

This period of extended adolescence presents young people with some unique challenges unknown to their grandparents. In the highly sexualized adolescence young people now experience and with the availability of modern contraception and abortion, our culture sends a message encouraging promiscuity in young people while simultaneously convincing them that the traditional sacrifice related to pregnancy and marriage, which might have formerly served as deterrents to premature sexual behavior, is no longer required of their generation.

We need only consider a few examples from current news headlines to begin to appreciate how complete and widespread this early exposure to adult imagery has become. Almost every teen now has a cell phone and with that cell phone, a camera. In the past year there have been scores of media reports concerning junior high school students who are sending sexually explicit pictures of themselves and their friends to others in their social network. Local school officials and police departments are struggling to get a handle on the problem, but there is little they can do. This is not a matter of adults exploiting children. This is fourteen-year-old girls sending pictures of themselves to fifteen-year-old boys, and the boys sending the pictures on to their friends.

Where do they get these ideas? Try taking a stroll around the Internet and the Facebook super-hot girls thread, the amateur post-your-girl sites, or pull up YouTube. A study by the University of New Hampshire's Crimes against Children Research Center⁹ studied adolescents between the ages of ten and seventeen during the spring of 2005 and found that 46 percent had been exposed to online adult web sites and their explicit sexual content. Information that was once considered private and intimate is on a daily basis shouted from the rooftops. The outcome is that our children and teens now assume that the normal person is preoccupied with sex, and they receive the very strong message that they should be as well.

A Lack of Maturity

Like the mother I met on *The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet*, all too often we project onto adolescents a hoped-for maturity that they are not ready to assume. Studies demonstrate that in the last fifty years in the United States, the age of first sexual initiation has been steadily dropping. Adolescents are becoming sexually active at younger and younger ages. In 2002 some 13 percent of females and 15 percent of males reported that they had had sex before the age of fifteen and almost 25 percent of both males and females reported they were sexually active by age sixteen.¹⁰ The result of this trend is that almost eight thousand teenagers relinquish their virginity each day in the United States.

The Guttmacher Institute reports that among sexually active teenage girls, 61 percent have had multiple partners. And in spite of ever-increasing sex education in the schools, a rise in contraceptive awareness, and more discussion about sexual issues than ever before, each year almost 750,000 girls aged fifteen through nineteen become pregnant.¹¹

It is frightening to consider that although fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds represent only one-quarter of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half of all the new sexually transmitted diseases reported annually. Of the 18.9 million new cases of STDs each year, 9.1 million (48%) occur among this same adolescent age group.¹²

Such disturbing research on teen sexuality and its consequences is not restricted to heterosexual adolescent behavior. A recent study reveals that among males who began having sex with other males in their teen years (specifically, between ages fifteen to nineteen), 11.6 percent were HIV positive.¹³ The same study found that when men who have sex with men delayed their involvement until they were twenty to twenty-two years of age, only 3.8 percent became HIV positive. In other words, postponing sexual behavior yields clearly identifiable benefits in the lives of adolescents.

To cite another example, Robert Garofalo demonstrated in his research that gay and lesbian youth who self-identified or “came out”

in high school were at a disproportionate risk for a variety of physical and psychological problems, including suicide, sexually risky behaviors, and multiple types of substance abuse. Even if an individual later identifies himself as gay, current scientific research suggests that delaying sexual conduct until adulthood is highly advantageous.

If we truly want to be of assistance to sexually questioning teens, we cannot allow the wide variety of emotional stories we often hear to override the valuable information available to us through scientific studies. It is true that gathering and interpreting data on teen sexuality is very challenging, and it is important to acknowledge that all sexual statistics need to be understood for the imperfect measurements they are. After all, society has a conflicted relationship with all things sexual, and getting people to answer questions about their intimate behavior is difficult. That being said, it is apparent from the overwhelming evidence available to us that adolescents are the least likely age group in our society to handle this type of responsibility adequately.

One reason for this immaturity is a lack of experience. Adolescents simply haven't been around that long. As we have more experiences over our lifetime, we hopefully grow wiser and are better prepared to contemplate difficult decisions. Experience helps; however, there is more to consider than just familiarity. Emerging research concerning human neurological development may provide additional answers to a teenager's apparent lack of maturity. Extensive investigation by neuroscientists at UCLA's Laboratory of Neuro Imaging indicate that the area of the brain related to reasoning and problem solving, the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last to mature. Because the prefrontal cortex's wiring is still incomplete, an adolescent can't always distinguish between a good decision and a bad one, no matter how seemingly mature or intelligent the teen may appear.¹⁴ Teenagers engage in risky behaviors like driving too fast or jumping off a cliff into an unattended reservoir because their brain isn't quite yet connected and because consequences are something that happen to the other guy.

This failure to appreciate the seriousness of certain types of behavior can produce some frightening results. By way of

illustration, it is worth noting that half of all sexual crimes, defined as unwanted sexual conduct directed toward women, are committed by those under the age of eighteen.¹⁵ Young people often engage in foolish behaviors simply because they cannot mentally envision the cost to themselves and others.

Not only do adolescents fail to consider the consequences of their actions, but they often have a difficult time correctly correlating what they are feeling with what they are thinking. Early adolescent emotional experiences are not well integrated with cognitive processes. That is why you will often get an impulsive action from your teenager that seems to be totally disconnected from what is actually happening.¹⁶ For example, a minor slight can easily be blown into a major catastrophe that can make school attendance almost impossible. Many of us can remember falling in love as a teen and feeling so distraught when our devotion was not reciprocated that we truly believed all future possibilities for true romance were now forever closed to us. Yet these same highly sensitive adolescents can sometimes dismiss an out-of-wedlock pregnancy or the cruelty of a high school hazing incident with little thought for its significance.

Adolescence is a time of life best suited for supervised, controlled, and measured growth. As teens gain physical, emotional, and psychological maturity, they will have plenty of time to develop a secure personal and sexual identity. There is little well-founded evidence that would suggest that “coming out” in junior high school and declaring that you are gay will produce any beneficial results, and there is tremendous potential for harm.

Sexual Fluidity

A dangerous misconception that is too often accepted without challenge is that sexual attractions are fixed and unchangeable. Many decades ago, in the 1930s and 1940s, Alfred Kinsey’s admittedly problematic research suggested that many people were neither exclusively heterosexual nor homosexual in their attractions throughout their lifetime and that human attractions and

behaviors were fluid and diverse.¹⁷ Current research supports Kinsey's early hypothesis. Lisa Diamond's new book, *Sexual Fluidity*, provides some important insight into how sexual attractions can change for women over their lifespan. Based on her many years of research, Diamond reports that changes in sexual attraction and behavior can and do change repeatedly over time and in different situations.¹⁸ This information will run counter to popular conventional media representations, and it has serious implications for teenage girls, for example, who firmly declare that they are lesbians when they are experiencing their first adolescent attractions. Teenagers need to know that early same-sex attractions can change dramatically over time. This is why labeling an individual as gay can be so problematic.

Nancy Cobb, author of *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*,¹⁹ points out that our sense of ourselves comes in part from our awareness of how others see us. We cannot ignore the substantial evidence that labeling individuals in general and children in particular can result in significant harm. Dr. Mel Levine, a professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Medical School in Chapel Hill and the director of the University's Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, explains in his book, *A Mind at a Time*, that scores of educational studies substantiate that when mislabeled as slow learners, clumsy, or ADHD, schoolchildren begin to take on that identity.²⁰ Labels can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy as those around the student join with them in this self-labeling process. All too easily, well-meaning friends and family join the process and begin to see what they are programmed to see and expect what they are told they should be expecting. The frightening result is an adolescent trapped within a label. How quickly that teen can move from being a person dealing with questioning or with homosexual feelings to being a homosexual.

Research confirms that the issue of sexual uncertainty and fluidity is particularly pronounced in adolescence. In a large-scale study of Minnesota junior and senior high school students, 25.9 percent of twelve-year-old adolescents were unsure of their sexual

orientation. The study also demonstrated that their uncertainty declined with age, and by the time these same students reached the age of eighteen only 5 percent expressed similar ambiguity.²¹ Most researchers in the field agree that confusion in sexual identity is not uncommon in early adolescence. Even sexual activity does not necessarily reflect either present or future sexual orientation.²² In his book, *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, respected, self-identified gay social research scientist Rich Savin-Williams of Cornell University reminds us that some teens will self-identify as gay or lesbian without ever having had any type of sexual experience.²³

In another important study, Bearman and Bruchner found that 9.7 percent of teens had experienced a romantic attraction to someone of the same sex.²⁴ Yet the percentage of adults who identify as homosexual is consistently 3 percent or less.²⁵ Having same-sex attractions, fantasies, and/or experiences as an adolescent does not mean that a teen is or will be homosexual. Stephen Russell of the University of Arizona has analyzed findings from a ten-year longitudinal study of twelve thousand teens and reports that there is evidence that many who said that they were once attracted to others of their own gender grow up to be heterosexual.

Once again, current research into the neuroplastic nature of the brain may provide insight into this potential change process. We now know that every sustained activity, including physical activities, learning, thinking, and imagining, changes both the brain structure and the mind. In plain language, our brains are modified and molded by the things we do.²⁶ This is hopeful information for those seeking change from thoughts or behaviors that they wish to overcome, but it should also serve as a serious warning as we go about the business of selecting our daily activities. Scientists tell us that genes can provide the rough outline for the brain to use, but it is the specific environment that fine-tunes development as we get good at some things and let other options fall by the wayside.²⁷

Not all environments are healthy in terms of brain development, and an adolescent that begins experimenting with sexual behaviors is literally building his or her brain and establishing future neurological pathways. Once established, even

unnatural behaviors can seem natural to that particular individual, and changing thinking patterns or altering conduct becomes more of a challenge.

Sexuality is fluid, and the human brain has the wonderful ability to adapt and grow, but behaviors have consequences. Changing the way we think and transforming unwanted feelings is far easier if we avoid problematic, reinforcing activities. Protecting adolescents from harmful behaviors and teaching them how to steer clear of unhelpful thoughts will result in future blessings.

The Need for Responsible Support

The belief that homosexual behavior is sinful does not excuse us from our obligation to be powerful advocates for young people experiencing same-sex attractions. Their ability to develop a positive adult identity can be severely compromised when they lack the emotional support and positive reinforcement of families, religious organizations, and peer groups normally available for most teens. This difficulty arises when an adolescent who is questioning the nature of his or her sexual attractions feels forced to remain silent to avoid ridicule, verbal abuse, and exposure. This isolation can be a unique stressor that increases his or her vulnerability and risk for a variety of emotional and health problems.²⁸

In our desire to teach children a doctrinally correct set of morals and values, we may inadvertently convey the message that their sexual feelings are deviant or unnatural. The teachings of the Church are clear: feelings of same-sex attraction are not sinful. Every teen needs to know that they have a reliable and consistent support system of family and friends that assures them that they will not be rejected if they share their deepest thoughts.

The message that those who experience same-sex attractions were born that way and that they cannot possibly modify or

An important resource for parents and priesthood leaders is the clear discussion of sexual morality in the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet. This discussion raises the issue of same-sex sexual behavior forthrightly and carefully, in the context of gospel expectations and standards of behavior.

change those feelings can be counterbalanced by the love of their own family and the unconditional support of member of their own faith. The message suggests a hopeless predicament that will eventually end in same-sex behavior. The counterbalance opens the door to the growth possibilities that accompany the all-powerful Atonement of Jesus Christ and the loving and transforming strength we receive through our membership in His Church. The fellowship of the Saints can provide a protective environment for these questioning adolescents as they work through their same-sex attraction challenges, and we must rise to meet this obligation. Be assured that if we fail in our responsibilities to these youth, others are ready and willing to take our place in their lives.

Naturally, questioning or confused adolescents will seek support and assistance from the resources they can locate. Often these teens find themselves on the Internet looking for answers to their questions and finding instead pornographic gay web sites or one of the numerous gay teen chat rooms. Seeking support, they are also likely to find the local high school chapter of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a group reputed to be a gay teen self-help organization. GLSEN now operates in more than three thousand public junior high and high schools in the United States. It is actually a well-funded national organization run by adult homosexuals who assist questioning adolescents by encouraging them to proudly self-identify as gay. GLSEN and various pro-gay psychologists have an enormous media presence anytime teen homosexuality is discussed. While they talk about openly about same-sex attraction concerns, too many of us who work with youth within the Church are hesitant to address these issues. As a result, our questioning youth are likely to approach them for help rather than coming to us for assistance. This must change.

The challenge for those of us who are willing to reach out to these questioning youth is to provide assistance that is both effective and well received. First, gaining information about same-sex attraction challenges is important. These wonderful youth have so many questions and concerns about their attractions that they

have probably spent a great deal of time investigating the subject already and finding out all that they can. Some of this information may be incorrect, but if you have no knowledge on the subject, not only do you appear to them to be helpless, but you are powerless to help. Several small, good books can provide you with a brief overview on same-sex attraction, and Church-related web sites contain a great deal of useful information as well.

Next, you need to become familiar with reliable helping organizations that can provide professional assistance. It is usually a mistake to try to assist people with problems that are beyond your scope of training or experience. LDS Family Services and Evergreen International are two organizations with reliable resources where you can turn for help. The issues surrounding same-sex attraction usually will require professional intervention. If you need a mental health referral, you should contact these two organizations.

Finally, and of primary importance, are the spiritual resources we can draw upon in time of need. When we are faced with difficult challenges, our local ecclesiastical leader can provide irreplaceable spiritual guidance and insight. Quorums, youth programs, and home and visiting teachers all are sources of strength. Working in harmony with one another, spiritual, relational, and therapeutic resource people can make a significant difference in the lives of these adolescents.

Community and Context Make All the Difference

Two additional resources, community and context, can make an essential difference in the lives of adolescents. Unlike most adults, teenagers are still in the process of building their community. By community I refer to those significant individuals and institutions that shape and give direction to our lives. The lives of adults tend to revolve around their work, their neighborhood, potentially a local church congregation, their family, and a few close friends. In our twenties and thirties, we attain our education or training and select a profession. We buy a home in a specific neighborhood and by definition become members of a local ward. We marry and often

begin our own family to add to the established relationship we have with our parents, siblings, and their children. In addition, we may have a hobby or recreational interests that allow us to develop associations with friends that share our interests. Our community becomes pretty well defined. We know who our family and friends are and know where to find them when we need support or fellowship.

Conversely, adolescents are still in the process of building their community. The friends of high school will be long gone in only a few years. It will be many years before they start their own family, and they may not have the maturity to truly appreciate their family of origin. Consciously or unconsciously, they understand that they have limited relational resources. While all teenagers are somewhat insecure, a difficult challenge like same-gender attraction complicates relationships and can affect teenagers' ability to build even a temporary community of peer or adult support. They often feel they have to hide out to keep their same-gender feelings secret. Sadly, most of the teens I work with report feeling very friendless and alone. This needs to change.

Context is the life story we are in the process of constructing as we go about selecting a profession, a place to live, a spouse, and a variety of activities that come to define the daily nature of our existence. The vast majority of adults have a pretty clear idea of who they are and how they fit into the world.

My father, for example, was a design engineer who lived in a suburb of a medium-sized North Carolina city and was an elder in the local Presbyterian church. He was the husband to my mother, the father to his four children, and grandfather to his seven grandchildren. His best friend was our next door-neighbor, Jim, and they were both active Republicans. If you asked my father who he was he could tell you. His standards and values were pretty well fixed. He had a context for his life.

Knowing who you are, and developing an appreciation for your own unique "story" gives your life context and a sense of well-being and stability. As adults we have most of these anchors in place.

Adolescents, on the other hand, are still in the active process of trying to figure out who they are. The adolescent stage of

development is a time for searching, but the search is much easier when they are able to explore various possibilities knowing there is a secure base camp to which they can return. That is why we teach our children from a very early age that they are children of a Heavenly Father who loves them and that they can live a righteous life, go on a mission, marry in the temple, and be sealed to an eternal family. They are still in the process of writing their own unique story, but there are some basic gospel promises that are foundational and upon which they depend.

Same-sex attracted adolescents are going through the same insecurities as their peers and experiencing the same difficult process of finding friends, discovering the subjects in school that interest them, trying to discern what their strengths are, and figuring out how they fit in. The emotional roller coaster of teen life is much the same for everyone, but for these teens there is an enormous additional burden. They have a secret that they are reluctant to share with anyone, questions they assume they cannot ask without risking personal or emotional harm, and genuine concerns that their same-sex feelings will deny them all the blessings of a mission, marriage, Church callings, and eternal progression. They never hear their particular challenges discussed in youth meetings. It is rare to find a bishop that speaks comfortably about same-sex attraction or invites questioning teens to share their concerns. They are isolated, afraid, and often cannot imagine how their story can possibly have a happy ending. This too must change.

The change I am advocating is not a change in the doctrines and standards of the Church. Those are sacred laws given to mankind to protect us from earthly harm and to provide us with heavenly opportunities. The change must come in the hearts and minds of those of us who do not struggle with same-sex attraction. The change must come in our willingness to speak reverently and at the same time candidly about the challenges of same-sex attraction in our homes and youth meetings. We must be more knowledgeable and more understanding, and we must be willing to try to do the hardest thing of all—help them to realize they are surrounded by love in a church that offers them limitless possibilities.

We must appreciate the unquenchable longing those who struggle have for community and context. They need to know that they are loved and valued for who they are right now. Those of us who care deeply for young people must hold onto the knowledge that they are beloved of God, that they have special gifts that will enrich the world, and that their presence in our lives is a cause for celebration. We must hold this understanding of their true identity as a child of God until they can hold it for themselves. They must feel welcome in our youth meetings, and we should seek opportunities to demonstrate our respect for them in the presence of others.

If we want them to hold on to their standards and remain faithful to the gospel, their same-sex attraction feelings or adolescent confusion cannot become their excuse or ours for constructing walls of separation. This may sound too simple, but I find when I work with these adolescents that relationships are everything. Relationships are healing. We can help them find a therapist or access to support organizations for questioning teens, but nothing is more valuable than supportive friends and loving adult leaders.

The philosopher Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote that there is no such thing as an individual Christian. I know he is right. Jesus instructed us that loving one another is second only in importance to loving God. We must surround our youth in a loving community where every member is important. We must reflect their beauty back to them until they see it, until they believe it, until they can live from it grounded in the love of their Heavenly Father.

About the Author

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CHAPTER 18

What Is a Parent to Do?

John P. Livingstone, EdD

Faithful Latter-day Saint mothers and fathers have given dedicated sacrifice of time, resources, and training in the raising of their children. And they hope their efforts place the child on the “straight and narrow path” to happiness. When their children wrestle with same-sex attraction and then choose that lifestyle for themselves, mothers and fathers can feel like they have been betrayed. What is a parent to do? What should a parent do if a child seems to be at risk for such attractions?

Communicating with Youth or Young Adults Who Engage in Same-Sex Behaviors

Latter-day Saint parents of those who struggle with same-sex attraction find themselves in a particularly difficult spot. On the one hand, they love their child and have dedicated themselves to that child for many years. On the other hand, they know that the commandments of the Lord prohibit any sexual relations outside the bonds of a legal marriage between a man and a woman. The Lord said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the

daughter in law against her mother in law” (Matthew 10:34–35). Most assume that He was speaking of one who accepts the gospel when others in the family do not. But for those wrestling with same-sex behavior, the realization that families may be affected and even torn apart by the gospel view of the problem activities makes the variance a very real possibility.

However, parents can take some steps that will decrease this danger. Parents should not ever reject a child, even though they reject the child’s problem behavior. Keeping the focus on the problem, rather than on the individual, is paramount. Of course, children wrestling with same-sex attraction may feel that a rejection of the problem behavior is a rejection of them. But wise parents will want to be completely up front regarding the difference between the problem and the person. Of course, many misbehaving children will try to manipulate their parents into siding with them *and* their problem. Thoughtful parents will do their best to love their “sinner” but not the sin, and they will be very clear about the difference.

One mother counseled: “Never forget that that child was sent from Heavenly Father, and never ever stop loving them. Love makes all the difference. I have come to terms with it over the years because I know *the Savior knows* why this happens, and the Savior will be the healer if it is healed. I still get upset when people say unkind things. My same-sex attracted son is the most caring of all my sons.”

This situation is not one where parents must choose between the child and the Church. Sympathy for a child wrestling with same-sex attraction does not constitute a turning against “Church and gospel.” The Lord himself still loves the child. Encouraging a child to refuse to act on same-sex temptations will not block the child from happiness or eternal fulfillment. In addition to violating the commandments of our Father in Heaven, adopting a same-sex lifestyle is dangerous to the physical and mental health of participants, as evidence presented elsewhere in this book shows.

Sandwiching love around any expressed “negative” feelings you express gives greater clarity to the rejection of the *sin* rather

than the sinner and offers a kinder context to challenging parent-child communication, as suggested in Doctrine and Covenants 121:43: "Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy." "Sharpness" as used in this scripture can be interpreted as clarity of focus. In our age of high-definition televisions and high-resolution computer screens, we can appreciate metaphorically the need for more focus or precision in our correcting actions as parents. In such a difficult moment as a child's disclosure of homosexual feelings, "showing forth" or sandwiching love *both* before and after speaking with clarity would be appropriate. Many people struggle with feelings of repulsion or even revulsion when they envision homosexual behavior. Honestly acknowledging such feelings lovingly rather than harshly and sandwiching them with love will greatly reduce potential feelings of rejection in a child.

Remaining positive and upbeat in the face of a hurt, angry, or confused child can be the ultimate challenge for a mother and father, particularly the same-sex parent. Alienation from that parent is often a prominent factor in same-sex attraction. More will be said about that later.

There is a great need *not* to affirm the child's desire to act on same-sex temptations any more than a mother or father would encourage acting upon any other temptation faced in mortality. However, resorting to acrimony and counter-anger will likely not get parents very far. Simply preaching, quoting scripture, or quietly holding to righteous principle may not send the appropriate message to the child, either. Doing your best to talk (and talk and talk) about the issue and the feelings associated with it *without* anger and recrimination is essential. If, in retrospect, parents have not handled a situation or discussion well, they may want to revisit the conversation and see if they cannot do it much better the second (or third or fourth or fifth) time.

Trying to understand the child's real feelings and the need for empathy and understanding helps avoid devastation for the child. When parents begin to obsess about the problem and use

demeaning and hateful language, they may shatter their relationships with the troubled child and exacerbate the problem.

Merely encouraging marriage as a hopeful antidote or “therapy” for children tempted to engage in homosexual behaviors is also ineffective. Parents may be prone to look for a quick-fix solution to a child’s acknowledged same-sex attractions, but the road of reorientation away from same-sex attractions and behaviors, if present, is too complicated for quick fixes. What parents will need to do is encourage their children to continue working through these difficulties when those children become discouraged, depressed, and even angry by what may seem to be slow or nonexistent progress.

Remember, homosexuality is a complex issue. Parents would do well to not become “reductionists” by oversimplifying in their attempts to explain to their child, themselves, and others how their child could arrive at such feelings. On the other hand, if parents begin to press the child to change his or her feelings without a thorough understanding of the child’s feelings, they may become “enmeshed” in the issue, where they become part of the problem instead of being a helper.

Parents can help a child understand that same-sex attractions involve complex psychological impulses, that such attractions are not simply “fixed,” and that, even though the impulses the child feels may not have been chosen, the child still has both the agency and the capacity to choose how to respond to the impulses, including taking measures to change unwanted feelings. This understanding can offer real hope to those who feel overwhelmed by certain feelings, such as same-sex attractions, that can become temptations.

The world whispers, and even screams, that these homosexual attractions are “normal” and ought not to be resisted. Faithful Latter-day Saints know that any unrighteous temptations ought to be fought, even when they are overwhelming or have been indulged in previously. At the same time, it is important to understand that an impulse of attraction by itself is not synonymous with *temptation* and that *temptation*, again, is different from *transgression*. No repentance is required for impulses or temptations; it is

One mother commented:

I've had people call me, both strugglers and parents, asking how you deal with this problem of same-sex attraction. I say love them—more than ever before! There seems to be a combination of subtle factors with this problem. Birth order, influence of siblings, neighborhood, some influence of his learning disability all play into his feelings of inadequacy. In almost everyone I've dealt with, there is this strong feeling of inadequacy. This may have an impact on why they turn to their homosexual temptations. Any expression of sexual contact outside of that which Heavenly Father would authorize can become very addictive. The more addictive it becomes, the more the loneliness seems to grow.

necessary only for transgression. Temptations themselves can be avoided or mitigated through the proper schooling of our impulses or emotions.

Everyone in mortality faces temptation, and temptations play a major role in the great test of mortality. We know when we are being tempted. And perhaps *all* temptations arise from unwanted feelings. When temptations turn into sin and begin to take over lives, unhappiness and confusion result. Individuals can tell when their lives are out of control, and the results create increasingly troublesome difficulties in life. Repentance—and, for same-sex attraction, usually professional therapy—is required to help individuals turn from transgressions (or *behaviors*) that have become dominant or addictive in their lives.

Handling Your Own Feelings about the Problem

If you think about it, anger can be a smoke screen or a cover-up of primary feelings. In other words, a parent may feel deep hurt or frustration inside, but rather than communicating that hurt or frustration, he or she may exhibit anger instead. Learning to talk about underlying feelings is essential to dealing with this problem. Let me explain.

Feelings are not identical with emotions. We don't often split semantic hairs like this, but when problems are extreme, more precision is usually necessary. Feelings are basic human reactions to

life. The feelings themselves may remain hidden within us, or we may give expression to them. Emotions, on the other hand, represent our decided response to these feelings. All humans everywhere experience negative feelings such as shock, embarrassment, hurt, frustration, and worry when faced with difficulty. These feelings may differ depending on the specific situation, but we have all felt them from time to time. The situations that create these feelings are typically unpredictable and/or intermittent in life and therefore out of our control.

Like the situations that create them, the onset of feelings is mostly beyond our control. But—and this is important—the outward reaction to these feelings is within our control. These are emotions. We *choose* to “emote” anger, jealousy, or hatred. We do *not* choose feelings such as shock, embarrassment, hurt, frustration, or worry.

Some people give thoughtful reflection to their feelings, while others may spontaneously react outwardly to them. Properly responding to your feelings is an essential part of dealing with situations such as the revealing of same-sex attraction by a child. Discussing your feelings about the disclosure, rather than choosing to be angry or hateful, is essential. In fact, being willing to thoroughly discuss the matter with your son or daughter will likely minimize the chance that the child will feel rejected or hurt as a result of discussing the problem. Being honest about your feelings, not simply “emoting,” will signal to the child a willingness to examine the situation and your feelings regarding it. “Wow, I’m shocked!” is completely different from saying, “What’s the matter with you?” The former simply indicates your reaction to the disclosure, while the latter implies a judgment against the child.

Helping Children Who May Be at Risk

Like a fawn who has lingered too long at the river, a child caught between “the world” and his or her parents may be in mortal, even eternal, danger. There are predators only too quick to see the distance between parent and child. Exploiting the danger, they

corner their prey and move in. Protective parents will do all they can to quickly and lovingly close the distance and immediately offer comfort and counsel. Convincing counsel is loving counsel.

Vigilant parents are also proactive by acting early to protect their offspring. They have meaningful talks or interviews with each child and insulate or defend their children from worldly danger by holding to strong traditions of family prayer, family home evening, and family scripture study. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said:

Consider a principle learned in gardening. Someone said that if we plant a garden with good seed, there will not be so much need of the hoe. Likewise, if we fill our lives with spiritual nourishment, we can more easily gain control over inclinations. This means creating a positive environment in our homes in which the Spirit is abundantly evident. A positive environment includes consistent private and public worship, prayer, fasting, scripture reading, service, and exposure to uplifting conversation, music, literature, and other media.¹

By asking questions, parents may discern potential concerns or weaknesses in a child well ahead of actual problems. Such questions, asked wisely in the right spirit, and at the right times and places, may deflect future problems. When questions are not accusatory, they inquire as to what a child may have been thinking. Asking in a way that is age and maturity appropriate tends to “make the bandage the size of the wound.” For instance, parents do not need to address sexual issues with a four-year-old the same way they do with a thirteen-year-old. As children become teenagers, parents may ask questions beginning with “Have you ever been tempted to . . . ?” Such questions as “Have you ever been tempted to shoplift?” or “Have you ever wanted to watch pornography?” may prompt children to open up and talk about the challenges they face. Asking how they feel about same-sex attraction at an appropriate age may reveal troubled thoughts or confusion that may be emerging.

If you sense your child feels completely “different” from other children and does not seem to engage in gender-traditional activities and behaviors, talk about it. Feelings of loneliness and alienation should be discussed and gender-traditional activity encouraged. Parents who are sensitive but straightforward about teaching sexuality will put their children more at ease in talking about such things. Otherwise, children will learn about sexuality on the street, at Scout camp, at girl’s camp, or in other settings beyond the parents’ control. How many young people could get help early if their parents saw the signs and asked about them, instead of just praying that their child will not be gay!

Alienation from the same-sex parent is often reported as a difficulty for those struggling with same-sex attraction. Starting when their children are young and continuing through the teen years, fathers would do well to spend good amounts of time with their sons, and mothers with their daughters. Engaging in gender-traditional activities during these times may be very helpful in preparing children to avoid feeling alienated from other children of their same gender, as long as those activities are kept low key and enjoyable for the child. Of course, parents should not denigrate their children if they are not interested in or good at gender-traditional activities.

The same-sex parent can join in or value a child’s untraditional activities. For example, if a very tall boy wants to play the organ instead of playing basketball, his father may not understand such an interest, but he should support and praise it, never demeaning his son for wanting music instead of sports. Since *providing* is a traditional masculine role, the father may affirm his son’s masculinity by pointing out men who support their families with their music. The father may also teach the son how to properly preside, while reminding his son that *presiding* is another masculine role in the Church.

Freely expressing love to children, especially fathers to sons and mothers to daughters, can be a major preventative and perhaps even remedial action for many potential same-sex attraction issues. A loving, open atmosphere in the home, where

parents and children talk about important things together, may solve many possible ills in this world. If issues of gender alienation and same-sex attraction are addressed early enough, many who might otherwise have eventually expressed their same-sex attractions through same-sex behavior might be helped to reduce or eliminate such feelings before they become entrenched through homosexual behavior.

The Importance of Continuing Love and Spirituality

Perhaps a child will not respond to your feelings and attempts at discussion at all. He or she may engage in or continue on in homosexual behavior. What then? One mother said:

I had a testimony that my son would return to the gospel. Then, when I realized it might be many years before he returns to those things he knows to be true and to his children and family, it was almost impossible to cope with my sorrow. I withdrew from my friends and family for a time as I pled with the Lord for understanding. The world was so dark. My son's comments were no longer like him. He expressed no hope for any continued activity in the Church, and even joined a choir in a large metropolitan Protestant church near where he lives.

He stated he had never felt completely at home in the gospel, even when he was on his mission. I still can't believe it. I still have and read his letters from that time and they are filled with light and enthusiasm for the work he and his companions were doing.

After a few months, I decided I would have to turn this all over to the Lord and move ahead with my life. I wondered at first if I would be able to volunteer to work with other young men and women who struggle with this problem of homosexuality. I found it was not only possible but a real blessing in my life. I spend a lot of time visiting with other mothers whose sons are struggling to leave this behind. I am on much better terms with the Lord and

am more happy in the gospel than ever before in my life. I find I gain real solace from my service to others and am way less concerned about what others think of me or of my family.

Granting us the opportunity to turn our trials and afflictions over to the Lord is one of the main purposes of the atonement of Jesus Christ. While salvation from death and forgiveness of sin are often seen as the only purposes of the atonement, the scriptures tell us otherwise. Alma taught the people in Gideon, “And he [Jesus] shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11). Matthew taught, He “took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17). Turning to God for help and strength, of course, is the main theme of the Psalms of the Old Testament. It is appropriate to humbly ask the Lord for a miracle for your troubled child.

Losing yourself in service to others, as you can see from the account of the mother above, is another way to deal constructively with family challenges. When you become absorbed in your own personal problems, you may lose eternal perspective and feel like you are drowning in grief and pain. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24–25).

Controlling the tendency to obsess over the problems of your children and trying to do something beneficial for others can bring peace and comfort within. By the time children are in their teen years, the directing and training time for parents is fast slipping away. You cannot *make* them do much, and quite frankly they cannot *make* you do much either. Agency was the issue over which the war in heaven was fought, and it was a war that really never ended. Heavenly Father allows His children to work and play out their lives and then ultimately take responsibility for how things have gone.

Recognizing that your children have agency, perhaps you would do better to respect and honor that agency rather than fight it, even when you can see harmful decisions being made. Respecting, even reverencing, the agency of our offspring may cause them to reflect on their choices, more than would be the case when they think we are always opposing or dismissing them. (And perhaps the dismissal of a child's agency *feels* a little too much like the dismissal of the agent!)

Parents never know when a beloved son or daughter will want to return to the gospel fold. It is crucial that they continue to show

One son struggling with same-gender attraction said of his mother:

My precious mother, with nearly every card or letter she wrote, would say something like this, "We love you so much; we are so proud of your accomplishments and success in your life. We love and want you back!" This would almost anger me, because I felt they *did* have me. "Why couldn't they love me for who I was and not for who they thought I should be? I'm still the same boy they have raised all these years." They just knew the real me, whom I felt I was from the age of four! (. . . even though I didn't realize it at the time, this was so vital for my return).

After those feelings would race through my mind, my thoughts would rest upon the reassurance of her love for me. I was reminded of the Prodigal Son, who knew he always had a home to return to. I know my mother was inspired and acted on faith to add those words, "We Want You Back!" I often received cards and letters from my brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces that only spoke of their love and desire for my happiness, which I greatly appreciated, most showing even more love and respect for me.

I think there is always a special concern between a son and his mother, at least there was for me. I feel it may be the same for a mother and daughter, but think a daughter may feel more inclined to show more respect to her father. Dads seem to be the disciplinarian for their boys, where moms are for the girls. I was always told, Go ask your father! I wonder now if I had received a letter from my dad if that wouldn't have made an even greater and deeper impact in the time it took me to recover from forbidden paths.

Christ truly makes up the difference, filling in the gaps that we can't quite seem to reach. He only asks for us to have faith in Him as we do our best to keep His commandments. I will be forever grateful for His outstretched hand of patience and long suffering, grace and mercy, and for showing me the way back and giving me the agency to do so.

love and constantly invite him or her to “come home.” Another mother said, “My advice is to never, never cast them out.”

Orson F. Whitney reminded us about an important truth when he said:

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.²

More recently, President Boyd K. Packer taught:

The measure of our success as parents . . . will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible.

It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons or daughters. They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should.

It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled. . . .

We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the

One parent said:

My son feels shy, embarrassed to talk to me about it. I say the words; he asks if I feel okay saying those words. I've never, ever felt to reject him. I've talked to parents and siblings who say horrible things about this problem. Some families totally reject them and don't want this person to be around nieces and nephews. Homosexuality is not the same as pedophilia. It is not "contagious." I personally feel that these mistaken ideas come more from fathers than mothers. Mothers seem much more willing to ask, "What can we do?" They want to fix this. It seems that many fathers want to ignore it. I feel same-sex attraction is clearly a condition, and I don't know why it comes. But knowing why is not as important as what we do about it. To be gay is a lifestyle choice; I don't know that you necessarily choose the attraction.

standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them.³

When a child discloses homosexual feelings or behavior, parents often go through a grieving process not unlike that which would occur at the death of a child. This commonly occurs in other scenarios, such as when a newborn baby is discovered to have a serious disability. There is grieving for lost dreams and hopes for the life of the child. Likewise, parents whose child reveals deep and troubling homosexual feelings or behaviors may experience a profound grieving over hoped-for "normality" in mortality or even over a perceived lost divine destiny. Knowing that the grief process can involve denial, anger, bargaining (even with God, i.e., "If I become a better person. . ."), depression, and acceptance can help parents recognize their natural psychological response to the realization of a child's homosexuality and swim upstream against it.

Parenting is one of life's most wonderful, and most devastating, vocations. Simply trying to do the best you can is often what many of us are all about as mothers and fathers. Radiating love and kindness in the face of trying situations and circumstances can feel almost impossible at times, but remember that the Lord's invitation to "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28) can bring comfort and relief from the truly tough situations that arise during the mortal journey. The atonement of Jesus Christ will ultimately resolve all human problems and mete out mercy when needed and justice when best. Having faith in the Lord—a putting-all-your-eggs-in-one-basket type of faith—is our best hope, after all we can do. May the Lord bless you in patiently working on those issues that have come into your life and competed against the peacefulness promised to those who truly follow the Lord.

About the Author

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Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 2007, 45.
2. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1929, 110.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 68.

CHAPTER 19

Risk Factors for Mental Illness and Physical Disease Associated with Homosexual Practices

A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH

Deciding to engage in homosexual practices involves more than a choice of morality and lifestyle. Scientific research shows that homosexual practices are fraught with a multitude of mental and physical health risks. Thus a decision to participate in these practices may result in a reduced quality of life and a shorter lifespan.

The Mental Health Research

The research data consistently demonstrate that homosexual practices place its participants at risk for such mental disorders as anxiety, depression, suicidality, and multiple disorders. Replicated studies show that the risk for mental illnesses remains even in societies where there is little if any stigma associated with homosexual practices.

In the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, researchers Herrell, Goldberg, True, Ramakrishnan, Lyons, Eisen, Ming, and Tsuang arrived at the following conclusion: “Same gender sexual orientation is significantly associated with each of the suicidality measures. . . . The substantially increased lifetime risk of suicidal behaviors in homosexual men is unlikely to be due solely to substance abuse or other psychiatric comorbidity.”¹ In other words, suicidality is

Given the effects on spirituality, consequences for family life, and even physical and emotional ramifications, those who consider acting on same-sex attractions would be wise to ask if these are risks they ought to take.

associated with homosexual orientation and not to some other co-existing condition like substance abuse or depression.

In the same journal, Fergusson, Horwood, and Beautrais conclude, “Gay, lesbian and bisexual young people were at increased risks of major depression, . . . generalized anxiety disorder, . . . conduct disorder, . . . nicotine dependence, . . . multiple disorders, . . . suicidal ideation, . . . and suicide attempts.”²

After analyzing the data from both of these studies, independent reviewers Bailey, Remafedi, and Friedman determined that there is a strong association between homosexual practices and mental illness.³ In fact, Bailey notes, “These studies contain arguably the best published data on the association between homosexuality and psychopathology, and both converge on the same unhappy conclusion: homosexual people are at a substantially higher risk for some forms of emotional problems, including suicidality, major depression, and anxiety disorder.”⁴

In searching for an explanation for these increased risks, Bailey offered the following hypotheses:

- The increased depression and suicidality among homosexual individuals are consequential to society’s negative views of treatment of this group.
- Because homosexuality represents a deviation from normal heterosexual development, it represents a developmental error, rendering homosexual individuals vulnerable to mental illness.
- The increased psychopathologies in homosexual people are a consequence of the risk factors associated with receptive anal sex and promiscuity.⁵

Bailey’s first hypothesis is quite unlikely because the study was replicated in the Netherlands—arguably the most gay-affirming

society in the world—by researchers Sandfort, de Graaf, Bijl, and Schnabel. They arrived at similar but more robust results. They conclude:

Psychiatric disorders were more prevalent among homosexually active people compared with heterosexually active people. Homosexual men had a higher prevalence of mood disorders . . . than heterosexual men. Homosexual women had a higher 12-month prevalence of substance abuse disorders than heterosexual women. . . . More homosexual than heterosexual persons had 2 or more disorders during their lifetime. . . . The findings support the assumption that people with same-sex sexual behavior are at greater risk for psychiatric disorders.⁶

Some of the vulnerabilities to mental illnesses may be explained by the emotional traumas often associated with mental illness found in the backgrounds of many homosexual men and women. Researchers report higher rates of child sexual molestation in the histories of homosexual men and women than in comparable cohorts of heterosexual men and women. For example, in a non-clinical population, Tomeo, Templer, Anderson, and Kotler found that 46 percent of gay men and 22 percent of lesbians were sexually abused as children, compared to 7 percent of matched heterosexual men and 1 percent of matched heterosexual women.⁷

However, other vulnerabilities arise from the significantly higher rates of domestic violence that have been consistently found among homosexual couples when compared to heterosexual couples. Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, and Magruder concluded from their sample of 283 homosexual men and women that 47.5 percent of the lesbians and 29.75 percent of the gay men had been victimized by a partner.⁸ Island and Letellier noted that the incidence of domestic violence among gay men is almost double that of the heterosexual population.⁹

Greenwood, Relf, Huang, Pollack, Canchola, and Catania found rates of battering among homosexual men to be substantially higher than among heterosexual men and possibly heterosexual

women.¹⁰ What is even more interesting is that Lie and Gentlewarrier found that lesbians reported greater rates of violence perpetrated by their female partners than by their male partners (many lesbians have sexual relationships with men).¹¹

In their national survey of lesbians, Bradford, Ryan, and Rothblum noted a high prevalence of physical and sexual abuse and an associated high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse. The researchers also found that 75 percent of the two thousand respondents had received psychological care, a large number of them for depression. During the previous twelve months alone, more than a third of the sample had been depressed, and 20 percent of those in this sample had attempted suicide.¹²

Such research supports a plethora of other studies that highlight the increased risk of mental illness associated with those who engage in homosexual practices. The following are but a sample:

- Cochran and Mays's research provides further evidence for an increased risk of suicide ideation among homosexual men.¹³
- Skegg, Nada-Raja, Dickson, Paul, and Williams provide evidence of a link between increasing degrees of homosexual attraction and self-harm in both homosexual men and lesbians.¹⁴
- Kelly and Warshafsy found that 50 percent of their combined sample of fifty gay men and forty-eight lesbians perpetrated violence against their partners.¹⁵

The abundance of scientific evidence offers cause for concern: gay men and lesbians are at greater risk for some forms of mental illnesses, and there is an overrepresentation of violence in such relationships. The explanation for such problems cannot be reduced to society's disapproval of homosexual relationships because these conclusions hold true even in very tolerant societies like the Netherlands.

Homosexual Practices and Physical Diseases: The Evidence

What of physical diseases among the gay and lesbian population? Public health and medical researchers have produced disease and death data for those engaged in homosexual practices. Their extensive medical evidence demonstrates elevated rates of physical diseases among those engaged in homosexual behaviors.

Diggs offered one of the more comprehensive, yet concise, papers on the health risks of homosexual practices. Of particular concern is promiscuity. Diggs summarizes the research data:

A far ranging study of homosexual men published in 1978 revealed that 75 percent of self-identified, white, gay men admitted to having sex with more than 100 different males in their lifetime: 15 percent claimed 100–249 sex partners; 17 percent claimed 250–499; 15 percent claimed 500–999; and 28 percent claimed more than 1,000 lifetime male sex partners. By 1984, after the AIDs epidemic had taken hold, homosexual men were reportedly curtailing promiscuity, but not by much. Instead of 6 partners per month in 1982, the average non-monogamous respondent in San Francisco reported having about 4 partners per month in 1984.¹⁶

The data reported by Diggs are supported by other researchers as well. Consider the following:

- Prior to the AIDS epidemic, Bell and Weinburg reported that 28 percent of homosexual men had more than one thousand lifetime partners.¹⁷
- Focusing on comparative data, Michael and others noted, “It is extremely rare for a heterosexual who is not a prostitute

Though it can be distressing to consider the very real health consequences of same-sex sexual behavior, this matter must be considered because of the potentially serious and life-threatening consequences for the participant, and even for his or her family members, particularly a spouse.

to have 1,100 lifetime sex partners, as the average gay man infected with HIV had in the beginning of the epidemic.¹⁸

- Bailey quoted a 1981 statistic from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC): “AIDS patients with an average age of 35 years reported an average of 60 sex partners per year, or approximately 1,000 lifetime partners.”¹⁹
- Thirty percent of all gay black men are HIV positive. Forty-six percent of the gay black men in this particular study had unprotected anal sex during the previous month and less than 30 percent knew that they were infected.²⁰

Such promiscuity has medical consequences. Extensive medical evidence reveals greater rates of physical disease among homosexual than among heterosexual people. For example, the rate of anal cancer infection in homosexual men is ten times the rate in heterosexual men.²¹ Other medical conditions where there is an overrepresentation of disease among homosexual males include damaged sphincter tissue leading to incontinence, hemorrhoids and anal fissures, anorectal trauma, retained foreign bodies, recto-sigmoid tears, allergic proctitis, and penile edema.²²

A study of cancer incidence among male registered homosexual partners in Denmark likewise shows an elevated risk of cancer incidence when compared to the general population.²³ Lesbians have higher rates of hepatitis B and C and bacterial vaginosis, as well as higher rates of heavy cigarette smoking, intravenous drug use, and abuse of alcohol.²⁴

Many other infections are associated with homosexual practices, including a high rate of parasitic and other intestinal infections. Increases in sexually transmitted diseases, including gonorrhea and syphilis, are higher among gay men than in the heterosexual population.²⁵

The June 2003 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* was devoted entirely to health risks associated with homosexual practices. Article after article in this flagship journal of the American Public Health Association provides a bleak picture of homosexuality and HIV/AIDS. Consider the following brief summaries from several of these articles.

Gross's editorial, "When Plagues Don't End," focuses on the resurgence of HIV/AIDS among homosexual men in the United States.²⁶ The highest rates of HIV transmission are among African American men and Hispanic men who self-identify as gay.²⁷ Gross concludes, "To prevent HIV transmission, we have little more today than we had two decades ago, when it became clear that the virus causing AIDS is sexually transmitted: behavioral interventions."²⁸

In his article on "Black Men Who Have Sex with Men and the HIV Epidemic: Next Steps for Public Health," Malebranche addresses risk assessment and risk reduction. He references a six-site U.S. metropolitan-area study that reports that 93 percent of African American men who were HIV infected felt that they were at low risk for HIV and did not know that they had contracted the virus.²⁹

Malebranche's study contradicts the view that coming out of the closet, or disclosing one's homosexuality, is associated with improved mental health, responsible behavior, and lower rates of HIV infection. To the contrary, African American men who disclose their homosexuality have a higher rate of HIV prevalence than those who do not choose to do so (24 versus 14 percent). They also engage in more unprotected sex than those who do not disclose (41 versus 32 percent).³⁰

The title of Gross's second article in this journal comes with an ominous warning, "The Second Wave Will Drown Us." Citing a statistic from the CDC—a 14 percent increase of HIV/AIDS occurred among homosexual men in the United States between 1999 and 2001—Gross provides data from California and New York (two states that were excluded from the original CDC report) that focuses on unprecedented outbreaks of syphilis and alarming rates of rectal gonorrhea among homosexual men. Gross notes an emerging subculture of homosexual men who engage in intercourse without condoms.³¹ He offers the following comparison:

On the same day that seven astronauts and fragments of the vehicle that failed them plummeted to the fields and woods of East Texas, six times as many US MSM [men

who have sex with men—politically correct term for gay men] became infected. Maybe the number is higher, since it occurred on a weekend; perhaps lower if news of the catastrophe interrupted libidinous pursuits.³²

On the basis of CDC estimates of the lifetime expenditures for treating a single case of HIV infection, MSM infections acquired that single day will cost \$6.5 million. The cost in human potential need not enter the calculus even for a voodoo economist, unless so muddled by moral outrage that he thinks sex between men is indeed something to “die for.”³³

Perhaps the most alarming article in this public health journal was a randomized control study reported by Koblin and others titled, “High-Risk Behaviors among Men Who Have Sex with Men in 6 US Cities: Baseline Data from the EXPLORE Study.” The authors describe the prevalence of risk behaviors at baseline among MSM who participated in a randomized behavioral intervention study conducted in six U.S. cities: Boston, Chicago, Denver, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle. The data gathered involved homosexual men who were HIV-negative and who reported engaging in anal sex with one or more partners during the previous year.³⁴ The results among the 4,295 men randomized to the intervention or control condition were staggering: “48.0% and 54.9%, respectively reported unprotected receptive and insertive anal sex in the previous six months. Unprotected sex was significantly more likely with one primary partner or multiple partners than with a non-primary partner. Drug and alcohol use were significantly associated with unprotected anal sex.”³⁵

The final study in this journal was conducted by Ciccarone and others on “Sex without Disclosure of Positive HIV Serostatus in a US Probability Sample of Persons Receiving Medical Care for HIV Infections.” It provides additional alarming data to support the conclusion that “risky sex without disclosure of serostatus is not uncommon among people with HIV.”³⁶ The authors of the study write:

The results of this study indicate that sex without disclosure of HIV status is relatively common among persons living with HIV. The rates of sex without disclosure found in our sample of HIV-positive individuals translate into 45,300 gay or bisexual men, 8,000 heterosexual men and 7,500 women—all HIV infected—engaging in sex without disclosure in our reference population who were in care for HIV. . . .

These numbers should be considered a lower-bound estimate.³⁷

Of particular concern is the alarming numbers of homosexual men who actually seek to become HIV infected. In an article featured in *Rolling Stone*, the director of behavioral health for San Francisco County, Dr. Robert Cabaj, told the magazine that at least one quarter of the newly infected gay men may have sought out the fatal disease.³⁸ According to Gregory A. Freeman, the author of the article, some gay men say being HIV-positive “opens the door to Nirvana” because they need no longer worry about safe sex; others say they cannot stand the idea of being different from their HIV-infected lover. The magazine article entitled “In Search of Death” tells the story of Carlos, a man who considers HIV-transmission, “the most erotic thing I can imagine.”³⁹ “If I know that [another man is] negative, . . . it sort of gets me off. I’m murdering him in a sense, killing him slowly,” Carlos said, “and that’s sort of, as sick as it sounds, exciting to me.”⁴⁰

Called “bug chasing,” Dr. Marshall Forstein, medical director of mental health and addiction at Fenway Community Health, an arm of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center that specializes in care for gay and lesbian patients, notes that the phenomenon of intentionally transmitting the virus is growing.⁴¹ Evelyn Ullah, the director of HIV/AIDS in the Miami-Dade County Health Department in Florida, agrees. She cites “conversion parties” in the Miami-Dade area in which the goal is to have HIV positive men infect HIV negative men.⁴²

Forstein is further quoted as saying:

What frustrates health care professionals the most is that gay men who are doing this, haven't a clue what they are doing. They are incredibly selfish and self-absorbed. They don't have any idea what's going on with the epidemic in terms of the world or society or what impact their actions might have. The sense of my brother's keeper is never discussed in the gay community because we've gone to the extreme of saying gay men with HIV can do no wrong. They're poor victims, and we can't ever criticize them.⁴³

Forstein further notes, "We're killing each other. It's no longer just the Matthew Shepards that are dying at the hands of others. We're killing each other. We have to take responsibility for this as a community."⁴⁴

Such actions do not bode well for progress being made in the epidemic. In fact, with the failure of recent vaccines, the spread of HIV/AIDS can only be viewed as a behavioral epidemic—one that is poised to cause more destruction as scientists are finding more and more strains of the virus that are resistant to intervention.

The editor of this public health journal summarizes the current state of the efforts: "Having struggled to come to terms with the catastrophic HIV epidemic among MSM in the 1980s by addressing the pointed issues of sexuality and heterosexism, are we set to backslide a mere 20 years later as HIV incidence rates move upward, especially among MSM?"⁴⁵

Reasons for the Higher Rates of Disease and Death among the Homosexual Population

While there is no single, simplistic reason for higher rates of disease and death, the evidence to support two of Bailey's hypotheses might be worth reviewing.

*One: Homosexuality is a deviation from normal heterosexual development and thereby creates vulnerability to illness.*⁴⁶ The whole idea of what is normal causes controversy; however, it is clear that homosexuality is not consistent with the perpetration of the species and therefore is really an enigma even to the evolutionist.

Perhaps the better definition of what is normal is that which functions according to design (whether the adopted view is a creator's divine design or the impersonal theory of evolution). Diggs makes it clear in his paper that human physiology simply does not accommodate anal intercourse, the primary sexual relationship for homosexual men. The differences in physiology place those engaged in homosexual practices at substantially greater risks for infections, not limited to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and immunosuppressive diseases but inclusive of physical, internal injury.⁴⁷ Thus the greater disease and death rates are associated with the homosexual practices themselves.

*Two: Homosexual lifestyles are responsible for the greater rates of diseases and deaths.*⁴⁸ A particular characteristic of the homosexual lifestyle for which there is good documentation is promiscuity.⁴⁹ Repeated studies of homosexuals and homosexual couples have revealed significant concerns about the promiscuity. In fact gay men report having sex with someone other than their partner in 66 percent of the relationships within the first year, rising to approximately 90 percent if the relationship endures over five years.⁵⁰ Australian researchers have reported that lesbians, although not as promiscuous as homosexual men, were 4.5 times more likely during their lifetime to have had fifty male sex partners than were heterosexual women.⁵¹ This latter finding suggests not only the lack of stability in lesbian relationships but also the bisexual behavior of those in such relationships.

Monogamy is so rare in terms of both reality and expectation that the phrase "fidelity without monogamy" has been coined. Translated, this phrase refers to the belief that for homosexual couples to survive they must permit sexual relationships outside the relationship. Rotello, a gay author, notes, "Gay liberation was founded . . . on a sexual brotherhood of promiscuity and any abandonment of that promiscuity would amount to a communal betrayal of gargantuan proportion."⁵²

Bailey adds, "Gay men who are promiscuous are expressing an essentially masculine trait. They are doing what most heterosexual men would do if they could. They are in this way just

like heterosexual men, except that they don't have women to constrain them."⁵³

Implications of the Mental Health and Physical Disease Data

For those who engage in homosexual practices, the implication of the above data is simply this: a shortened lifespan as well as a far greater risk of seriously reduced quality of life associated with that lifespan.

Hogg and Strathdee offer the following summary:

In a major Canadian centre, life expectancy at age 20 years for gay and bisexual men is 8 to 20 years less than for all men. If the same pattern of mortality were to continue, we estimate that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently aged 20 years will not reach their 65th birthday. Under even the most liberal assumptions, gay and bisexual men in this urban centre are now experiencing a life expectancy similar to that experienced by all men in Canada in the year 1871.⁵⁴

The cultural implications are many. As the barriers to homosexual practices are removed and data such as that presented in this chapter are relegated to the back rooms of media outlets, the subsequent social approval of homosexual practices (primarily associated with lack of accurate data accompanied by gay activism) leads to increases in such practices. And such practices are extending to younger and younger ages. The mental illness and medical disease data associated with homosexual practices must be brought to the forefront. Such data may indeed be a matter of life and death.

About the Author

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Compassionately Standing Up for Traditional Marriage . . .

And Why We Should Be Concerned
about Same-Sex Marriage

William C. Duncan, JD

Many people of good will wonder whether longstanding social norms about marriage and parenting should be changed to accommodate the desires for greater legal and social acceptance of those who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. They wonder whether such changes are necessary or helpful and whether they should avoid objecting out of concern for offending others or not being sufficiently tolerant of differences. They worry that they cannot be *for* marriage and family without being *against* individuals who advocate that same-sex couples should have the right to marry. They may also wonder what harm there is in allowing same-sex couples to marry in the face of the argument that marriage should be a matter of personal choice and individual rights and that those who oppose same-sex marriage are merely intolerant, bigoted, and homophobic. In response to the increasing support for same-sex marriage in the world, those who desire to defend traditional marriage will need to become more articulate and more compassionate in responding to the issues.

The Purpose of Marriage Throughout Time and Across Cultures

In answer to these questions, it is helpful to first review the nature of marriage and why it is treated as a most favored status in our society and its laws. A group of family scholars recently issued a statement about marriage that includes this concise declaration:

Marriage exists in virtually every known human society. Exactly what family forms existed in prehistoric society is not known, and the shape of human marriage varies considerably in different cultural contexts. But at least since the beginning of recorded history, in all the flourishing varieties of human cultures documented by anthropologists, marriage has been a universal human institution. As a virtually universal human idea, marriage is about regulating the reproduction of children, families, and society. While marriage systems differ (and not every person or class within a society marries), marriage across societies is a publicly acknowledged and supported sexual union which creates kinship obligations and sharing of resources between men, women, and the children that their sexual union may produce.¹

Millennia of human experience tell us that marriage is society's way of ensuring that the adults responsible for creating children take responsibility for raising them. When we recognize marriage between a man and a woman in our laws, we are endorsing that idea. From a child's perspective, when we support marriage we are also endorsing the message that children benefit most when their mother and father can rear them together. Marriage also provides an ideal setting for childrearing through adoption or foster care in situations where children's biological parents cannot care for them.

Social science research "demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. . . . There is thus value for children in promoting

strong, stable marriages between biological parents.”² Marriage is, without dispute, beneficial for children.³ Of course, some married couples cannot have children, but marriage is highly beneficial for the spouses as well.⁴

The Perils of Redefining Marriage

Obviously, there are strong voices that would endorse another view of marriage. These voices come from “those who see nothing in marriage but the pleasure married people derive from one another, that is, only the first beginnings of marriage and not its whole significance, which lies in the family.”⁵ Their motivation may be, in part, understandable. They believe that if society redefines marriage to include other kinds of adult arrangements, it will increase acceptance of those who prefer these arrangements, many of whom have been cruelly treated by others.

As a prominent family advocate has recently noted, however, “marriage does not exist in order to address the problem of sexual orientation or to reduce homophobia. Marriage does not exist in order to embody the principle of family diversity or to maximize adult choice in the area of procreation and childrearing.”⁶ Because marriage is so important, we do no favor to anyone when we attempt to respond to their challenges by enacting laws or policies that would harm traditional marriage, even if we do so with kind intentions.

When we legally redefine marriage we are endorsing an entirely different set of messages from those currently sent by our marriage laws. These new messages include the following: marriage is just another lifestyle choice, one lifestyle is essentially the same as any other, and children really don’t need a mother and father because any adult or set of adults will do. These messages affect not only those who choose a new kind of marriage but all of society because everyone in the society will be told by their government that the old view of marriage was really nothing more than bigotry and prejudice. This logic is likely to heighten “legal collisions with the rights of free speech and of action based on religious beliefs.”⁷

Marriage Is Not Primarily a Contract Between Individuals to Ratify their Affections and Provide for Mutual Obligations

While the question of same-sex marriage is a moral issue, the potential damage to the fabric of society from marriage redefinition is profound. The redefinition of marriage is also a redefinition of the family, the fundamental unit of society. As articulated by the Church in “The Divine Institution of Marriage”:

Marriage is not primarily a contract between individuals to ratify their affections and provide for mutual obligations. Rather, marriage and family are vital instruments for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults. While governments did not invent marriage, throughout the ages governments of all types have recognized and affirmed marriage as an essential institution in preserving social stability and perpetuating life itself. Hence, regardless of whether marriages were performed as a religious rite or a civil ceremony, married couples in almost every culture have been granted special benefits aimed primarily at sustaining their relationship and promoting the environment in which children are reared. A husband and a wife do not receive these benefits to elevate them above any other two people who may share a residence or social tie, but rather in order to preserve, protect, and defend the all-important institutions of marriage and family.⁸

The Church’s position on traditional families is supported by social science studies. Again quoting from “The Divine Institution of Marriage”:

High rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births have resulted in an exceptionally large number of single parents in American society. Many of these single parents have raised exemplary children; nevertheless, extensive

studies have shown that in general a husband and wife united in a loving, committed marriage provide the optimal environment for children to be protected, nurtured, and raised. This is not only because of the substantial personal resources that two parents can bring to bear on raising a child, but because of the differing strengths that a father and a mother, by virtue of their gender, bring to the task.

As the prominent sociologist David Popenoe has said:

The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to childrearing is unique and irreplaceable.

Popenoe explained that:

The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child's overall development. It is sometimes said that fathers express more concern for the child's longer-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well-being (which, of course, in its own way has everything to do with a child's long-term well-being). What is clear is that children have dual needs that must be met: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support.⁹

Defending Traditional Marriage in Appropriate Ways

The unique contribution marriage makes to society and to children in particular helps explain why the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have called on "responsible citizens . . . everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society."¹⁰ "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" also says that "children are entitled to . . . be reared by a father and a mother."¹¹

In response to calls to redefine marriage, the First Presidency has issued a number of statements. One of the first said, “We encourage members to appeal to legislators, judges, and other government officials to preserve the purposes and sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, and to reject all efforts to give legal authorization or other official approval or support to marriages between persons of the same gender.”¹² In 2004, the First Presidency explained:

As a doctrinal principle, based on sacred scripture, we affirm that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. The powers of procreation are to be exercised only between a man and a woman lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, undermine the divinely created institution of the family. The Church accordingly favors measures that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman and that do not confer legal status on any other sexual relationship.¹³

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “We believe that defending this sacred institution by working to preserve traditional marriage lies clearly within our religious and constitutional prerogatives. Indeed, we are compelled by our doctrine to speak out.”¹⁴ In 2008, the First Presidency encouraged Church members in California to “do all [they] can to support [a] proposed constitutional amendment” defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman.¹⁵

Changing our laws about marriage cannot make behavior morally correct, and it cannot make a person feel good about choices they make that are wrong.¹⁶ The opposite is true, and that is why we can and ought to speak in favor of marriage and the family as we have inherited them.

The way we do this is very important. The 2004 First Presidency statement on same-gender marriage exemplifies the spirit in which our constructive and civil efforts to speak up for marriage should be offered. That statement begins, “We of The Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender. We realize there may be great loneliness in their lives but there must also be recognition of what is right before the Lord.”¹⁷ “The Divine Institution of Marriage” encourages members to “approach this issue with respect for others, understanding, honesty, and civility.”

President Hinckley emphasized, “Our opposition to attempts to legalize same-sex marriage should never be interpreted as justification for hatred, intolerance, or abuse of those who profess homosexual tendencies, either individually or as a group. . . . We love and honor them as sons and daughters of God.”¹⁸

In everything we do, we must act in a way that makes clear that our efforts are motivated by concern for marriage and family and not bitterness or hatred towards those who disagree. We must learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We must be careful not to hurt others unnecessarily in the words we use or the things we say.

When offered in a spirit of compassion and kindness, our efforts to stand up for truths about traditional marriage and family life can enrich our whole society, not only those who are married or who will marry but also those who may never have that opportunity because of same-sex attractions or other reasons. While we must be kind and compassionate in our defense of traditional marriage, we must nevertheless defend it if we are to preserve society as we know it.

About the Author

William C. Duncan, JD, is the executive director of Marriage Law Foundation and has done extensive research and writing on family law and constitutional law issues. He has provided technical assistance to state legislators, attorneys general, and other attorneys and interested groups; has written and filed briefs in major litigation across the country involving family law issues; and is the recipient of the BYU Service to Family Award. During 2003–2004, Mr. Duncan was a visiting professor at the J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University, where he was

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SECTION IV

ADVICE FROM THOSE
WITH EXPERIENCE

“Teach one another words of wisdom”

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS ABOUT

Stories from Personal Experiences

In reading the following stories of the personal experiences of those who have dealt with the struggle of same-sex attraction it is important to bear several points in mind. First, there are many pathways into and out of same-sex attractions and homosexual behavior. It is important, therefore, not to over-generalize the experiences of a few people as being representative of everyone else. Everyone's story is important and unique. As in all of life's challenges, individual struggles with same-sex attraction span the continuum of human experience. The following stories have been selected by the editors for both the insights into the issue of same-sex attraction they shed, and for the sense of hope that they convey.

It is also important to understand that most homosexual behavior and sexual addictions are distorted attempts to meet legitimate needs. Human beings need love, affection, and acceptance. In his story, Robert James describes his desperate longing for the love of his father and acceptance by his male peers. Likewise, Katie Merrill describes her need for a deep and affectionate friendship she did not find in her marriage. When legitimate needs such as these are met in appropriate ways the propensity to satisfy them in same-sexual relationships is often diminished.

The Editors

CHAPTER 21

Filled with Light

How I Found Help with Resolving Same-Sex Attraction through the Atonement of Jesus Christ

*Erin Eldridge**

During most of my growing up years in the 1970s, I felt different from my classmates, like I did not fit in. (Few things can be more difficult in junior high and high school.) As time went on, the confusion intensified. Everywhere I tried to turn, I found rejection and isolation. Except for one place. A place that has been forbidden by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Self-loathing was the order of the day. In addition to condemning myself, I felt condemned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church in which I had always had a deep, undeniable, and irrefutable testimony. The church to which I had devoted my life. The church that spoke of my desires in terms of perversion, selfishness, and sin.

How could that be? All my life I had tried to choose the right, to follow the prophet, to toe the line. But alas, now the line kept me out instead of drawing me in. I wanted, so desperately, to bring my feelings into compliance with gospel principles. But my same-sex attractions would not go away, no matter what I did to rid myself of them. Each wholehearted attempt increased my sense of failure and my pangs of guilt.

* Not the author's real name

After struggling through years of torment, I decided that life was not worth living. The gospel plan had brought nothing but turmoil, so I adopted a plan of my own. One that would finally bring an end to my suffering, at least in this life.

But what about the next life? Since I knew the gospel is true, I also knew there is life beyond this one. I could not help but wonder, what if the suffering does not end here? What if my situation becomes worse? I decided it was not worth the risk. So instead, I resigned myself to the only way of life that seemed plausible. The one that I had done everything I possibly could to avoid, short of killing myself.

In time, I met someone I could relate to, who provided the sense of belonging I had sought so desperately. Even though it was another woman, confusion was replaced with meaning. Rejection with acceptance. Self-loathing with love. It was exhilarating and calming, all at once. I was free to live the life I felt I was destined to live. The only life worth living.

As time went on, my testimony of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints resurfaced on occasion, creating angst and unrest. I learned to ignore it or explain it away. Because my passions and desires had always been oriented toward the same sex, I became certain they were a permanent part of me and my identity. Mormon leaders declare the opposite to be true, so I surmised they were wrong. They insist that “passions, appetites, and desires [are] planted in the mortal body that were not there when we were in the preexistent sphere. . . . Down here we’re on probation as mortals, where appetites control our bodies, where we have lusts, and where we’re subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, disease, sexual appetites, and all the rest.” Back then “we walked by sight. Down here we walk by faith, and we have to believe and obey the Holy Gospel when it’s taught to us by the Lord’s representatives.”¹

I denounced the gospel that was being taught by the Lord’s representatives. Life’s experiences were my teachers now, and they taught me different lessons. I subscribed to a new doctrine, one that even felt spiritually correct. Certainly, I believed, my feelings knew best, no matter what the prophets and apostles might say.

“Be even on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. . . . The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual.”
 (Boyd K. Packer, “Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, pp. 56–57)

Since I felt “spiritual confirmation,” I believed that God approved of my new life. What I did not realize is that the fulfillment of my most basic needs for love and acceptance could feel spiritual because they contain a strong spiritual component. However, just because righteous needs were being met, that does not mean they were being met in righteous ways. Sin is often the wrong way “of expressing some basic needs that we all have, such as for belonging and recognition. The adversary understands and plays upon these basic needs.”²

As time and space increased between me and the Church, my testimony still sought a place in my heart. I could not help but wonder, again and again, if there were any chance left that living the gospel could bring happiness, or at least some peace of mind. So I tried leaving the life I had come to love, but I soon found that the pain of my unmet spiritual and emotional needs became all-consuming. Darkness and depression overwhelmed me, feelings I attempted to express through poetry:

Dear God, it’s black again—
 two solid months of darkness.
 Two solid days of light marked Christ’s arrival.
 I guess He isn’t coming.

Have faith, I say?
 But faith does not take my hand
 and tell me I’m OK.
 God, if this is wrong,
 then where’s thy love when heaven’s touch
 feels cold as brass?

And if this flame that lights my heart
 is Satan's fire, I cannot tell.
 Sheep's clothing warms my soul.
 I say to change.
 I say I can't.
 I feel, therefore I am.

But words fell miserably short of expressing my tumult. I wrote in chicken scribbles slanting down the page. Pain seldom stayed between the lines. Again I faced the unbearable dilemma of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I could not live it, yet I could not live without it. So I decided, once again, that I could not live at all.

As I was about to implement my plan of self-destruction, I knelt to pray, just in case someone out there was listening. It was then that it came: a flicker of light, a glimmer of hope. It seemed vaguely familiar at first. But as the intensity grew, the feeling became unmistakable. It was the light of Christ. I had felt it before, even during what I considered to be my most unworthy moments. This time the feeling was surprisingly tangible. There was a distinct physical sensation as the Spirit enveloped me.

For the flash of a moment, for the expanse of an eternity, there on my knees in the middle of a life consumed with darkness, I was filled with light. The light of Christ.

I watch, with spiritual eyes, as the Savior approaches. He has left the ninety and nine to come find me. He calls me by name. He knows my heart. I sense that Christ has taken and is now taking my burdens upon himself. I watch him collapse under the weight of it all, only to realize he is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is in my Gethsemane.

At that moment, that eternity, I came to know that He knows. He understands my pain perfectly—somehow, some way—in a manner known only to a god. I was blessed with a personal witness that through this godlike transcendence of time, through Christ's infinite atonement, He truly suffers as I suffer. Throughout my life I had never felt that even one member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had ever truly understood my pain—until that moment.

I kneel as witness that the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Jesus Christ himself—understands in a way no human possibly can. Only the Savior, the perfect Son of God, can take upon himself my sins. Only He can suffer all my “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” so that he can succor me here and now, in this moment of my infirmity (see Alma 7:11).

I kneel in awe, in prayer, in hopes of extending the communion. I begin as I would any other prayer, but this is not any other prayer. The words begin to flow as if from a divine source, as if I am speaking with the tongue of angels. It is scripture. It is poetry. It is Truth, ringing out across eternity and back to “fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:12).

At last, at long last, I had found someone, *the One*, who truly understands.

It was now undeniable: I could not live without the Light. I knew that I would need divine help from an inspired source—a source that wore the mantle in my behalf.

The thought of seeing a judge in Israel struck fear deep in my heart. I knew I needed to contact my bishop, a man I had never met before. Then I must tell this stranger the most intimate details of my life—a subject that, when discussed with some members of the Church in general terms had been met with judgment and condemnation, scorn and ridicule, even thoughtless jokes and rude comments. Not to mention the fact that my actions could cause my name to be struck from the records of the Church.

But now I had received a greater witness, a message delivered by the Savior himself, for “he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). Now, instead of worrying about how a human might react, I exercised faith and called into remembrance the Savior’s response. After some inquiry, I found out who my bishop was and gave him a call.

By the grace of God, this man was one of the finest disciples of Christ I had ever met. I got a sense of this as I spoke with him on the phone. He recognized my sense of urgency, even though I was doing my best to act casual. He asked questions as if he were genuinely concerned, not curious or prying. A meeting was set up for Thursday.

I could not sleep for the next seventy-two hours. I felt a whirl of emotions that ran the gamut: humble, grateful, remorseful, calm, panicked, angry, anxious, resentful, nervous, guilty, defensive, just to name a few. Round and round they went—all at once, single file, and everything in between. It proved to be the longest three days of my life. By the time Thursday arrived, I had literally worried myself sick. I considered canceling but was afraid I might never call him again. Surprisingly, my fear of avoiding the meeting was greater than my fear of meeting with him.

He was even more compassionate in person than he was on the phone. He was not shocked or disgusted or condemnatory as I confessed to him the sins of the past several years of my life. Before each of his questions and comments, I could tell he waited for the Spirit to distill upon his soul. Both of us were very aware of the importance of this first meeting. Both of us wanted to be sure I would return. He asked me to meet weekly. I agreed.

The bishop had never counseled with anyone who struggled with my particular challenge, though he had helped bring others back into the fold. From the very beginning, he helped me love and accept myself through his Christlike example of love and acceptance. He reminded me that I am a beloved child of God, with a difficult challenge. I was surprised that he spoke more of my spiritual strengths than of my weaknesses. He bore testimony that I was destined to perform great works, and that was the last thing I expected to hear from a judge in Israel, given my situation.

The bishop continued in patience, even at first when I found it impossible to give up my current relationship and way of life. So he asked for obedience in other areas where I was able to give it. He asked me to read scriptures and pray daily, as well as attend church and meet with him weekly. As I did so, he acknowledged my accomplishments, realizing that they truly were accomplishments, given my history of turmoil surrounding the Church. He offered encouragement and praise. I found myself eager to please him, especially since he stood as a representative of God. It was such a welcome relief to feel as though I were pleasing God. I had always wanted to please Him, even from the time I

“Rather than trying to force ourselves along with white-knuckled willpower, our first goal should be to tap into the natural flow of the will of God. When it comes to changing our lives, our energy is often better spent in setting the sail than in rowing the boat. . . . We spend our energy on this concern and that, worrying, and trying to control. In the frantic midst of all our doing, we would do well to stop rowing and instead set the sail to pick up the winds of God’s power. . . . Our point is not that willpower is unnecessary, but simply that it is not enough. In matters of self-control, all the perspiration in the world can go to waste if there is not inspiration from God to direct it.” (Byrd, A. Dean, Chamberlain, Mark. *Willpower Is Not Enough: Why We Don’t Succeed at Change*. Deseret Book, 1995.)

was very young. But somewhere along the way, things went awry. Terribly awry.

Line upon line, precept upon precept, my spiritual strength increased. After months of struggle and heartache, I was finally able to sacrifice my relationship with my partner. The days and weeks and months that followed were intense, both with regard to temptation and my desire to overcome. I was strengthened as my bishop exercised his priesthood in righteousness, by divine design, “by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge,” which not only enlarged his soul, but mine also (D&C 121:41–42).

I made progress and then slipped back. Each time I fell, I was crushed. The bishop’s initial reaction was sometimes one of frustration and disapproval. Then the Spirit took over, making a visible change in his countenance. If he did reprove me, he always showed afterward an increase of love. Although I hated it when I needed to confess something, I loved the meetings with the bishop. I always felt the Spirit there, even when I was unable to feel it anywhere else. His office became a safe haven, not as comforting as the relationships I was sacrificing, but enough to sustain me for a time.

The bishop helped me turn my desires, my thoughts, and my will over to God.

I continued in faith as I followed God’s directions, made manifest through my bishop. I experimented upon the word, even when I had nothing more than a desire to believe. As this desire worked

in me, it grew and swelled. Soon it began to be delicious to me. And even when I was tempted to cast it out—to turn elsewhere—I continued to nourish it through prayer, scripture study, general conference tapes, church attendance, and, of course, weekly meetings with my bishop (see Alma 32).

The bishop was also inspired to assign me a visiting teacher and encouraged me to open up to her. She, too, was accepting and understanding, illustrating that the gospel I once thought to be rejecting is quite welcoming. I learned to discern between the gospel and some of the people from church who had been judgmental. Fortunately, more and more Church members were learning that Latter-day Saints with same-sex attractions as well as strong testimonies of the gospel do not consciously *choose* to engage in a direct conflict between the two strongest, most significant desires in their lives.

The bishop also suggested I see a therapist. I was careful to select a professional who allowed me the freedom to worship as I please. Someone who was willing to help me overcome the negative effects of same-sex attraction without insisting that it was the Church and its “homophobic policies” I needed to overcome. After all, that was no longer the direction I wished to go in.

With counseling, I did not attempt to trace my same-sex attractions backward in search of direct causes. Instead, I explored the various challenges I had faced throughout my life so I could heal. I uncovered events of the past that had been harmful or damaging—emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually. Even occurrences that may have seemed insignificant at the time had had a profound effect on my life. It was important to uncover those issues that prevented me from becoming whole, from being made perfect in Christ. This is a process that everyone should go through, whatever their sins and weaknesses in life.

“Repentance. The Greek word of which this is the translation denotes a change of mind, i.e., a fresh view about God, about oneself, and about the world.” (LDS Bible Dictionary, 760)

“Because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye was filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.” (Alma 32:42)

As I continued to heal mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, I gained a greater understanding of repentance. I realized it was not a principle of punishment, but rather, a principle of change. I learned to view myself, my God, and my world in new ways, allowing for growth and transformation.

Although I remained uncertain as to what the future would bring, I moved forward with faith in Christ. I received my temple endowment and made higher covenants with the Lord. In turn, my regular temple attendance and covenant making brought me to a deeper level of commitment and a closer companionship with the Holy Spirit. My desires to return to my past diminished as the things of the Spirit became more satisfying, for “unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life” (D&C 63:23).

Of course I continued to face challenges, but it was a welcome relief when my temptations turned to matters other than those that once consumed my life. Human relationships were no longer my primary source of sustenance because I had entered into the most intimate of relationships: becoming one with Jesus Christ, even as He and the Father are One.

About the Author

A former struggler with same-sex attraction, **Erin Eldridge** (not the author's real name) caught the attention of the national media with her book *Born That Way?* published by Shadow Mountain in 1994. Sister Eldridge is married, has three children, and speaks from personal experience that same-sex attractions can be dealt with successfully. An active

member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ms. Eldridge has served in a variety of callings.

Editor's note: Some of this material was previously published in Erin Eldridge's book, *Born That Way? A True Story of Overcoming Same-Sex Attraction with Insights for Friends, Family, and Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 1994). Erin and her husband have been married fifteen years and are busy raising three children.

Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, address delivered at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, January 10, 1982.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, *We Will Prove Them Herewith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 24.

CHAPTER 22

The Fruits of Faith

My Journey Out of Homosexuality

*Robert James**

My Journey into Homosexual Behavior

As a young child, I remember wanting my father to like me. He liked my older brother, who was athletic. I didn't like to play catch because I was no good at it. I was never interested in throwing, hitting, catching, or chasing balls of any variety. My father always seemed to be mad at me. He had a violent temper, and I tried to avoid him as much as possible and was glad he worked long hours and was gone most weekends. Still, I wanted him to love me. He died of cancer when I was fourteen. I cried because the family was crying and because I felt bad that I was not sad that he died. Actually, I was relieved that he was gone and couldn't lose his temper at me anymore.

In grade school, I longed to have good male friends, but the boys didn't like me much, so I played with the girls a lot. My brother always had a group of friends both at school and in our neighborhood. He and his friends would play army by the hour. I didn't like to play army, but I was jealous that he had good friends and I didn't. I remember crying on the playground in fourth grade because none of the boys would play with me. I remember wanting desperately to have friends.

* Not the author's real name

Because I did not have many friends, my social skills were lacking. When a boy would play with me, I didn't know how to act, so I acted weird. By sixth grade, my relationships with the other boys in my class were reaching a crisis. I became the object of constant teasing for being "sissy." After school, I walked home in terror. Several times during the year, I was attacked by a group of four to ten classmates who beat the tar out of me. I was different, and I was not accepted in the male world.

Seventh grade was a horror. I was teased in the halls, my books were grabbed from me, my papers were thrown down the crowded halls, and I was ridiculed in gym. My male peers hated me and went out of their way to send the message that I was not part of their world and was not wanted.

At home it was a little better. Kevin, a neighbor boy who had moved into the area when we were in fifth grade, would play with me while we were at home, but at school he avoided me and did not want to be seen with me. I hated his duplicity but was consoled by the fact that he would at least play with me some of the time. I wanted to be accepted by the other boys, to be part of the group, but I was afraid of boys. In my world, most interactions with boys my age meant teasing, ridicule, and betrayal.

As my sexual feelings began to develop, I found myself intrigued by other boys, those I so wanted to accept me. Looking back, I believe my poor relationship with my father, my lack of male identification and less manly interests as a child, and my complete failure to identify in the male world, all contributed to my homosexual attractions.

During my early teenage years, I heard talks on morality in Church settings that I twisted in my brain. It seemed that Church leaders spoke a lot to the youth groups about inappropriate behavior with the opposite sex, but they did not say much about same-sex attractions. From these talks I learned that sexual feelings towards girls should be avoided, but attractions toward boys weren't discussed. This was the early seventies, and the sexual revolution in America was in full swing. I remember being with my mother when we came upon a young boy and girl kissing each other

openly on the street. My mother told me firmly that she never wanted me to do anything like that. The message I internalized was, "Good boys don't do those things with girls."

The teasing and rejection by my peers continued unabated during seventh and eighth grade years. In ninth grade, the ridicule decreased quite a bit, but by this time boys my age had become the enemy. They were adversaries bent on humiliating me. By this time, I had also been exposed to enough references about sex that I had become fully aware that I was sexually attracted to men. I also began a masturbation habit that lasted for many years.

When I started high school, the teasing by the other boys largely stopped. But I had become so afraid of interaction with male peers that I avoided most of my male classmates. Even when I was with young men who seemed to be friendly towards me, I was sure they harbored contempt, that they wanted to tease me but were no longer overtly showing it. I felt isolated from men, and I was sure all men hated me, the same way the boys had always hated me. The constant fear of being teased or rejected stayed with me long into adulthood. It was inconceivable to me that any of my peers would want me as a friend. If they were nice to me, I was convinced that it was out of charity, not because they really liked me.

I remember watching the boys in my high school classes and wishing I could be friends with them. There were two young men that I had several classes with in high school. I knew both of them well, but they did not know each other. I watched in dread as over the months these two became great friends with each other. They hung out together constantly, while they both became completely oblivious that I existed. I became jealous of their friendship. Every time I had a conversation with one of them, I would hear about all the fun things they had been doing away from school with the other. I wanted desperately to be included, but once again found myself on the outside looking in at men having healthy relationships among themselves.

During high school, I had my first sexual experience with a man. What I did not realize at the time was that I was the victim of sexual abuse by a man in his fifties. What I saw instead was that

a man sought after me. Finally, after years of desperately wanting male attention, here was a man whom I felt wanted me. However, I did not have the maturity or understanding to realize what was happening. Nor did I understand at that age that the physiological pleasure responses of the body are essentially gender neutral. But the experience did wreak emotional havoc, and it left me feeling filthy. Nevertheless, I had learned that I could be wanted by men, and I had additional sexual experiences with men while I was in high school.

I was raised in an active LDS family. I went to church every week, was active in my Aaronic Priesthood quorums, received awards for perfect attendance at all my meetings, and answered all the questions in Sunday School. Every mother in the ward probably thought I was the perfect boy. All the boys in the ward, however, thought I was the strangest creature on two feet. Somehow despite the fact that I never measured up to my father's expectations of what a son should be and although I felt almost total rejection from my peers, I did not project this rejection into my belief in a loving, male God. I never doubted God loved me. That was always an absolute. I knew He was disappointed when I engaged in sexual activity, but I also felt He loved me. In later years, I came to know many men struggling with same-sex attraction who feel unloved by God, even angry at Him. I believe I was an exception.

I also don't think there has ever been a time in my life that I did not know in my heart that the LDS Church is true. It is part of who I am. I went to seminary, read my scriptures, and blessed the sacrament. In seminary in tenth grade, I read the Book of Mormon for the first time. By the end of the Book of Mosiah, I knew in my heart it is God's word. The Spirit also communicated very clearly to me that somehow, someday, I would have to tell my bishop about my sexual behavior. My bishop, however, was a college football coach who stood six foot six inches tall and weighed three hundred pounds. He was not the type of man I thought could have any compassion or understanding of my situation. Although he was nice enough to me in general, in my mind he epitomized the enemy male. I was in no rush to tell him of my homosexuality.

During my high school years, I was miserable, lonely, and confused. To the core of my being I wanted love from a man. It was not sex I wanted, although that became part of it in time. What I really wanted was a man who would be kind to me, value me, pay attention to me, and spend time with me, all the things my father never did. I wanted a man who would think I was special and love me. And I wanted a man whom I could love in return. I did not want to be sexually attracted to men. I hated that part of me, but it seemed the more I tried to push the feelings away the stronger they became.

By my late teens I had a few anonymous encounters where I learned how to find men who wanted me sexually. These encounters masqueraded as relationships with men who cared about me. This was the only way I knew to get anything that resembled caring interactions with men. I always left these encounters feeling dirty and disgusting but also feeling oddly accepted and wanted. Combine this pseudo-affection with the potency of sexual climax, and I quickly became addicted to thoughts of sex with men. In these encounters, I found men who accepted me as a man, or at least left the impression that they did. I realized later they did not want me at all. These men were, like me, completely self-absorbed. I was irrelevant. They only wanted sex.

During my high-school years, I masturbated frequently, and I fantasized about those few encounters endlessly. I also started what became an addiction that stayed with me for thirty years despite all my efforts to be rid of it. I became addicted to finding the places where gay men met to have sex. I would go and watch these men. Then I would leave and masturbate to the fantasy of having sex with them. Although I had had the few physical sexual encounters mentioned above, the real addiction was this “cruising,” this constant search for fodder for my sexual fantasies. I was out of control. I wanted to stop the cruising, but the more I tried to stop, the worse it became, the more I would masturbate, and the more frequently I would go looking for more. I prayed desperately to God that I could stop the sexual behavior. I wanted to stop but had no idea how to do it.

My dual life of active LDS Church member and secret sex addict was ruining my sanity. I couldn't sleep nights. I didn't feel worthy to participate at Church, but I was scared to death to tell anyone why. One day, I overheard my mother mention to a friend something about homosexuality being mentioned in the book *Miracle of Forgiveness*. A few hours later, I took my father's old copy off the shelf and put it where I could read it without being seen. In the book, I read that the Church had assigned two General Authorities to help homosexual men. I felt that I could not tell my bishop about my homosexual behavior, but I thought perhaps I could tell one of these General Authorities. It took me many months to gather the courage to call Church headquarters to ask to speak to one of these men. When I finally made the call, the female telephone operator refused to transfer my call unless I told her what I wanted. I hung up.

Several months later I was still desperate and made the call again. When I blurted out my question, the woman was stunned into silence for a long time. She put my call on hold, saying she needed to ask her supervisor where to transfer my call. I hung up again. After several more months and more desperate calls, I was able to speak to a Church leader who said he wanted to meet with me. I went to his office in Salt Lake City a few days later. I thought I would die, but I was desperate. My attractions for men ran deep. I knew my thoughts and behaviors were out of control. I also knew the Church was true. I expected to be given intensive therapy so I would no longer be gay.

When the day came, the Church leader greeted me warmly, chatted with me briefly, and assured me that the "millstone around my neck would soon be lifted." Then he introduced me to a therapist at LDS Social Services, excused himself, and left. The therapist seemed to have no answers, however. I was too frightened to talk with him much. I did not know what questions to ask. I assumed he knew what I was feeling, how ashamed I was about my behaviors and feelings, how desperate I was to not be attracted to men, and that I was there so he could make me well. Mostly we sat in silence. It soon became obvious there was not an intensive therapy

program, or any program for that matter. He didn't ask me about my behavior or my feelings. I didn't tell him that I had a compulsive masturbation addiction and occasional compulsive, anonymous sex. I was too afraid to talk. He seemed to be waiting for me to ask profound and insightful questions.

On my third visit, he gave me a fifteen-step program for young men struggling with homosexuality, which he assured me would cure me. The list included getting up every morning before 5 AM, vigorous exercise, and praying and reading the scriptures for half an hour in the morning and then again at night. It instructed me to attend Church meetings regularly and to surround myself with "the best LDS young people I could find."

Now I had an agenda. I went after it with all the energy I could muster. The program helped me to become more religious, and it led me to develop habits of regular prayer and in-depth reading of the scriptures, but it did not cure me. I continued to have same-sex attraction and to engage in fantasies and occasional homosexual behavior. I began to obsess about eliminating these things from my life.

After I graduated from high school, I went on to college. Within a few weeks of starting college, I knew a dozen places in the area where I could find other confused young men who wanted to have anonymous sex. I loved God and had faith that He would save me from what I was doing. I began to pray more earnestly. I wanted God to take away these "wicked desires." I wanted to be born again. I wanted an Enos-type experience. I fasted every Sunday and sometimes for two or three days before Sunday. I developed calluses on my knees. I read the Book of Mormon so many times I could recite entire pages from memory. But God did not give me what I prayed for. I was still attracted to men. But my cruising did become less frequent.

At this time I knew essentially nothing about the psychology or physiology of same-sex attraction. I thought my problem was that I was not religious enough, that I did not have enough faith in God. I thought if I had enough self-control and became more righteous, I would be able to stop my homosexual attractions and

behavior. I thought my problem was that I just didn't have enough discipline. At that time there were fewer resources for dealing with homosexuality than there are today. Same-sex attractions in that day were generally thought to be sins, and repentance was viewed as the key to make them go away. I tried with all my heart to repent, but the attractions persisted.

When I turned nineteen, the other boys my age all left on their missions. I avoided the bishop. I loved studying the gospel, however, and availed myself of every opportunity to do so. I attended every class, fireside, and devotional that I could. On one occasion, I attended a devotional in which a General Authority said, or so I recall, that men with same-sex attractions who learned to serve other people, became unselfish, and prayed could overcome the attractions. He also said that he rejected the word *homosexual* as a noun. I remember thinking he was trying to be helpful, but that my experience was real and that rejecting the noun did not make me or my feelings go away. But because of his talk, I tried to find ways to become less selfish and volunteered to serve in a number of ways in the community. I was still attracted to men.

During this time I was still desperate for male friendship but felt very clumsy and awkward trying to engage in healthy, non-sexual relationships. It was among the other young men who were struggling with the same issues I was having that I found the most acceptance. I tried to tell myself that I could just enjoy their friendship, but too often they wanted physical encounters and I gave in. Each time I felt terrible and promised myself and God that I would not let it happen again. I prayed and read my scriptures more, and I pled with God to help me stop my behavior.

I also continued to visit a therapist. Looking back, I can see that as helpful as the therapist wanted to be, some of his advice would be considered to be inappropriate by today's standards. I also started to attend a therapy group. The problems of those who attended the group varied: a bald girl who was embarrassed that she wore a wig, a young man who was pathologically shy and was so afraid he couldn't even speak to a girl, a young woman who had been physically abused by her father, another girl with poor

self-esteem, and another young man besides myself who struggled with same-sex attraction. He and I became good friends. He was a returned missionary who had once been sexually active, who was still struggling with overwhelming attractions for men. We would talk for hours. He hated having same-sex attractions as much as I did. For the first time in my life I found someone who understood me and didn't hate me for what I was and who never tried to take advantage of me sexually. I hated myself, but he didn't hate me.

Slowly I learned to stop having any physical contact with men. I also gathered my courage and went to see my bishop and gave him a detailed account of every sexual encounter I could remember. I believe he was shocked. He gave me a blessing and challenged me to become worthy to serve a mission. I wanted to go on a mission. I read books on mission preparation and attended missionary devotionals. I continued to take several religion classes every semester, and I read my scriptures daily. I prayed diligently, and I fasted often. I tried to learn the scriptures inside and out. I met with my bishop, went to therapy, and buried myself in church activity. I read the Book of Mormon over twenty times during these years. But I was still attracted to men, and I was unable to completely avoid homosexual cruising areas and masturbation.

Time passed. Finally, when I was twenty-three, I was allowed to serve a mission. This was many years ago, and perhaps I would not have been allowed to serve under today's standards. But I had a wonderful mission president who loved me and respected me because of my scriptural knowledge and understanding of the gospel. My mission was a wonderful reprieve. For two years I served the Lord with no concerns. I was still very attracted to men, and I did not trust my companions, but my behavior was in line.

When I came home from my mission, I went back to college and back to many of my old habits. I wanted to be loved by a man so desperately I thought it would kill me. About three months after I returned home, I had a sexual encounter. I did not want to have sexual contacts with men, but a few weeks later it happened again. I felt terrible. I tried to forget these events, but I felt a loss of the

Spirit, and I could tell the difference it made in my life. I couldn't live with myself. I was an elder in the Church and had been to the temple and made sacred covenants, covenants I was not keeping. I decided the only thing to do was to confess to my bishop. I was scared of what the consequences might be.

I fasted for several days and prayed earnestly; then I made an appointment to see my bishop. In his office, as soon as I opened my mouth to tell him about my behavior, I began to sob. I cried uncontrollably for the first time since I was a child. I had wanted so much to continue the success I had felt on my mission. I was so ashamed and embarrassed that I had failed to maintain my behavior. I wanted God's love and forgiveness. I poured out my soul to my bishop, my struggles, my successes, and my recent failures. I wanted so much for this bishop to hug me and tell me it would be all right, that God would forgive me and that he would work with me. My desire for a hug had no sexual overtones; I just wanted to feel the bishop's love, his concern, his support, and his encouragement. I had never been so completely open with anyone.

My bishop sat sternly and coldly listened to what I said. Partway through the interview he got up and stood behind his chair—as if he wanted to get farther away from me. When I finished, he mumbled something about not holding a disciplinary council this time, but he warned me strongly that further infractions would land me in front of a council and I would be excommunicated. Then he sent me out of his office. He did not even offer to shake my hand. I felt no love from this man. I was relieved about not having a council but felt the interview was very disappointing. After my confession, the bishop avoided me. When he saw me, he was barely civil to me. It seemed as if he was afraid he would be contaminated by being in the room with me. In a few months the school year was over, and I moved to another apartment and another ward.

During college, I moved into a different ward almost every semester, and every semester I would go in and talk with my new bishop about my struggles. I felt that a few of these men tried to understand my struggles, but I didn't feel that any one of them really cared about me. In hindsight, I can see that as needy as I was,

none of them probably could have met my expectations as to what I thought I needed.

As I was nearing the end of my college days, my homosexual behavior became more frequent and my obsessions more pronounced. I went back to the same therapist whom I saw before my mission. He strongly encouraged me to start telling people I was attracted to men. I was scared out of my wits, but after several weeks of coaxing from my therapist, I finally told one of my roommates I was “gay.” To my amazement, my roommate did not run shrieking from the room. He did not understand, but he did not reject me. He was still my friend.

I am sure I completely overwhelmed him. I was so insecure and needy. I wanted him to accept me and make all the pain I felt go away. He pulled back and told me I was asking too much of him. I felt rejected again. I had wanted this young man not only to accept me, but to solve all of my problems while he was at it. But I also felt for the first time that a “straight” man could know both halves of me and still be my friend.

I did feel like I was two people: there was the conservative returned-missionary who was active in the Church and something of a gospel hobbyist; then there was the gay man who would sneak a look at things he shouldn't, fantasize, and sometimes have homosexual encounters. I was being pulled apart by these two halves of myself. Telling my roommate that I was gay and also about some of my compulsive sexual behavior was significant. It was the beginning of the long journey of merging these two halves of myself into one whole man. Having my roommate know about me provided a huge relief. I wasn't alone any more. This man knew my secret, and I could quit lying to someone. Slowly, I started to tell a few other men. A few times when I told a friend, that would be the last time I saw him. Sometimes my news brought closer friendships with the men I opened up to, but none of them really understood my situation or gave me the love I wanted from them or even sensed that I was desperate for any type of male acceptance.

This situation led me to a radical scheme to get support. I prayed that God would help me stop fantasizing about men.

I got the idea that the home teaching program was the solution I needed. If my home teachers would come over once or twice a week, especially on days I was feeling tempted, I could stop going to the locker rooms and having occasional sex. I shared my plan with my therapist, who agreed it was a good way to get emotional support. He suggested that I ask my bishop to come with me to my next therapy visit, where the therapist would explain my needs to my bishop. My therapist also suggested that we ask my bishop to assign two sets of home teachers, as my needs were probably more than one set could handle. I wanted to be visited. I wanted someone I could call when I was having trouble with temptation.

My bishop came with me to therapy. He listened very intently and said he thought it would be a good opportunity for some of the elders in the ward to offer service. We decided these home teachers would not need to know about my homosexuality, but they could be sincere friends (a term that at twenty-five I still did not understand). I went home and waited for a home teaching visit. No one came. Every week at church I expected my bishop to say something about our meeting with the therapist. I expected my bishop to inform me that new home teachers had been called and would soon be coming to help me. Instead, he avoided me. He said nothing to me about the visit with the therapist. And no home teachers came. Two months later I quit going to church for the first time in my life. I had never had anyone who could have understood and loved me more than this bishop did after my therapist's careful explanation of my situation, yet he did nothing. I was angry and confused.

As I sit down now in my mid-fifties to write my story, I understand how foolish my plan was. I wanted to shift the responsibility of my behavior to someone else. I wanted friendship by assignment because I could not trust men enough to allow any sincere friendship. I was so needy I would have consumed all the time and attention twenty home teachers could have given me. I also know I would not have found any of my relationships with these men satisfying because I wanted an intensity of friendship and association these men did not need and would not have known how

to provide. I would have felt frustrated and unfulfilled. I was also thinking only of myself. In the end, I would probably have still been addicted to cruising and to occasional compulsive anonymous sex. I was a mess.

After a short time away, I went back to Church. I was still filled with frustration at how little support I felt I received from the Church. I was disappointed that my bishop had done nothing and did not even grant me the courtesy of explaining why he did not do what he told me he would do. In time, I forgave him, but for a long time I had a great deal of resentment at how little real help I received from Church leaders.

At the time, all I understood was that again the Church did not have the answers. I still believed strongly in God. Because of the session with my therapist, my bishop knew about most of my sexual behavior. I humbled myself and went to him and confessed all my past behaviors and expressed the desire to set my life right with the Church. My stake president instructed my bishop to hold a disciplinary council because of my repeated behavior. When my bishop told me this, I was sure my life was over. My Church membership meant the world to me. In the end, the council was never convened.

During this time my therapist had me start keeping a journal of my daily struggles, which I turned in to him every time we met. Early in this process, while I was finishing one of my last semesters of college, I was working hard to get a few late assignments finished and to study for my finals. In the middle of finals week, without warning, I had a serious incident and once again ended up having a sexual encounter with a man I had never met before. I wrote in my daily journal about how well life was going and how this man had come out of the blue to sideswipe me and how he had derailed a healthy and successful few weeks. I turned my journal entries in to my therapist, fully expecting him to sympathize with me when next we met about how cunning and baffling my behavior was and to assure me I had been doing everything I needed to be doing to stop my compulsive behavior. To my surprise, when I went back to the next session, my therapist reported that he could tell three

or four days before I had compulsive sex that I was headed toward acting out sexually again. I was alarmed and puzzled. The ten days before that episode of compulsive sex were among my most successful and productive periods in weeks. How could I have been using this to set myself up for failure?

My therapist's response was straightforward: "Of course, you were working hard and being productive. And you were also carefully setting yourself up to have sex as a way of rewarding yourself for working so hard."

I was struck dumb by his comment. I didn't believe what he said at first, but as it sank in, at some level I knew it was true. He went on to tell me that I used dozens of ways to set myself up so I could entitle myself to have sex. This insight was the most discouraging revelation imaginable. Ten years earlier, this very man had given me a list of fifteen things I had to do to be successful in overcoming homosexuality. Now he was telling me that when I was the most successful at doing the things I had been trying so hard to do, I was setting myself up for defeat. I was devastated. My entire paradigm of thinking about sexual behavior was suddenly shot full of holes. I was setting myself up for failure in the very things I was doing to prevent failure. When I was winning the battle against compulsive sex, I was really losing it.

With a few days of contemplation, I realized my therapist was absolutely right in his observation. I was depressed beyond belief. Why fight a behavior when I was failing both when I did it and when I didn't do it? I could see how I used sexual behavior to cheer myself up when I was down and to reward myself for good behavior when I was up. I realized that I was an addict and completely out of control.

On one of my next visits, my therapist had me buy a new book that eventually changed my life. It was *The Sexual Addiction*, by Dr. Patrick Carnes. I read it and saw myself on every page. My therapist also told me about a new support group called Sexaholics Anonymous (SA). He strongly encouraged me to attend the group. I was scared. I was physically trembling when I went through the door to my first meeting. The room was filled with smoke. There

were three other people there, all looking like they had walked in off skid row. Two were older women in their fifties who said they had been prostitutes; the third was a haggard-looking man in his thirties who said he used to spend time with prostitutes. Never in my life had I been in a room of people with whom I was less likely to associate. I think the only reason I stayed for the meeting was that it would have been more embarrassing to leave after walking in than it was to sit it out. As soon as I saw the faces of these people, I was sure I would never be back to another meeting. While I sat there for an hour and a half, a strange thing happened.

As I listened to the stories of these people whom I considered “losers,” I heard them telling *my* story. The specific behaviors were different, but the crazy, compulsive sexual acting out was the same, as was the desperate and futile search to find a way to stop—but I also heard that two of the three had stopped their compulsive behavior. At the end of the meeting, all three of these people gave me a big hug and told me they cared about me and would help me find a way out of sexual addiction.

I left the meeting having felt more love, acceptance, understanding, and support than I had ever felt from anyone before in my life. I felt here what I had wanted from the bishop when I had sobbed in his office earlier and what I wanted when I had told a few friends I was gay. I felt the support I had wanted from home teachers. These people understood completely my compulsive addiction to sex and my feelings of emptiness, and they understood without any explanation. I felt unconditional love. It was wonderful.

It was also terrible. I did not want love from such undesirable people! I wanted to find love inside God’s Church. I wanted it through the home teaching program, which was God’s appointed network of providing love. I wanted it from a bishop and a quorum president who cared about me and understood me and from Church members who supported me. I did not want it from a group of people I considered disgusting and who were very critical of the Church. I was so confused. I felt disappointed in every interaction I had with the Church. I was angry. Was not this the Lord’s Church? Were not the priesthood leaders supposed to be

the epitome of love and acceptance? How could I possibly feel so little understanding from anyone at Church and feel so much understanding from this unappealing group of old prostitutes?

I did not know the answers to these questions. I wrestled with them in my mind from every direction I could think of. I prayed earnestly. Didn't God understand I wanted to solve my problems inside His Church? I only wanted the programs and the leaders to work in my life on an ideal basis the way the Church was supposed to work. I went to my Sunday meetings, and week after week I saw people who spoke about love but who had no understanding of my situation.

I started to go to SA meetings every week and to learn about the twelve-step program. The number of people who attended the meetings grew, and several other LDS men struggling with same-sex attraction joined the group. The twelve-step program was first developed in Alcoholics Anonymous and had been adopted and modified to meet the needs of those addicted to compulsive sex. I slowly learned new ways to think about my behavior. I learned that fighting to overcome my compulsive sexual behaviors only made them worse. I knew this from my life experience, but I had not known any other options. I learned that acknowledging I was not able to win the battles to stop having anonymous sex was part of the healing process. At the meetings I also learned how to curb the force of the lust that was destroying me.

The Journey Away from Homosexual Behavior

There was one concept of recovery as taught at SA, however, that was beyond my comprehension. During almost every meeting I attended, I heard people talking about something they called "surrender." I did not understand what they were talking about. The idea didn't make any sense to me. How can you fight temptation by surrendering to it? Wasn't that what I had been doing for years, giving in to temptation? Then one day on a vacation to San Francisco, the answer came to me in a powerful way. I was walking down the street looking in the windows of the shops as I

walked past. Suddenly I saw a display that included a graphic piece of male pornography. I stopped dead in my tracks. At that time, graphic pornography was difficult to find in most places. I was pulled by that image. I wanted to go into that shop in the worst way. I knew there was no way I would be able to stop myself. I was alone in a strange city, and no one would ever know I did it.

Then I remembered what I had learned in SA. I remembered to surrender. Right there in the doorway to the porn shop, I said a silent prayer, "God, I can't turn away from this pornography. I can't do it. Please take away this temptation. I can't fight this battle and win. God, I give up. I surrender to you my desire to indulge in this pornography. God, you are going to have to fight this battle for me."

It was a prayer of desperation. In an instant, I had an idea come into my head of something I had forgotten to do. The desire for pornography slipped from my mind. I turned around and walked quickly away to attend to my unfinished business.

The entire experience I had in the doorway of the porn shop did not last ten seconds, but it was one of the most poignant experiences of my life. I had prayed for years asking God to give me the power to overcome temptation. I had fasted until my health was threatened. Here, in a moment, I learned that I had been asking for the wrong things in my prayers all of my life. I had been praying, "God give *me* the power so *I* can resist temptation. Help *me* to overcome these desires. *I* want to be faithful. Help *me* to stop this behavior." It had all been about *me* saving *myself*, with a little help from God.

Instead, I needed to pray to ask God to be my savior. He was to be the actor; my role was to give Him my desires and to submit to His will. I needed to follow the twelve steps and turn my life and will over to God. Instead of asking God to meet my agenda, I learned to pray to ask Him to inspire me to know what He wanted me to do.

I had gone on a mission and kept my Church membership by shear, hold-tight, determined, white-knuckle will power. It was exhausting, and I knew I could not hold on forever, as much as I

wanted to. God was the most important thing in my life, and I was doing everything I had always been told to do when I had problems—fasting, prayer, priesthood blessings, and so forth—but my sexual desires would break out every week or two, and for an hour I would binge in some type of sexual expression. After my mission I had lost control and was sinking into more and more frequent sexual encounters. It was not what I wanted, but I did not know how to stop.

But from SA I learned that by the power of God I could quit. I worked the steps and went to meetings. I slowly learned how to let God free me from behaviors I did not want. I still had many setbacks. On occasion I decided I wanted to do things my way and was unwilling to surrender my desires to God. On every one of these occasions, I would quickly return to unwanted behavior. After many such failures, I slowly gained sexual sobriety. It was wonderful. I still went to the restrooms occasionally to look, but my masturbation reduced to almost nothing, and the anonymous sex stopped entirely.

I need to interject that same-sex attractions are not the same thing as sexual addictions. People with heterosexual attractions can become addicted to pornography and sexual behavior, and not all people who experience same-sex attraction become sex addicts. I met many people in SA dealing with various sexual addictions, both heterosexual and homosexual. But when a person who experiences same-sex attraction is also sexually addicted, it is difficult if not impossible to successfully deal with the attractions unless the addictions are first arrested.

Somehow, I had never stopped believing in God or in the Church, despite my frustrations with the Church. I had always loved the scriptures and prayed fairly regularly. After twelve or eighteen months of sobriety, I came to be at relative peace with God. I went to my bishop and again set everything right with the Church. I still had a desire for men, but my behavior had ceased to be an issue.

I prayed earnestly to God that He would direct my life. In my prayers I started to get an impression that surprised me. The more

I prayed, the stronger the impression came. God wanted me to get married. I prayed more earnestly and went to the temple. I received an almost audible answer from God, "Marriage is the only way you can progress off your current plateau." I wanted children and a normal life, but marriage meant sex with a woman and marital fidelity. Not that I didn't think I could function with a woman, but I was not sure I wanted to. I did have minimal attraction. God gave me no answer to my dilemma of how I could get married when my desires for women were so marginal.

I had dated women occasionally for social purposes and to maintain the appearance of not being homosexual. Over the years, half a dozen women had fallen in love with me, but I had not felt much interest in them. I kept waiting for a strong feeling of passionate attraction to come. It didn't. It was pleasurable enough to kiss them, but the intensity was not there. I went back to the temple and continued to pray for guidance.

After a lot of thought and prayer, I found a wonderful girl. She was a little older and had never been on a serious date before I asked her out. I was the first man who had shown any interest in her. She was a lot of fun to be with, and I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with her. We were great friends, and I did feel a degree of desire for her. After several more trips to the temple, I received confirmation to ask her to marry me. I was willing to take a step into the unknown because I sincerely felt I had been led by God to make the step.

I did not approach marriage thinking it would cure me of same-sex attractions. I knew it would not. The young woman I was dating was intelligent and witty and always the life of a party. I was moderately attracted to her and felt she was an important part of my life. I had come to love her. After about six months of serious dating, I proposed marriage to her. Two days later, I told her I had a serious subject I needed to discuss with her before we announced our engagement. I told her I had same-sex attractions, that I had been through a lot of counseling, and that I felt like marrying her was a wonderful thing to which God had led me. I promised her that night I would be faithful to her and true to

God. She heard my words and told me she wanted to go forward with the marriage. Understanding what the words would mean to her life was something else entirely. We were married in the temple. I was twenty-nine.

Several months after we were married, my guard was down, and I went back to some of the places where I knew I would meet gay men wanting sex. I did not have sex. But I was there long enough to realize that my desire for men and the intensity of my sexual attraction for men was still very intense. I was devastated. I went home to my wife feeling guilty I had flirted with temptation.

In six years, my wife and I had four children. We were active in our ward. I still wrestled with same-sex attractions, but I was mature enough to realize that most people have some kind of desire that must be curbed. I was committed to my wife, to my family, and to the Lord. I was keenly aware as I observed other couples that I was not as emotionally committed to my wife as other newlyweds were. I felt my situation was very unfair to my wife. Marriage was a great theory, and intellectually and spiritually I could think through why I wanted to stay with my wife and why that was in line with my belief system. But my desires for male affection and companionship were so strong that it was still all I could do to keep myself from leaving it all and finding a man to fill what I thought were my needs. I continued to fast and pray.

Despite my inclinations, I stayed faithful to my wife and did all in my power to love and support her. My wife was patient with me. My children were a great blessing to me because of the unconditional love which they gave their daddy and which I tried to give them in return. With a young family, I was needed at home every moment I was not at work.

A few years after I was married, I received a telephone call from an old friend from SA asking if I had heard about the new group for LDS men with same-sex attractions. I had not. He said there was a new book out by a woman from England named Elisabeth Moberly called *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, which presented some new theories about homosexuality and how to deal with it. A concise overview of her theory is that gay men need

male attention and affection to fill the deficits they experienced early in life. Men with homosexual attractions usually felt rejected in their masculine roles and had learned to turn away from male interaction as a defense mechanism to protect them from further rejection by men. This “defensive detachment” kept them from having meaningful relations with men.

Moberly suggests the best way to treat male homosexuality is to encourage men to genuinely love each other and to learn to feel and accept this love. She also suggests that for men with homosexual attractions, relationships with women contributed very little to the healing process. The deficit was caused by male relationships; the healing had to come by nurturing healthy male relationships.

Wow! This meant I did not have to fight my desires for men, but instead I was supposed to want men to love me, and it was okay to be loved in nonsexual ways.

I went to the meetings of this LDS group, which eventually chose the name Evergreen International. Week after week, I sat with a group of men who shared my experiences and values and who loved me. And I loved them. Although the meetings did nothing to curb my sexual desires, I could not get enough of the association. For the first time in my life, I was with a group of men who wanted very intense relationships but who did not want to have sex with me.

Evergreen was not a great experience for the majority of the men who came. Most of the men attended two to twenty meetings, then decided their attractions for men were too strong and went into some level of a gay lifestyle. I had many good friends who made this choice. Sometimes I was jealous of them. But I could not make that choice. I could not! God, the Church, and my family were more important to me and to who I was than my sexual attractions. I could no more deny the Church was true than I could deny I was attracted to men. I was more than a homosexual; I was a Mormon. Somehow I had to find a way to stay true to my belief system.

I attended the Evergreen meetings every chance I could. It was very difficult for my wife to have me gone one evening every week

and often half a day on Saturday. I lack the words to describe the intensity of the feeling I had for this group. I had been starving for male attention all of my life. Here for the first time were caring friendships, where I was wanted and welcomed. I was always the first person to arrive for the meetings and was usually the last to leave. I didn't want the association with these men to end. I could not get enough. And as soon as a meeting was over, I wanted to get on the phone and talk with my Evergreen friends or go to lunch with them or go to a movie.

There was also a fundamental difference between my associations with my Evergreen friends and my association with my straight friends. For many years, in almost every interaction I had had with straight men, I was constantly aware that I wanted a closer, tighter friendship than the straight friend did. They seemed satisfied with occasional interactions, usually because this was all their job and family allowed them. My Evergreen friends, like myself, usually hungered for much more frequent interactions and a much closer friendship.

At Evergreen I also saw a lot of pettiness, immaturity, favoritism, and ego trips, as well as control freaks among the men. Like the gay world, Evergreen was a group where physical attractiveness was valued above all else. When a good-looking man came to meetings, the men flocked around him like flies to honey. The men who came were in the infant stages of learning how to have appropriate male interaction and what to value. We had to learn by experience that the good-looking men were often the biggest jerks in the group. We also had to learn how to not be jerks towards our friends.

My Evergreen friends sometimes had trouble setting appropriate boundaries for these friendships. Many struggled, slipped, and learned by painful errors how they needed to establish their boundaries. Some of us struggled only in theory, others in practice. Some readers may feel any degree of physical contact between men with same-sex attraction is inappropriate, but this physical interaction was something we longed for and did not know how to handle. (If you believe masculine men who are secure in their

sexuality are not physical in their interactions between themselves, watch the spontaneous physical outpourings of any sports team that has just won a championship.)

Before this period in my life, I lived in a world where any physical contact with friends or associates was unthinkable. Through Evergreen, I learned that an occasional pat on the back, arm around the shoulder, pat on the knee, or a hug were acceptable and normal ways men interact. I also learned that this physical interaction was completely nonsexual. In time, I learned that a good, brief, tight bear hug with a man gave me the courage to carry on and that I could give the same in return to others in need. If I went beyond that limit, the physical exchange passed the bounds of support and approached the sexual, which defeated the entire reason I went to Evergreen in the first place.

In Evergreen, I also met many men whose lives had been much more difficult than mine, men who had endured severe emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. I learned to feel their pain and to love them for their struggles to try to stay in the Church.

In Evergreen, our ages ranged from eighteen to sixty-five, and the men were from every profession imaginable. I was frustrated that Evergreen did not have a solid meeting plan like SA did, with a program of how to work through homosexual attractions. Evergreen had the saying, "We are not a social club," but their lack of a meeting agenda left this support group to be little else. Yet the socialization was exactly what I needed. Every Wednesday night, my wife knew, hell or high water, I went to Evergreen. I went to be with the men. I'd be on the phone with them during my lunch hour and breaks at work. In the evenings when I was not at meetings, I was on the phone with them. I drove my wife crazy because I was withdrawn from the family—the only place I wanted to spend my time was with my Evergreen friends.

In hindsight, I realize that somehow during the five or six years I hung out with these ex-gay Mormon men, I went through a puberty of sorts. The male socialization process that most men go through during their teenage years as they spend every possible waking moment with their buddies, playing sports, fixing

cars, going skateboarding, hanging out, and talking about girls was something I never did as an adolescent. Instead, I did it in my mid-thirties with my Evergreen friends. I was being socialized as a male into a group of males.

And slowly over a period of several years, I began to realize I wasn't hungry for male attention anymore. For the first time in my life, the insatiable hunger for men was sated. When I first went into the group, I was so needy I felt my desires for socialization with men could never be filled. But by the end of about six years, I wasn't needy anymore. I wasn't desperate for their attention anymore. I enjoyed their attention on occasion and still do, but the hunger was gone.

I also learned a lot about myself by observing the failures of some of the men who came to Evergreen. The group was full of hypocrites. Almost all of the men who came to Evergreen said outwardly that they did not want to be gay, but most were willing to pay only a portion of the price it would take to give up homosexuality. Some were going to gay clubs. Some were investigating the new world of Internet pornography. Some were flirting with the other men in Evergreen, trying to seduce them. Some would call their old boyfriends on the phone. These were men who came religiously to Evergreen every week, but unlike SA, whose program mandated brutal honesty to the group by every member regarding what their behavior had been, Evergreen had no such charge. Lying and deception among the men was rampant. Almost every member of Evergreen had some behavior that was still out of line with the lifestyle they were striving for. I was very critical of these behaviors but refused to acknowledge even to myself that I still had problems to resolve and was often as guilty as any of them of duplicity.

Some of the men I admired most at Evergreen eventually gave in to these occasional habits. One of them had been one of the early members of Evergreen. He had gone around the Church and spoken in sacrament meetings and held firesides touting that he had been healed of his homosexuality. Later, he had a major relapse. His life went downhill quickly from there. His sexual

liaisons became more frequent. Later he divorced his wife and moved in with his boyfriend. I heard later that he was hanging out in gay bars and laughing with his buddies about the foolish people at Evergreen who thought they could change their homosexuality. As I watched this man, I realized he had always been living a lie. Even when he was giving firesides, a member of the group would occasionally run into him in one of the gay hangouts. I had always been very critical of him for this.

I had another friend in Evergreen who was active in the group for many years. He was married with six kids, was relatively happy with his wife, and, unlike many in Evergreen, had never had a sexual encounter with a man. I watched him over a number of years playing unhealthy, sexual teasing games with men. When he was driving in his car, he would search the other cars on the highway looking for good-looking young drivers. He would then try to get the young man to look at him. I went shopping with this man once in the mall and found that he did the same thing in the mall. He was constantly trolling for men. In conversation with him, I learned that his thoughts about these young men were full of sexually explicit fantasies.

Then one day a young man whose attention he was trying to gain returned his flirtation. At age forty-eight, he ended up having a sexual encounter with a man for the first time in his life. His wife divorced him and he left the Church. He quit associating with his friends in Evergreen and moved into an apartment with a man half his age, whom he had picked up in a gay restroom.

I could go on with dozens of stories about other men who tried to find a way out of homosexuality but in the end fell completely into it. For a long time I was very critical of the pattern. These men were pushing homosexuality away from them with one hand and subtly clinging to it with the other hand, with all the strength they could muster. In the process they were lying to themselves and to the group.

I could see this clearly in the lives of the other men. What was much harder was to realize how much I was doing this myself. Through all my years in SA and Evergreen, although not sexually

active, I had certain thoughts and behaviors I clung to. It took a major mental readjustment for me to realize how warped I had allowed my thinking to become in this area. Just like my dear friends who had gone into the gay lifestyle, I was harboring behaviors that were going to destroy me, and like them, I insisted on lying to myself about the subtle power this behavior had over me.

Slowly it began to dawn on me that I could not continue to play this game without dire consequences. I finally accepted the fact that if I wanted to stay in my marriage and get rid of the male attraction, I had to stop playing all the games, not just the ones that were easy to stop. If I did not stop, I, too, would end up out of my marriage, out of the Church, and separated from my kids.

I am very grateful that I had also continued my habits of scripture study and prayer. I began to pray more earnestly and fasted every week about how to break my lingering bad habits. At length I resolved to go back to SA. SA had gotten me sober from my worst addictions. Evergreen had taught me how to heal my relationships with men. Now it was time to go back to SA to get help with my lingering issues.

The brutal honesty of SA was again a godsend. Every week I had to honestly report my failures. I also joined with the group to celebrate the successes of others. I went to SA meetings and admitted my problems honestly. I again followed the twelve steps, concentrating this time on steps four through nine. I did a searching and fearless moral inventory, looking for the corners of my life where I was still harboring immoral desires. Once again, I learned to surrender these feelings, behaviors, and desires to God. Once again, I committed to live my life as God would have me live it, rather than follow my own preconceived agenda. Once more, I found love, honesty, openness, and acceptance as I learned to be the same person on the outside I was on the inside.

I learned that humans are both good and bad, that we all struggle with inappropriate desires, and that even very good men have frequent inappropriate desires. The secret is learning to not act on the desires. Most importantly, I learned again to surrender my struggles with the undesirable and inappropriate to God.

My problem was that I was not always sincere. In this process, a passage of scripture that moved me greatly is Joseph Smith's translation of Matthew 16:24. The verse in the King James Version of Matthew reads, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Joseph Smith adds, "And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments" (JST Matt. 16:24).

I saw each step of surrender as following the injunction to take up my cross by denying myself all ungodliness. This scripture changed my life as I learned to surrender one issue at a time to God. Every time my addictive soul found some new avenue where I could indulge my lust, I would fast and pray and come to the determination that once more every piece of the unacceptable behavior had to be placed on the altar before God, because God asked for everything.

I would ask myself, "Am I honest?" Not always, not when it was inconvenient. But I would slowly have to come to terms with my dishonesty, and I would have to put it on the altar and become an honest man. Am I fantasizing about men? I would have to put the fantasies on the altar and tell God I would not let my mind wander in those directions anymore. Am I going to places that I know are not healthy for me? Am I going into bookstores and looking at suggestive material? "Okay, God, you win; I will give you the bookstores because I cannot deal with them." I quit going into any bookstore alone. I had to put every inappropriate thought and action on the altar and give it up. Nothing short of everything would do.

I need to backtrack a bit here to talk about some things that were happening concurrently in my life. At my first Evergreen meeting, a friend invited me to play softball with the group. I told him, "You don't understand—I don't do sports—that's not part of who I am." In my mind, participation in sports equated with teasing and embarrassment. I genuinely do not like sports. I am not good at them. I told my friend, "No, I'm not coming to play softball." This old friend said, "No, you've got to come and play softball

with us; it is part of the program.” He explained that the ball field was isolated, where other people could not see us playing ball and where no one could ridicule us if we couldn’t catch or throw. Reluctantly, I agreed to go watch the group play softball.

When I arrived, memories came flooding back of junior-high teasing and taunting for my lack of athletic prowess. The team looked like a bunch of jocks, and they frightened me. I knew they were all dealing with homosexual issues, but I was still sure they would tease me. I was scared to death.

As soon as I arrived, a friendly man approached me and asked if I was there for the first time. This was the therapist who ran the softball group. He did not give me the option of watching but kindly pointed out where the newcomers divided from the others for training. He treated me with respect, and at the same time he did not expect me to have any understanding of softball. He showed me how to put on the mitt (which he provided) and how to hold the ball. Then in slow motion he demonstrated several times how to throw the softball and how to catch it. He was a very masculine man who could easily see how bad I was at throwing a ball, but he was not critical of me. He made it natural and easy, like he was teaching a six-year-old boy how to throw a ball. I was thirty-four years old, doing stuff that my dad never did with me, never had time for, and which I never wanted anyway. At the end of the practice, he told the newcomers where and how to buy a softball mitt and what shoes to buy.

Week after week, this coach very gently corrected me on how to hold the bat, how to hit the ball, and how to throw the ball. When winter came, he taught us to play basketball the same way. I learned how to make a layup. I wasn’t very good at it, but that was all right because the others weren’t very good at it either. I actually enjoyed playing sports with this group.

The softball program had a profound effect on me—at least as much, if not more—than the years of therapy did. My time with these men and our association in Evergreen gave me something I did not perceive at the time. Like my overall Evergreen experience discussed above, this interaction helped me socialize into

masculinity. It gave me male acceptance, which I had never dreamed could happen to me.

This, in turn, led to a life-changing event. About four years after I started going to play softball every week, I decided to go play with my ward softball team. To say I was scared is to use the wrong word. Playing with the ward team was so far out of the equation of how I had defined myself that I was terrified! Petrified! Mortified!

I should explain a bit about my associations in elders' quorum. I met with these men every Sunday, but I didn't think I fit in and knew I wasn't accepted. I was the quorum heckler. I just sat at the back and made little disruptive comments to show them that I knew the scriptures better than all the rest of them put together. They knew I wasn't questioning the Church or the teachings, but I was keeping myself separate from the rest of them. They knew I was usually teasing. They did not know how uncomfortable I was with them. I didn't recognize it at the time, but in elders' quorum, like in every other setting where I had to interact with men, I built a wall to protect me and to separate me from the pain I equated with enemy men. The wall that protected me had also kept me isolated from healthy male interactions.

This wall of protection and separation came tumbling down when I walked out onto the ward softball field to play a game against another ward. Everybody in my quorum knew what a difficult occasion it was for me and how scared I was. They did not know that I dealt with homosexuality, but they knew I was tackling a huge fear, and several of them told me they respected me for coming. They were not patronizing me—men in my quorum actually admired me for trying. The men on the other team had no idea of my fears and did not modify the way they played to accommodate my lack of skill.

The first time I went up to bat, I prayed earnestly to be able to hit the ball. On the second pitch I hit a drive that sent the short stop running, and I made it to first base. The next man at bat hit a fly ball, and I ran to third. The next man brought me home. I not only played softball with the ward, I hit the ball, made it to a base, and actually scored a run. I went back and played two or three more games with the ward.

Those few softball games brought down my wall of protection and separation from the men in my quorum, and I never let myself put it back up. It was no longer me against them. I was one of them. I was one of the guys. I was no different than they were. I was no longer going to be teased for failing to meet some masculine agenda. I identified with these men.

After this experience with my ward, I realized that I was doing the same type of thing every time I was with men. I would make some protective comment to establish my identity, saying in effect, "I'm not athletic; I like the arts; and that's who I am and you better leave me alone about it." I also liked to play the intellectual card to establish my separation from men. Again with the help of a therapist, I was slowly able to recognize myself doing this "defensive detachment." In time I came to think, "This is stupid; I don't need to play these inane adolescent games anymore."

I was also guilty of disregarding anyone who offered me male friendship. If a coworker wanted to have lunch with me, I was scared stiff, and although I usually went with him, I maintained a safe emotional distance from him so I would not be hurt. At a subconscious level, I was still in seventh grade, where the only reason any man could possibly have for going to lunch with me was to tease me, ridicule me in front of the other men, and make me the object of sport. I knew intellectually my coworkers didn't feel this way, but my gut fears had continued all these years.

After testing the waters with the ward softball team, I tested it at work. I found that the men I had occasionally gone to lunch with did not think of me any differently than they did anyone else. I saw myself as different from them; they did not think it so. I realized I was at fault for separating myself from men because I was hanging onto the past.

This was a very difficult concept for me to understand and internalize. Men had always been the enemy. Men were what I had to defend myself against. And here I was being invited into a circle of men as an equal. I did not know how to act or react. I was scared beyond belief. Slowly, over a period of three or four years, I got so I felt that I fit in. I was part of the world of men.

This redefinition of myself had a profound effect on me sexually. With men no longer the enemy, my physical attraction for them decreased significantly. The yearning and attraction were mostly gone. I actually stopped looking at men. It was not that I repressed it. I didn't strangle it out. I just reached the point where it was no longer who I was. The macho men I had sexualized for so many years were no longer something I wasn't. The attractions diminished to the point where they no longer controlled my mind. My obsession with men went away.

This is not to say I changed from a raging homosexual to a raging heterosexual. In Evergreen I learned that sexual attraction was not an either-or proposition but was a continuum. Many people have some degree of attraction to the same sex and a much larger degree of attraction to the opposite sex. These experiences moved me along that continuum. My attraction for men greatly decreased, and for the first time in my life, I found my interests in women increasing. For me, this was a major step.

That was some years ago. In the intervening years I have been able to develop close friendships with many straight men. When I was young and needy, I thought straight men were jerks because they did not have time for the intense relationships I wanted. Now I find that occasional interactions with a few good, straight friends are very fulfilling. I am still aware that I want closer relationships than most men do, but as a result I am a better friend. I have had several straight men in recent years tell me I am the best friend they have ever had. It still floors me when it happens, to think these men actually value me as a good friend. Wow, that feels good! I still see a few of my Evergreen friends occasionally.

As I mentioned, many of the men who attended Evergreen eventually went into a gay lifestyle. I think during my time with the group I saw hundreds of homosexual LDS men come into the program. Most did not stay very long. But over the years there was a core group who kept trying, who were committed to the Lord and His gospel. Without exception, every one of the men who kept trying and stayed with the program is now active in the Church in good standing. All of them say essentially the same thing: "Homosexuality is no longer an issue in my life."

These men had had terrible things happen to them. They were outed in public. Some lost their jobs and licensure in professional fields. Some were excommunicated or disfellowshipped from the Church. Many were divorced and lost their wives and children. But those who stuck with it and did not give up are unanimous in saying they have found recovery.

For most of these men, it took five to seven years of intense, healthy male interaction. A few found healing within eighteen months to two years. A few took eight to ten years. These men have largely resolved the homosexual issues in their lives. I have been with them when they have been rebaptized into the Church. I have rejoiced with them as priesthood blessings have been restored.

I know men from Evergreen who are bishops and who serve in stake presidencies who have been completely honest about their past and have moved into a more healthy life. These are righteous men in every sense of the word. This is not to say that Evergreen does not have its problems. Many men found that the program did not have the answers they were seeking. But thanks to those who stayed with it, Evergreen International has helped men in many parts of the world, and a few of the men have stuck with it long enough and have fought hard enough that they have allowed God to heal their lives. Most who attend are trying desperately to reconcile their attractions with their testimonies of the gospel, some with more success than others.

My Family, My Home

Although I have not mentioned my family a great deal in this history, I have been married now for over twenty-five years to a wonderful woman who loves me, and I have four beautiful children. Every night for these many years, even when I wanted to be with a man so intensely I thought it would kill me, I have gone home to my wife. This struggle has been grossly unfair to her. My wife has been very supportive and understanding of me. She knows the depth of my commitment to God and to our marriage. She knew that when I had a bout with pornography or waves of desire, it was not what I wanted. She has been very patient and very loving.

I would not necessarily call ours a blissful marriage. It has been very hard work, and my wife has had to put up with a lot. But there is no way I can describe what sharing my life with my wife and children over these years has done for me.

We have shared the births of our four wonderful children. Two of our children have severe behavioral handicaps that make them unruly in the classroom and a handful at home. We have gone together to sit with our sons in the principal's office and before the juvenile court. We have gone to piano recitals and dance lessons and soccer games. We have gone Christmas shopping together on a tight budget and watched as the kid's eyes beam as they open their presents. We have been in the emergency room together with children with broken bones. We have gone with each other to our respective family reunions and mission reunions. We have gone on family vacations together. We have had fights over our inadequate finances. We have known each other's aunts and cousins and former mission companions and their kids. We have provided emotional support for each other as both of us have finished master's degrees. We have supported each other as the ravages of age have made children of the parents we loved. We have watched them die from cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's. We have gone to ward parties and served in the Cub Scouts and decorated for Mutual dances. We have been together as older aunts and uncles in our respective families have died. We have loved and supported and nurtured each other in all the ups and downs of life. We have shared life.

Although I have at times been embarrassingly emotionally and romantically absent from our marriage, I have tried. We have hung in together for over a quarter of a century, and the rewards are immeasurable. I don't have the words to convey what my relationship with my wife and children means to me. The best way I can describe it is to say that I have a place; I belong; I am needed; I am an integral part of a family. I have a home.

It is almost forty years since I started praying to God to be able to "overcome this temptation," and for years I thought that my prayers had not been answered. Now, with two children having

served missions and grandchildren approaching, I realize God did hear and answer those prayers. Not in the time frame I wanted. He could not answer the prayers then. I was offering the wrong prayers, and I had too many lessons of life I had not learned.

Retrospect

On occasion I will run into one of my old friends who chose the gay lifestyle. I usually find their faces are drawn and lonely, their eyes are darting and shallow, and the pain in their eyes goes to the very core. And almost without exception they are now alone. They are no longer in their mid-twenties and young and good-looking and desirable. And they cannot believe that I am happy, but I am. At the height of my struggles with homosexuality, the Lord answered my desperate prayers and advised me to get married to a woman. Somehow I found a woman foolish enough to marry me. Now, I can see that it was the best decision I ever made. It is a choice that will bring eternal blessings. I tell my wife all the time that marrying her was the best thing that ever happened to me.

When I was young and praying so desperately to stop my sexual behavior, I thought the Lord was not hearing my prayers or that I did not have enough faith. Now I know that He was hearing and answering them all along, but I was too caught up in my day-to-day failures to realize it. As to the promise I received many years earlier from a Church leader that I would soon be free from the millstone around my neck, that too has been fulfilled. Not in the time frame I had expected, but in the Lord's time. The first therapist I met gave me a list that said if I read my scriptures and said my prayers, I would no longer be homosexual. In retrospect, I can honestly say that that advice was the best advice I ever received. Scripture study and prayer are what pulled me through trial after trial in the thirty-five years since I was first handed that list.

Later on in my struggle, I prayed for a bishop and home teachers who would understand me and support me in my struggles against unwanted sexual behavior. Instead, the Lord led me to Sexaholics Anonymous. I attended my first meeting within a few

weeks of its founding in Utah. What a blessing that was in my life. In those meetings I found a degree of love and understanding that I needed and which the Church at that time could not have provided. It was in SA where I learned to let God fight my battles and to allow him to be my Savior. Now I am delighted to learn the Church runs twelve-step programs to help addicts. I also learned to accept love from people whom I saw as undesirable. I learned to love them in return and to value my relationships with them.

I prayed for thirty years that I would be able to overcome my sexual desires for men. The Lord led me to Evergreen, where I could have the intensity of experience with men and learn to give and receive male love appropriately. Evergreen is also where my bottomless void of insatiable need for male affection was finally filled. The Lord led me to the Evergreen sports program, where I finally broke down the barriers that kept me from receiving love from men in my day-to-day associations. The Lord also blessed me in Evergreen and SA to have hundreds of friends who love me and care about me, who have helped me during my times of wavering. These men and women have known the ugliness of some aspects of my life and have lovingly supported me through some difficult times. These men and women have also taught me to be one man, the same on the inside as I project on the outside.

I wanted the Lord's Church to solve all my problems, but when He provided me with SA and Evergreen, I learned that God works through many avenues, that He loves all people, and that the need for mutual love and understanding is universal.

God's Love

Finally, God has let me know that He loves me and knows who I am. I share the following story more reluctantly than I do all the embarrassing episodes of my youth. I do not believe in sharing sacred experiences openly but feel impressed that some who read my story will benefit from hearing it. I have continued to have moments of struggle and temptation, and sometimes I feel my behavior is less than exemplary. Not long ago, I was feeling

discouraged in my life-long struggle and prayed earnestly that God would forgive me and accept my faltering efforts to keep the commandments. A few months later, I received a telephone call from the stake executive secretary asking me to meet with a counselor in the stake presidency. When I arrived in his office, he told me that a few weeks earlier in sacrament meeting, as he sat on the stand looking out over the congregation, his eyes rested on me and as he looked at me, he had one of the strongest spiritual experiences of his life. He emphasized that with the exception of experiences in selecting new bishops within the stake, this was the most powerful impression he had received in all of his life. He then told me the Lord wanted me to be a high priest, that he had discussed it with the stake president, and that he concurred.

I am crying as I type this. The impression given to this member of my stake presidency means the world to me. It signals that God does indeed know who I am and that He accepts my bungling, failing, back-stepping efforts to live a righteous life within the bounds established by the Lord. It tells me that God loves me, homosexual struggles and failings notwithstanding. And I love Him for the miracle He has worked in my life.

Do I still struggle? Yes, of course I do—welcome to mortal life. Do I still have successes and failures? Yes! But in comparison with my struggles of twenty years ago, what I face now is minimal. Am I still sexually attracted to men? I suppose so, if I thought about it. Does that make me gay? No, I do not believe it does, because I have chosen not to be so, because by the grace of God I am living the life God wants me to live and because I don't get hung up on labels. Did reparative therapy work? No. Did Evergreen change my life? No. Did Patrick Carnes's books change my life? No. God changed my life—because I put myself in the position where He could.

And it wasn't one thing that happened that changed me; it was all of it. All of it together, through God's grace, has brought about the results. When I prayed so hard that I would be able to overcome temptation, I didn't realize what I was asking. I didn't realize how deeply I was into it. I didn't know it would take me more years to come out of homosexuality than it did to get into it. But I now

know that, even then, God was answering my prayers. God has blessed me beyond measure.

At this point of my life, the struggles that at one time were overwhelming in their intensity are now mostly forgotten. I remember a speaker at one of the Evergreen conferences many years ago referring to the remnants of homosexual desire in his life as the buzzing of a mosquito in his ear. That is the way I feel. It is annoying sometimes, but that is about all the mental and emotional energy it takes anymore. Most importantly I have learned that the Lord is my Savior, my Redeemer, my Friend, and I am made whole through Him.

About the Author

Robert James (not the author's real name) has dealt with the struggle of same-sex attraction since his teenage years. His story is a powerful testament to the fruits of faith exercised over many years to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Mr. James is married with several children. An active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mr. James has served in a variety of callings.

CHAPTER 23

He Healed My Whole Soul

True Change Does Not Start or End with Same-Sex Attraction

*Katie Merrill**

I was baptized when I was eight years old and grew up in a very active LDS family. We appeared to have the ideal family. We attended all of our Church meetings, we held family home evening every Monday, we said family prayer in the morning and evening, and there was always a lot of missionary work going on with neighbors, family friends, or anyone who would listen.

Despite the influence of the gospel, we still had our problems. I loved my family, but growing up was stressful. Our home was filled with anger and terror as I saw my mother fight for her sanity. She was overwhelmed by having eight children under the age of twelve, and my father had a difficult time staying employed. He loved to play sports or go out with his friends. My mother was frustrated and suffered major anxiety, she did not have a car, and she received little financial and emotional support from my father. We had very little food, and I remember going to school every day without eating breakfast and having only a Miracle Whip sandwich for lunch.

I was the third child and only daughter, and I spent many days and nights as a very young girl consoling my mother as she wept, saying how she hated her life, was upset at my father, and wanted

* Not the author's real name

to leave. I wanted to help her, but I did not know how. I just wanted all the pain to go away.

To escape, I became very independent at a young age and played outside with my brothers, who loved sports. As noted, my father also loved athletics, and because I excelled at them, he told me I was the “son he always wanted.” I liked the attention and wanted to please him. Many times I heard him in front of me and my brothers jokingly ridicule the appearance of women. As they all laughed out loud, I would wish I was not a girl.

I write about these things now because I know that as a child I yearned for emotional attention. I wanted to be loved for just being a daughter or sister, and I found myself trying to do things, like sports, to gain love and respect. I was ambitious and worked hard to achieve, which became the core of my self-esteem. I felt I had to be winning and accomplishing to be loved.

Although we had many difficulties, the principles of the gospel were still taught in our home. I developed a love for the Lord and a firm belief that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that Joseph Smith restored the everlasting gospel in the latter days.

I attended four different universities in four years on athletic scholarships and chose the field of teaching and coaching for my profession. At one university, I met my husband-to-be, who played baseball in college and appreciated my athleticism. We went on dates, playing every kind of sport and respecting each other for our accomplishments. He was the first non-Mormon I had dated. After two weeks he told me he wanted to marry me. I replied by telling him the man I married was going to have to marry me in the temple. He told me he loved what the gospel had done for me in my life and he wanted the same things. He told me he would look into the Church. I moved on to a different university, and while I was away he received the missionary discussions and was baptized. We were later married in the temple and blessed with several sons.

I write about my childhood, my testimony, and my beautiful family because I have carried a secret that has haunted me throughout my life. *For twenty-five years I have struggled with*

same-gender attraction. During this time I hid this dark secret and loathed myself. I have tried to understand why I have this struggle and whether it will ever go away. I have wondered how God could possibly love me and why He still blesses me with so much.

I did not experience same-gender attraction in my early years. I had several crushes on boys and wrote about them often in my sixth-grade diary: “I think I like Gary”; “Mark tried to hold my hand today”; “I wish Mike liked me.” These were all entries on the same day. Even in high school I went to all the dances and dated several young men. I liked men and wanted to get married and have children. But I also remember going on a date and wanting to hurry up and get finished so I could go hang out with my one close girlfriend. My relationship with her was innocent, but I always felt more comfortable with her than with my boyfriends.

I read the Book of Mormon and asked for a witness of its truthfulness, and I remember the Holy Ghost speaking in my heart and letting me know with that sweet spirit that it was true. I loved the gospel very much; I kept the commandments and could never imagine sinning to any great degree.

Because I had the opportunity to attend several different universities on athletic scholarships, I was blessed to become good friends with some of my teammates and teach them the gospel. Some of them were gay, and I would testify to them that it was not right and that there was another way. I wanted to be a good example, and I thought I was. Several friends I introduced to the Church were baptized. I loved being a member missionary, and seeing their conversion brought me much joy.

After my husband proposed to me, he had to go away for a year to play baseball. While he was gone, I played college basketball, and I met a woman who became my best friend. We did everything together. I was excited to teach her the gospel, as she had many questions. She was very affectionate and paid a great deal of attention to me. She was mothering and nurturing, which filled an emotional gap missing from my childhood. She showed me how to wear make-up and do my hair, gave me gifts, and wrote me little notes every day. I really enjoyed her

companionship and found myself needing and depending on her. She boosted my self-esteem, and I felt good when I was around her. She was all I could think about. I had never had a friend that I could share all of my deep feelings with. I loved her. I became intensely attached to her and dependent on her for emotional support. What I did not realize was that she wanted more than friendship.

One day she told me she had feelings for me that were more than that of just friends. She told me she was gay and was in love with me. I was flattered that she loved me, but I was also frightened because I knew the feelings were improper. I was nervous about my ability to keep our friendship pure. I knew that she had been in relationships with women before, but I was determined to show her how to live a spiritual and straight life. I felt I needed her love and did not want to lose her.

The more we talked about our friendship being straight or gay, however, the more our emotions were stirred up, and curiosity and longing were ignited. In time, our relationship became physical. She introduced me to homosexual behaviors I could not have imagined; she also introduced me to alcohol, something I had never touched before. I began to have physical attractions for her, and I felt ashamed and weak.

I started recognizing the power of the adversary as I flirted with danger, and I tried to negotiate or cut deals with the Holy Ghost: “Well, if I only stay for a little while . . .” or “If I make sure that at least I don’t do this . . .” I convinced myself that setting some spiritual boundaries and remaining in this compromising relationship was better than being lonely and avoiding the situation all together.

My self-esteem began to suffer. I stopped writing in my journal, and I stopped reading the scriptures and going to church because it made me feel worse about myself. I quit praying regularly because I did not feel worthy to pray. I felt awful that I was having physical attractions toward my best friend. I started to ask myself, “Am I gay?” “I couldn’t be,” I thought, “I’m getting married!” My heart raced.

I kept getting myself into more compromising situations with my friend and ignored the Spirit telling me I was at risk. I would make a small mistake and then feel bad and pray for forgiveness, but then I would go right back and put myself in the same situation again and make the same mistake and even worse mistakes. I started to drink alcohol to cope with my fears and mask my feelings of being a failure. I was living a secret life and wondered how I was going to be married in six months.

Finally, I couldn't live with the secrets and deception any longer. I went to my bishop, sobbing and confessed everything. I told my friend that I could not see her anymore. I diligently tried to repent and live in accordance with my religious principles.

My fiancé and I were eventually married, and we had several children. We were active in the Church, and to many we may have appeared to have a perfect family. But I was lonely in our marriage. Though my husband and I struggled to create a strong emotional bond, I was not satisfied. I found female friends who would go places and spend time with me and listen to me, friends who were nurturing and caring, things my husband found difficult to do. I blamed my husband for the problems in our relationship and developed a belief system that men do not have emotional needs, so I would choose a close girlfriend instead. About every five years, however, one of these friendships would turn physical, and I found myself again confessing to my bishop.

Throughout these years, I held this secret in my life and felt I couldn't talk to anyone about it, so I tried to figure it out on my own. I asked myself, "Why did this issue of same-gender attraction keep resurfacing in my life?" It was a repetitive pattern—I found that I related better to women than men. I felt safer. I felt more open and trusting, and I was more confident in my friendships with women. This is where I spent most of my time. I started to rely on and depend on that "one close girlfriend" to meet all of my emotional needs. I justified this by saying in my mind, "I will find a friend who is righteous and has a testimony and has no need for physical involvement, and she can give me the emotional support I need without crossing the line." "I will be okay and won't break

any commandments.” “I will work out my life in this way.” Over the years, I tried harder and harder to keep my intense relationships with my girlfriends a secret. I believed in each “special” relationship, that we could have a special fulfilling friendship without crossing emotional and moral boundaries.

I knew the whole time that it was the right choice to be home with my husband and kids, but there I felt so miserable and lonely, and when I was with my friend, I felt so loved. I was always battling to not cross intimate lines. It was a balancing act that could never be won. I knew that by choosing my friend I could not have the relationship I needed with my husband or have the Spirit with me. The moments I was inappropriately affectionate with a girlfriend seemed to be the answer to my loneliness, but such moments quickly wore off. Then I listened to the truth, and it was painful. I was selfish and was living a lie. I wanted to run away and hide. I hated myself for being weak. It was like the effects of a drug, artificial, counterfeit, and short lived.

I stopped having any kind of serious relationship with the Lord. I felt that He couldn’t love me, that I was a lost case. I had too many secrets, and I was too weak to really overcome this compulsion. I resorted to becoming busier and immersed myself in my work. I went in and out of relationships and more carefully buried my secret. I listened to people who would tell me things I wanted to hear, such as, “Follow your heart, Katie!” “You don’t need religion; you are a good person!” “Your belief system is stopping you from living your truth!” As I listened with my carnal ear, I wanted to believe these words because I would not have to try anymore. At the same time, these messages took me further away from the truths in my heart and from being able to listen with my spiritual ear. I started to block out the promptings of the Holy Ghost, whose messages told me that all I needed to do to be happy was to follow the Savior. I grew lonely and depressed and started to reach out more frantically to the wrong people, getting the wrong answers. I became spiritually numb and fell even deeper into darkness and despair.

For a number of years I continued to cycle in and out of improper relationships, sometimes trying to repent. For the most

An intense and exaggerated emotional dependence on a same-sex (or opposite-sex) friend can be harmful not only because it may lead to inappropriate sexual behavior but also because it can distort expectations for one's spouse, friends, family and even Church leaders that may lead to unnecessary disappointment, unreasonable demands and further isolation from sources of help.

part I hid my secret life from my husband, and he was incredibly patient with me. But I was hurting inside and being torn apart over why I wanted to be, had to be, close with another woman. I felt so secretly dirty. I kept putting myself in vulnerable situations, messing up. I could not understand what was missing, why I kept coming up with this same scenario. I kept attracting women into my life who needed me on a deep level, and I needed them. I kept asking myself, "What is it that you are searching for?" All I ever wanted was to love and to be loved.

One day I went on a long hike up in the mountains and thought about my predicament. As I came back down, exhausted, I sat by the river next to a pool of water and thought about what it would take to be happy. I knew that I could not be involved with women as I had been because I knew it was against my nature and against God's laws. Even when I was in a relationship with a woman, I had heard the Spirit whisper to me, "This is not for you." I had been there, and I was miserable. On the other hand, I was so emotionally disconnected from my husband that I felt I was only enduring to the end in our marriage. I knew I could never be alone, but I could not imagine what kind of life I was supposed to live. I felt dread.

In spite of the intense pain in my heart, as I sat by the river that day I felt an overwhelming comfort come over me, and words came to my mind from the scriptures, "Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness" (Alma 27:18). All I really wanted was peace and happiness. I wanted to sleep at night, to love myself, to be happy at home, and to be at peace. This was a significant turning point. I determined I would do whatever it took to find peace in my life.

I was intense about my new goal, and I asked the Lord what I needed to do to find this peace. I promised to do His will. On a business trip away from home, I had nightmares that the adversary was trying to take me away. I was restless the entire night. As I prayed for comfort, the Spirit told me to go home and tell my husband everything. I lay in my bed all night and tried to negotiate a different way with the Lord, anything but telling my husband. I could lose everything, and the pressure I felt was intense. But it did not matter; the prompting from the Spirit was strong and I was going to submit. I did not know what I was going to tell my husband. I was terrified, and I even started rehearsing what I was going to say. I had mostly hidden my secret lifestyle from him, and I had become very good at lying. But the Spirit said, “Stop! Don’t worry. I will give you the words to say. Be honest and tell him everything.”

Steps to My Healing

While a variety of twelve-step programs have been designed to help people overcome addictions and compulsions of various kinds, the following twelve steps helped me to heal.

First step—being submissive to the Spirit

I had begun to recognize the promptings of the Spirit and to become submissive to what the Lord was telling me to do. I was supposed to speak to a large group the next day. The pressure was intense, and I was a nervous wreck. Following the prompting, I left my business responsibilities behind and returned home. I was being obedient to the Spirit, even though it would jeopardize my career. I did not care what I lost; I desperately wanted the feeling of despair to leave me, and I knew it would not go away until I opened up my life. I had listened to the Spirit tell me to go home and tell my husband everything. I was frightened.

Second step—uncovering my secrets

I told my husband everything. I told him how sorry I was and that I did not want to be the weak link in the family. I told him I had

struggled with same-gender attraction since before our marriage, that I had sought emotional support outside our marriage in relationships with women. I again told him how sorry I was and that I needed his help. He apologized for not being more emotionally supportive in our marriage, and he promised to stand by me. Although it has been difficult, my husband has given me his unwavering support throughout my healing process. He is a man of God, and I love him deeply.

Third step—asking for help

I went into my bishop the next day and asked him for help. It was difficult for me to talk to a man about my struggles with same-gender attraction. I feel shy around men and have a difficult time building strong and trusting relationships with them. Although the prospect of confessing to my bishop was very intimidating to me, I prayed for courage, went in to the interview, and told him everything. I tried to explain that I am not “*sexually* attracted” to women but rather that I am strongly “*emotionally* attracted” to them, and that my relationships with women often turned physical. I told him that I love my husband and children.

He said he did not understand how the emotional relationships with women became physical. To my bishop’s credit, I can see how difficult it is for most people to understand how a woman can be so emotionally attracted to other women. I told him I thought I needed to see a therapist, and he said he would help me find one. He referred me to a therapist with experience treating people with same-gender attractions, who helped me to see more clearly what was happening in my life.

This therapist, who shared my religious faith, counseled me that by the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ I could be healed. She said I could make it to the other side, that I could realize my life goals, and that many others had been able to make that transition. However, she said it would not be easy and that there would be many days when I would revert back to the longings that I had relied upon for so long.

Fourth step—trusting the Lord

I came to know that Jesus Christ truly knew and loved me, and that although I had disappointed Him, there was no one greater to go to for comfort than Him. I pleaded for Him to hear me. I had really messed up my life. I needed Him to save me. I learned to place my trust in the Savior and stopped trying to rely only on myself. Before, I had tried to muscle my way through every decision I made, relying only on myself to control my same-sex attractions. And I had failed. I came to realize that I had to let go and trust in the Savior to help me. I also learned to stop listening to my friends, who did not always have my best spiritual interest in mind, and to stop listening to the adversary, who tried to tell me it was okay to be like the rest of the world and that I could never be what God wanted me to be. I had to put my trust in the Lord.

Fifth step—believing that I could be healed and that I was worthy to be healed

I do not know how the Atonement worked in my life; I just know the Lord led me gently, day by day, as I partook of the miracle of forgiveness. It did not happen instantly, but I felt everything shifting for me daily as I kept the commandments and stayed true to my commitments and trusted in Jesus Christ. I felt a change of heart and began to see something different in my eyes as I looked in the mirror. I was starting to love myself again.

Even though I felt my heart changing and the Lord's forgiveness, I still lacked confidence that I had overcome my same-gender attractions. I was afraid of myself. This was the first time I asked the Lord to not only forgive me but also to heal me of my unwanted same-gender attraction feelings. I had never trusted the Lord to heal me like He did those who were lame or blind. I had believed I was a bad person, that I was responsible for my attractions, and that if I asked for the Savior to heal me He would turn me away. I had always felt I had to fix these attractions myself.

Coming to believe I could be healed from my unwanted same-gender attractions was extremely difficult. My belief was small at

first; I just took one step at a time until my faith began to increase. I followed spiritually healthy guidelines and knew my process of healing would take time and much effort. I knew that if I wanted help from the Atonement I needed to do my part in being obedient and trusting in the Lord to help me stay on the straight and narrow path. Gradually a miracle did occur in my life, and I no longer feel bothered by same-gender attractions.

Sixth step—forsaking *all* unclean things

In order for me to be purified and to be made whole and clean and stay whole and clean, I learned that I needed to forsake every unclean and unholy habit I was practicing. I began by having a cleansing or a cleaning-out of my bedroom and closet, which I did literally. I made room for new habits and for cleaner and healthier and more sacred and holy things in my life. I learned to start treating myself with respect, to treat myself and the place I lived like a temple.

Forsaking my bad habits was hard for me. They comforted me like a favorite pillow or blanket. I had acquired a number of habits not consistent with Church teachings. I stopped drinking coffee. I stopped eating out on Sundays, going to inappropriate movies, and watching television at all hours of the night to calm the stress brought on by my hectic work schedule. I stopped going to places where I knew worldly influences would tempt me. I stopped drinking alcohol, which I had come to view as a way to self-medicate my anxiety. I worked on cleaning up my language, especially when I was angry and frustrated. I stopped lying down when I prayed because I was too tired to kneel. I started writing in my journal and reading my scriptures, rather than just carrying my scriptures to church. I started attending sacrament

An honest attempt to deal with the challenges of same-sex attraction, as with all challenges, must include addressing all behaviors, attitudes and practices that prevent an individual from drawing on the Divine resources that provide the only ultimate hope for improvement.

meeting regularly rather than occasionally. I started to attend church when I went out of town for business instead of just pretending I had done so. I stopped living a lie, stopped lying both to myself and to others.

Seventh step—living the law of obedience

As I eliminated bad habits, I was making a solid effort to change the course and direction of my entire life and beginning to trust the Lord and others to help me. I had heard my husband tell how he witnessed during his mission that obedience brought the power of the Spirit to missionaries, and I committed that during my healing process I would live as much like a missionary as I could. If they could do it for a couple of years, I could long enough to get my own addictions under control. Instead of rationalizing that “little” things did not matter, I was strict in my interpretation of the laws, and I listened and obeyed the Spirit. Even when I felt pain and despair and was tempted to go back to my old habits of relying on a “special girlfriend” to give me advice or comfort, I would stop myself and make the better choice of communicating with my husband or going to Heavenly Father in prayer. I got away from going after the quick fixes in my life.

Eighth step—living the law of sacrifice

My therapist told me that although she knew I cared deeply for my girlfriend and that although we had stopped having intimate contact, I needed to stop all communication with her. She told me it might not be forever, but was necessary for now. My thoughts raced—I had committed myself to counseling and to the Lord, but I was still committed to my friend. Now I was asked to make a choice. I had always chosen her in the past. I can see now that this advice is similar to advising those involved in extramarital affairs to stop having contact with the person, but I did not understand this initially. I tried to negotiate with the Spirit, as I felt the promptings to follow the advice of my therapist, wanting to believe that I could just set stronger boundaries with my friend. “Not this time,” the Spirit said to me.

Although it was the hardest thing I had done up to that point in my life, I was submissive to the Spirit and called my friend to cut off all contact. I was trembling and shaking uncontrollably and praying to the Lord, “Are you sure this is right? Because it doesn’t feel good at all!” At that moment I heard the voice of the Lord’s Spirit come into my mind saying, “Worship Me.” “Worship Me,” it said again. The clear feeling and direction given to me was to worship the Lord instead of my girlfriend. He would fill the empty spaces that she had been filling. The Spirit filled my heart, and the Savior let me know by the power of the Holy Ghost that by sacrificing my time and my energies by giving up being with her, I would come to know Him.

Ninth step—worshipping the Lord with all my might, mind, and strength

In same-gender attraction, we tend to worship the person we are attracted to. The Lord is not part of the relationship, because the Spirit cannot dwell there, and so all the validation and approval comes from each other. Spiritual feelings are hard to come by and are replaced by carnal, sensual feelings, as well as intense emotional closeness. Those in such relationships tend to put themselves and each other above all others, including God. I know this is why the Holy Ghost whispered in my ear for me to love the Lord and to worship and to come to know Him. The period when I was learning to love and worship our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, placing them first, was my most difficult time. I had separated myself from the Lord through many years of sinning and relying on friends for my emotional needs. Now, with my communication with my friend cut off and my soul firmly committed to the process of really coming to know the Lord, I went to the Lord in prayer. I had all kinds of feelings—terror, guilt, shame, helplessness, and even apathy. At times I felt like giving up again, but I did not. I kept on trying instead. I wanted to worship the Lord. I just did not know how to do it with my low self-esteem and my fear of falling back under Satan’s influence.

One day my friend tried to contact me by text message. I was sorely tempted to respond but resisted. I was discouraged and sought the Lord's help in deep prayer. As I did so, answers came. I felt I was being taught that I simply needed to do the best I could and that the Lord would make up the difference. This was a turning point for me. I thought of the Savior's suffering for us, and how He put Father in Heaven's will before His own suffering. I determined to follow His example and obey His will, no matter how difficult it might be. I determined to worship the Lord with all of my "might, mind, and strength" (2 Nephi 25:29).

Tenth step—connecting with my divine nature

As I started the change process, my self-esteem was very low from having broken so many commandments and from all the negative chatter in my mind. I had been listening to the adversary tell me over and over that I was no good and that the Lord could never love me, but it was a lie. The adversary had filled my mind with many rationalized excuses for why I had a right to be happy being gay, such as that as a child I had suffered from lack of emotional nurturing from my parents and had been victimized for being a girl and that in my marriage my husband and I had struggled with emotional closeness. But they were lies, too. I had believed these lies for many years, and now I had to go to the correct source to find out who I really am.

Again I went to my Father in Heaven in prayer and asked Him who I really am. Through my tears I heard a still, small voice whisper in my mind, "Thou art a daughter of the Living Father in Heaven, who loves you." That was all I needed! A feeling filled my heart that was overwhelming, a feeling full of love, confirming that I was a valued daughter of God.

Eleventh step—serving others and expressing gratitude

As I made changes in my life, I felt kinder and more submissive, and I thought of others more. I began to see how selfish I had become in pursuing my former lifestyle. I used to look at myself as a

victim, fighting to make life work for me. It was all about meeting my needs. Now my thoughts were more about helping and serving others. I had a great desire to get my home organized and serve my family more as wife and mother. Before, high-power business had been my focus; now, making sure my sons had clean and matching socks became more important to me. I let people pull in front of me on the freeway. I took back my shopping cart and an extra cart that was out in the middle of the parking lot. I got ready for church on time. I said “good morning” to strangers. I bought thank-you cards on occasion and took time to fill them out for friends. I happily provided taxi service for my sons and their friends. I found joy in doing the little things. I woke up in the middle of the night to say, “Thank you, Heavenly Father.” I wanted to thank Him for the new peace I felt.

I had an overwhelming feeling of gratitude and knew I was becoming grounded, that my service to others was in essence helping me serve the Lord, and He was rewarding me with confidence and peace. I realized that we gain much confidence when we give service to others and when we live in gratitude.

Twelfth step—forgiving myself and building godly confidence

As I worked through the repentance process with my bishop, I began to feel clean and worthy again. I felt my Heavenly Father’s love for me, and I began to believe that He would forgive me. Feeling Heavenly Father’s love and forgiveness helped me to also forgive myself. My capacity to love and to understand the true meaning of love extended and magnified. The Savior gently led me through my own life lessons and taught me the power of forgiveness, including forgiving myself. As this happened, my confidence that I could live a clean, righteous life increased.

My Father in Heaven has taken away the burden of my same-gender attraction and made me whole again. He has led me down the path to loving myself and to worshipping Him. I know who I am. I am a daughter of a Heavenly Father who loves me and cares for me personally. In return I have a great desire to serve Him and to return to Him one day.

About the Author

Having struggled with same-sex attraction for more than twenty-five years, **Katie Merrill** (not the author's real name) recounts her own story of overcoming. Significantly, Sister Merrill's story recounts her discovery that the process of change is not only about same-sex attractions and behavior, but also about all thoughts and behavior that lead one away from God. An active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ms. Merrill has served in a variety of callings.

CHAPTER 24

Shock, Grief, and Healing

Dealing with the Tragedy of a Spouse and Parent Who Leaves Home to Pursue a Homosexual Lifestyle

*Rebecca Smith**

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is not a freight train.

Today I'm married in the temple to a wonderful husband. Our marriage is better than I could ever imagine. We are very happy. It is wonderful to be financially stable and able to have a marriage where we work together, make plans for our future, and have fun.

I have three biological children from my first marriage and another daughter we adopted just a few months before my ex-husband left. My children today are all on the road to success. They are moving forward with their lives and have devoted companions who love and support them. My grandchildren are living in homes that are stable and secure with parents who love them, work together, and are committed to their relationships.

This was not always the way our life was.

While I was growing up, I had a wonderful childhood. There were many opportunities that helped me grow and mature while having a lot of fun. I believed that if I married in the temple to someone who was worthy, it would be easier to raise a family successfully in the gospel. Early in the marriage I discovered that raising a family successfully in the gospel without the active support of my husband was very difficult. After my first son was born, there

* Not the author's real name

was increasing tension in our home. I was concerned it was all my problem and primarily my responsibility to work harder to fix the problem so I could find happiness and peace.

My ex-husband was active in the Church and successfully held many responsible callings. At home, life was much different. He would not focus on daily prayer or weekly family home evenings. When my children were younger I had to go to work. He would support me in front of the children then when I wasn't present he would tell them something else. One of his callings was singing in the Tabernacle Choir. We traveled and had marvelous testimony-building experiences. It was my hope that they would help to heal our marriage. My testimony was always strong, and he told me his was, too. My ex-husband was fun to be with when we were with the choir or on vacation, and he seemed to always have a lot of friends.

One of our unending struggles was having enough money to support our family. My ex-husband had a history of changing jobs every two years. Our financial problems were often overwhelming. I knew I wasn't happy and tried in every way I could think of to make the marriage work.

Another problem we had in the marriage was my ongoing medical problems. These were emotionally, financially, and physically draining to all of us. Within a few years I had four surgeries, two of which were brain surgeries due to a recurring complex cyst behind my pituitary gland. I was also diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and had an accident resulting in a badly fractured pelvis. While I knew these problems were not my fault, I blamed myself for a lot of the marital problems.

Then several years ago my ex-husband announced that he was homosexual and was leaving. He left that day and filed for divorce. My children and I were shocked and devastated even though I had known for several years that there were serious problems in our family and with our marriage. Learning he was going to openly pursue a homosexual lifestyle was so painful I didn't know how I would continue raising my children and find personal peace. My life was changed in a way I couldn't comprehend.

At the time my ex-husband left, he was working from home. He was the main parent in the home because I was working full time out of necessity. My daughter was in high school and relied on him to take her to school and to all of her extracurricular activities. When he left our home, he was no longer available to support her in any of her activities. Both my daughter and I became very depressed. My oldest son was living in California and heard about the divorce when I telephoned him. My second son was on his mission and was told about the divorce by his mission president. This began a very tough road for us.

I wish I could describe how devastated we all were. For a long time I had taken full responsibility for fixing the marriage and our ongoing problems, and I took full responsibility for the divorce. Prior to his declaration of being homosexual we had tried counseling and he was unable to be honest with the counselor. When he announced he was homosexual I believed that if I stood by him and if both of us went to counseling, he could resolve his homosexual feelings and we could make our marriage work. I had been truly committed to being a supportive wife and wanted to continue to pursue an eternal relationship.

A few years prior to the divorce, I had gone back to school, completed a master's degree, and become a social worker. With my professional background, I believed this serious problem could be positively resolved. For a time he went to individual and group counseling, but he was clear that he was homosexual and didn't want to change. The marriage was over and I had to deal with it.

When my ex-husband left, in addition to my sons, one of my first calls was to my parents. My parents gave me love and support, and my dad, who was an attorney, gave me a lot of good advice. My next call was to a trusted friend who was also a social worker. She listened to my plight and then instructed me to surround myself with family and friends who could support me. She encouraged me to learn all I could about having a husband who believed he was homosexual.

I was not prepared for this request. At her suggestion I called a therapist who is an expert in same-sex attraction. I met with

him and requested he interview and evaluate my ex-husband. This therapist was very kind and spent hours educating me on why my ex-husband was having problems. I learned that his problems were not my fault and that I needed to walk away.

At that time, walking away seemed to be an impossible task. I have a history of always working to get what I want and frequently succeeding. But being successful in putting my marriage back together was not meant to be. I learned the painful lesson that a successful marriage takes both a husband and a wife who are committed to make it work. My hopes for an eternal companionship with my ex-husband were gone.

I had never had a problem with depression until my life took this drastic turn. I began to cry at odd times and finally admitted I was depressed. After a lot of discussions with my doctor, I finally agreed to take medication for a short period of time while I was sorting out the problems.

The financial problems were considerably more than I could have imagined. Some days I believed they would never end. It seemed that every day I faced a new mountain to climb.

Many of my friends were therapists and were able to be objective with me. They gave me support, while helping me find solutions to my problems. My parents were always available and able to give me encouragement and welcome advice. I had a wonderful bishop and stake president, who were available to counsel and give me positive recommendations when I would take the time to talk with them. Even my missionary son was able to give me sage advice. As he served, he was very close to the Spirit. I wrote him letters where I had to work to be positive and give him support. It was amazing how he would respond with scriptures and stories that helped me to be a better mother to all of my children. My son in California was easy to stay in contact with. We frequently talked on the phone, and he came home when his schedule and finances allowed it. My adopted daughter was a returned missionary; she was married the year my husband left. She continued to be in close contact with me. And even though my other daughter and I were both busy, we would take a few minutes every day to talk with each other.

Even with all this support, I still found that I frequently felt alone in trying to work through my new life problems. I learned to take one day at a time.

When I finally realized I was a single mother and had children who also needed to be supported and loved, I started to gain more control. It was evident I had to take care of myself and help my children. Yet this continued to be a hard time for us. When my son came home from his mission, he brought the priesthood back into our home. It was wonderful. He was able to see what was happening and talk with our new bishop.

When my husband left, we didn't have any home teachers or visiting teachers, and the members of the ward seemed to become very distant with us. To make matters even worse, at this time two of my children suddenly decided to stop attending church. This was very hard for me. My ex-husband was supporting their decision and would often invite them to activities that were not in keeping with the gospel. I felt like he was sabotaging my efforts to raise my children in the gospel. It seemed that my goal for an eternal family was becoming increasingly unachievable.

Early on in my new life as a single mother, I decided that the best way I could protect my children was to love them unconditionally and educate them about what was happening with their father. This proved to be an impossible task. Several times during the first few years I called the therapist for help and guidance. On one occasion I explained to him my concerns about the children and their relationship with their father. The therapist gave me very important counsel and direction that changed my life. He informed me that my skills as a social worker were good and that I needed to use them to work through the problems that were facing me. He also reminded me that I was from a family that was strong in the gospel and that he knew I had a strong testimony. It was at this time I realized that I could rely on the Lord to find a way to resolve my problems. I will always be grateful for his kindness and understanding.

Prior to getting a divorce, I tried to read the scriptures and follow what we were studying in church. After my ex-husband left,

I found that this was too hard, and I couldn't always focus on the lesson plans. One night I decided to just let my scriptures fall open and read whatever chapter or verse met my eyes. It was amazing. My eyes found a verse that answered a question I had that day. Before I knew it, I was letting my scriptures fall open every night. I'm sure the Lord was giving me much-needed advice and strength to keep going.

One year we were given the challenge to read the Book of Mormon in its entirety. I knew this would be too hard for me, so I purchased the Book of Mormon on CDs and listened to it. This proved to be a wonderful experience.

I discovered the importance of prayer and listening to the Spirit. When I was depressed, I was concerned that my prayers were not being heard. However, it was not long before I knew the Lord was listening to me and taking care of my daily concerns and problems. I learned to rely on praying several times every day.

Going to the temple became an important part of my life. While I had friends and parents who could go to the temple with me, it was hard to schedule our time to go together. I was initially concerned about going by myself because I felt like everybody had someone to go with and I was alone. It didn't take very many sessions for me to discover I enjoyed going by myself. In the temple I could listen to the Spirit and gain a better perspective about what I needed to do. I always knew that the Lord was helping me. For the eleven years I was single I worked hard to be the best mother I could. Several times I wondered if I was being effective with my children. While my daughter was initially the only one home, I tried to spend as much time with her as I could. We scheduled time to do special things together weekly. Looking back, this helped us to develop a stronger relationship than we had prior to her father leaving.

Money was a continuing challenge. I was blessed to have a good job as a social worker. When it became difficult for me to pay for private health insurance, I was able to work part time at the hospital and receive insurance, which was a great blessing.

It was imperative for me to remain positive and take the time to communicate with my children. In many ways I was determined

to have the children know how much I loved them and wanted them to be able to set and accomplish their own goals. There were tears, hugs, and fun in our home. It was also important for all of us to continue the traditions we had had when their father was home.

I never forgot that I wanted an eternal marriage. This was not an easy task, because I couldn't seem to find anyone whom I could trust enough or feel good enough about to pursue a relationship with. For several years I went out with men who were either friends or blind dates. These dates didn't show any potential for a lasting relationship. It seemed I was convinced they were all either homosexual or wanted more from me than I would give both physically and financially.

On one occasion I was dating a man and thought perhaps I should agree to work on developing a long-term relationship. I went to my stake president, whom I had known for years, and asked for a blessing. He informed me I needed to do my own work prior to him giving me a blessing. I was initially disappointed that he wouldn't just bless me and tell me what to do. Instead, he gave me the assignment to go to the temple three times and think the relationship through. For my first visit to the temple, he asked me to fast and pray about being married to this man. For my second visit, I was to fast and pray about not marrying him. Then I was to make a decision about the relationship and go to the temple a third time to see if my decision was supported by my Father in Heaven. After I had done those things, the stake president informed me, he would give me a blessing if I still needed one. After following his wise counsel, I knew I shouldn't pursue a relationship with this man and have never been sorry.

One day I was particularly discouraged about not having an eternal companion and was struggling to know what to do. A few days later I was listening to Women's Conference and heard President Gordon B. Hinckley direct a talk to single women. This talk also changed my life. President Hinckley was predictably kind and empathetic. He told the single women to focus on the gospel and become self-sufficient; then, he said, we would find our eternal companions. This talk gave me hope, and I was able to

continue with my daily responsibilities as a mother and at work. My life seemed to get easier, and I knew that if I didn't get married in this life I probably could in the next life. There were still many days when getting married and being successful with my children seemed hopeless. Many times when I chose to ignore my desire to have an eternal companion, I became more devoted to my children and grandchildren and learned to have a lot more fun.

As the years passed, I still had a nagging feeling that I wanted to be married, but I was afraid it wasn't meant to be. My testimony was strong and never wavered, but I didn't know how I would ever find an eternal companion. I knew my desires were appropriate but decided I was too busy to actively pursue a relationship. I kept referring back to President Hinckley's talk and decided if I was ever to marry, my future husband would have to find me.

In 2006, I had a client who met her husband on the internet. She was happy with her marriage and during every session she would suggest I register on the internet as well. I resisted for a long time. One day I was checking my e-mail and was offered a reduced price to sign up for three months. I finally did, primarily to resolve the ongoing discussion with my client. I never believed I would meet anyone. For several weeks I received several matches and didn't take the time to look at any of them. One evening, however, I did check the matches. I rejected all but one. This proved to be the turning point in my life.

I answered the man's initial request, and we began to email each other, then to talk on the telephone. Eventually we began to date. After a few months it was evident we were becoming best friends, and there was more to our relationship than either of us thought was possible. On a beautiful June afternoon, we were taking a drive and stopped at the Manti Temple. It was there that he proposed to me, and we set plans to be married. Words cannot describe how happy I was. To this day we believe there was divine intervention for us to have found each other.

I am so blessed to have a husband who is worthy to hold the priesthood and anxious to be my eternal companion. This is such a different experience for me. Today when I think about my first

marriage I still feel bad it didn't work, but I'm so happy in my new marriage and can't imagine being with anyone else eternally. I can now understand what President Hinckley said about letting the Lord worry about finding a companion while I concentrated on taking care of myself and my family.

I believe the best advice I could give anyone who has a spouse who has left his or her family is to stay close to the Lord by praying, reading the scriptures (in whatever way works for you), attending Church meetings, fulfilling callings, participating socially even when it is difficult, and going to the temple.

It is necessary to learn to take care of yourself. I discovered that if I could take fifteen to twenty minutes every day and do something for myself, I was able to cope more effectively with my daily problems and be a better mother for my children. I would often read, write, or do something creative. It is also very important to reach out for help and find a good support system. This can include family, friends, bishops and other Church leaders, home teachers, and professionals who understand what you are going through and are sensitive to your needs. Remember to work hard and don't give up. Everything will work out in due time. I've learned a lot and am not the same person I was. My testimony has grown and I have been truly blessed.

I learned to work as hard as I could and leave the rest to the Lord. I always had the faith that, with the Lord's help, I could make it through each day and eventually resolve each problem that would arise. The Lord never let me down.

About the Author

Rebecca Smith (not the author's real name) lived through the difficult challenge of having her husband announce one day that he was homosexual and filing for divorce. In her touching and informative account, she describes how friends, family, a therapist, and, most importantly, prayer and faith helped her through the difficult experience. An active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sister Smith has served in a variety of callings.

CHAPTER 25

“Thou Shalt Love Thy Wife”

The Story of a Successful Marriage

*Todd Daniels**

My story of dealing with the challenge of same-sex attraction really starts during my childhood. As a preadolescent boy, I frequently held a fascination or intrigue for certain boys who were either friends in school or who were older. The attraction was not sexual at that stage; it was more like admiration—wanting to be with them or like them somehow. At the same time, I began to notice feeling differently because I was not as good at some things as my friends were. As I entered adolescence, the fascination and attraction towards other males began to take on sexual overtones. The intensity of the feelings increased, as did the level of distraction.

As I entered college, the preoccupation with homosexual thoughts seemed to intensify. I was surrounded by many people my age, yet I felt as though I was alone in the world. From my youth, I had continually asked God to help me with this problem and to help me understand the solution. I had always wanted to serve an LDS mission. I wanted to do it for all the right reasons, but I also thought that if I did, God would help me with my one “main” problem and take away these feelings that I did not understand or want.

* Not the author's real name

I learned a foreign language and traveled to Europe to be a missionary. God did help me to make it through, but the challenges were tremendous. This experience helped to take my mind off my own problems and taught me that there are blessings that come from helping others. Though I learned many things during my missionary service, I did not escape from the feelings of homosexuality as I had so desperately desired. It was almost as if God had more things to teach me, and I was not to be free from those struggles until I learned the lessons He had in store.

Upon my return from missionary service, I reentered college. The homosexual attraction continued. I recognized that I needed help beyond what I could provide myself. I went to the university counseling center to discuss my problems with a therapist. This was a big step, and it was all I could do to drag myself there. I was terrified to actually tell another person.

I swallowed hard and with much effort and hesitation related my story to a clinical psychologist, who patiently listened and asked questions about my relationships with others. He got me involved in support groups that met weekly. The members of the groups were male and female and had a variety of problems from homosexual issues to childhood abuse to fear of social interaction. This therapist came from the old school for treating homosexuality. He believed if he could get me comfortable relating to and being with women, the homosexual desires would fade away. In retrospect, I don't agree with this solution for homosexuality, but I do believe the things I learned in those groups were very beneficial and may have done much to start me on the path to healing.

After my first adult homosexual experience, I felt devastated. Everything I had believed in and the principles I had struggled to maintain for so long all combined to say that what I had done was terrible. I cried uncontrollably that night for the first time in as long as I could remember. I was depressed for weeks. I went to see my bishop, and he began to meet with me weekly to make sure I was doing alright and to see what help he could provide. He supported the work I was already doing with my counselor, and he stood by as an additional resource when I had problems.

Acting on same-sex attraction increases the difficulty of responding to and overcoming temptations by creating physiological dependence, developing harmful habits, breaking down natural hesitation and reticence, and creating interpersonal entanglements.

I turned to my therapist and friends from the support group to help me through the turmoil. I gradually began to get over the pain from that experience, but it was clear the problem was not getting better.

I struggled throughout college. The fight was a cycle from which it seemed I could not escape. I would get back in control, only to fall again. I had many bouts with suicidal thoughts (something I had also experienced in my adolescence), mostly brought on by my struggle. I began to wonder if there really was any way out.

After I graduated from college, I moved to another city, but the patterns continued. I would find myself cruising, acting out, feeling terrible, getting back on top of the problem, and then starting the cycle over again. My company offered an employee assistance program where I could see a counselor free of charge. I scheduled an appointment. As we discussed my troubles, this counselor took an approach I had not encountered previously, but which I now know is quite common in the mental health community. She asked me why I was so “hung up” with the religious rules that prevented a gay lifestyle. Instead of resolving the problem, she attempted to redefine the problem—it wasn’t a sexual orientation issue; it was the archaic system of rules I had accepted and could not consider violating.

In the end, I found that particular therapist was more dangerous than the problems I was seeking to solve.

As I became involved with other men, the struggles intensified. I wanted to be close to someone who could understand me, but because I sought understanding through homosexual contact, the solution was pushing me further from the peace I so desperately wanted. Not really knowing where else to turn, I looked up

“gay” in the phone book and called the “gay help line,” which was the only reference I could find that seemed to be a potential source for help. As I talked to the person over the phone, I told him I was LDS, and he directed me to an organization of members and ex-members of the Church who are gay. He told me that I could find people there who would help me understand how to deal with homosexuality and feel good about myself. I went to a meeting, not knowing if anyone would really be able to assist me, but attempting to try everything possible to get help. As the meeting began, the leader held up a flyer announcing an upcoming meeting of another organization in the area, which he described as very “dangerous.” He and other members talked about how they would need to rally support from within the group and the gay community at large to make sure that they disrupted this meeting because of the things that were to be discussed. I was curious about what kind of organization would arouse such contempt among these people. As they continued, it became apparent that the other organization was also a group of people dealing with homosexual issues—but the reason that group was “dangerous” and must be stopped at all costs was that they taught that people could actually change and leave the homosexual lifestyle.

I did some investigating and found where the other group met, and I began attending their meetings.

The group I discovered is called Evergreen International. Although it is not affiliated with any church, it supports the principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—specifically that God gives His children choices, that He does not sanction homosexual relationships, and that He is anxious to help us with any struggles we might have. I began to meet new friends in this group. New doors were opened. I began to realize that I was not alone in my struggle and that many people had made successful transitions out of the homosexual lifestyle. I was exposed to literature in which others described their personal journeys and changes. I contacted a therapist who believed that homosexuals could make changes in their orientation and who had expertise in such issues, and I began therapy.

I spent the next several years meeting new people in the group and working with my therapist to gradually unravel the confusing bands that had held me for so long. As I encountered the approach that would help me understand and escape the problem, I was frustrated by the fact that the developmental issues had occurred over so many years—and the therapy that would be needed to make a significant change would also take a long time. I kept trying, and I gradually began to understand and resolve the issues.

In my own experience, the change from an exclusive homosexual lifestyle literally took several years. Many times along the way, it was a “one step forward, two steps back” experience. I would find the thoughts and feelings diminishing for a while; then I would see something or someone that would cause the feelings to come rushing back. Or I would simply choose to walk “on the edge” and go back to some of the cruising activity or pornography, which would further feed the feelings and lead to homosexual contact. Critics would undoubtedly charge that this process suggests some kind of self-imposed mind control and that it does not indicate true change at all. The truth is that these experiences were signs of a gradual process to change deeply embedded feelings.

As I sought to change some of the things that were hard-wired in my brain, I often found certain stimuli going down the same pathway that they had always followed—such as noticing an attractive man and translating that attraction into sexual thoughts. However, changes to the natural thought patterns enabled me to introduce new pathways into my system of processing information.

I no longer experience an unbalanced focus on sex—homosexual or heterosexual. Although I experience sexual attraction and sexual fantasies, the attraction seems to be at the optimal level to maintain sexual drive and health, but not to the point of distraction or destruction, as was the case earlier in my life. This is the critical change that I have achieved—not that I have completely jumped from one end of the spectrum to the other. Rather, I have made a change that is significant enough that the feelings no longer trouble me.

What is my current status? Am I “cured”? My success with homosexual struggles does not mean that I will never have another homosexual thought. It means that the intensity of homosexual thoughts and behavior patterns are diminished to the point where the issue is no longer of great concern in my life. Homosexuality and the time and energy it consumes are no longer important factors, and the change I have made is satisfactory. I am at peace with myself. People treated for depression have no guarantee they will never be depressed again, but they can gain the tools to deal effectively with occasional problems. The same has been true for me with homosexuality.

Some men who experience same-sex attraction may not have the advantage of being married, but for me, having a supportive wife has been an absolute lifesaver. In my case, I had made it through most of the change process before I met my wife because I had never looked at marriage as being a viable option until I had resolved many of the homosexual issues that had haunted me for so long. I had decided long in advance that I wanted a potential fiancée to understand everything about the struggles I had so that she could have a fair perspective to know if she was willing to accept me and my past. When I got close enough to my current wife that it became obvious the relationship might progress beyond friendship, I sat down with her and, in an agonizing evening, explained some of the complexities of my life to that point. I indicated that I had largely worked through many of the issues that had led to my struggles, but I still felt it important to be up front with her.

Fortunately for me, I just happened to find an angel. I don't mean that she simply smiled and said that it was all okay. Instead, she didn't understand the issue, and she was very scared by the fact that she was considering marriage with someone with such complex problems. But she wanted to get a complete perspective, and she asked me about my history and just how sure I was about my change. She also made the issue a matter of prayer, and she came back to me a day or so later (during which time I felt a turmoil that is simply impossible to describe) and explained how she had struggled with the danger that I might revert to my old lifestyle.

She went on to describe how, as an answer to her prayers, God helped her understand His tremendous love for me—and how that knowledge helped her to feel that it was possible for her to love me as well. That single moment was perhaps one of the most healing experiences I have ever felt. I received answers and assurance from the two most important people in my life—God and my future wife. It was my wife’s experience that helped me fully realize just how much I was loved.

Because of this up-front honesty, we were able to talk about some things that promised to be a little different about being married to me. I explained that I would need to spend some time with “the guys” occasionally. Many of us who have struggled with same-sex attraction have had difficulty in relationships with other males. To overcome this difficulty we often gather in groups, such as those run by therapists, to learn how to develop appropriate male relationships through sports and other activities. While the time I would need may not be any more than any other husband would require, she had to know that this was important preventive maintenance for me. She also needed to understand that I am probably more sensitive than the average man. That is something that did not go away with the homosexual issues, and maybe that’s not so bad.

She needed to be aware of these things and to be reconciled to allowing me the latitude I needed to stay balanced. Beyond those initial conversations, we haven’t made homosexuality a frequent topic of conversation for a couple of reasons. First, it is no longer a factor in my life, and since it is not particularly important, we don’t need to constantly revisit it. Second, my wife would rather not focus on things she knows were painful to me. She would rather not expose me to things that could potentially bring that pain back. For that reason, she often struggles when I talk to groups of people about the change process—not because she doesn’t see the value, but because she worries about my exposure to things that have been painful to me. As with most issues, she is correct, and her concern helps me maintain a sense of balance. I can only thank God that I found such an understanding and caring companion.

Many people are not willing to discuss homosexual problems with their spouse prior to marriage. Many think that marriage will “cure” homosexuality, so they think that the marriage will actually end the ordeal, while others are simply too scared to discuss such things with a fiancée or wife out of fear it may destroy the relationship.

I would encourage being up front with a spouse or fiancée. This eliminates one aspect of homosexuality that always makes it more complex and more likely to be a problem—secrecy. Homosexuality is for so many like me a “Jekyll and Hyde” existence—no one witnessing the horrifying side except for the other poor souls who are locked in equivalent misery. By eliminating the secrets, we gain resources for assistance. I think that people like me most often find that others are much more willing to forgive than we are willing to forgive ourselves. The fears of rejection are just one more mechanism to keep us from the help that we most need. If there is anyone in our lives with whom we should be able to be completely open, it is our spouse.

Wives can offer help that no one else can—because they understand us better than anyone else. For some wives who find themselves in the middle of a marriage before the homosexual issue surfaces, it can be extremely threatening. Such women often describe feeling “inadequate” because of their perceived inability to completely satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands. It is critical to understand that the issue of homosexuality has little to do with satisfaction in heterosexual relationships. Women in these situations often do not know how to deal with the issue or how to offer help. Even if they have no problems with sexual adequacy issues, they are disappointed that they cannot offer assistance in an area that causes so much torment to their husbands and that is so threatening to their marriage.

The danger and occasional reality that men struggling with homosexuality leave their wives and families to pursue the gay lifestyle is an extremely unsettling thought for spouses. Commitment is critical. In a marriage where both the wife and the husband are totally committed to making the marriage work, regardless of

struggles, it can work. When either partner loses commitment, danger flags go up. This issue was eloquently expressed by a friend of mine with similar struggles: “Our level of love, just as our level of commitment, may not be absolutely constant, but we have made a promise to someone else and to God—and we should not consider such a promise to be reversible based on a periodic loss of focus.” Sometimes the commitment must go so far as to allow for forgiveness—and that is one of the most difficult steps for many.

I am not saying that all marriage failures resulting from homosexual involvement can be avoided, but at the same time, I don’t think that faithful spouses need to be in constant fear of such things. As long as the communication is clear and consistent in the marriage, both the wife and the husband can be good judges of when things are starting to be unbalanced. It is at such points that immediate steps should be taken to increase communication further and to improve the relationship, to encourage the husband to engage in activities that he has historically found to be effective in dealing with homosexual struggles, and to involve outside help from family, friends, counselors, and Church leaders as soon as it appears necessary. Indeed, I would suggest that every conceivable and necessary resource should be used without reservation. Many people do not seek outside help because of pride. In the end, however, the critical question is what is more important: a couple’s marriage, or their pride?

To those reading this book who are single and have never been married, do not lose hope. I know people who have been completely immersed in the homosexual lifestyle and who have never even remembered being attracted to women who then made a change and are now happily married. There are others who will make the transition out of homosexuality who may never be married in this life, but who will be happy and reconciled with their decision—for it aligns them with God’s will and makes their life consistent with their knowledge of eternal truth.

The commandments are a recipe for happiness. By giving commandments to us, God gives us the choice to be happy. Although there are thousands around us trying to “beat the system,”

I do not believe that a person can achieve true spiritual happiness while engaging in homosexual behavior. It is contrary to the laws of God and drives out the presence of the Holy Spirit. I speak from experience.

As I look at my life and the changes that have happened, I am struck by one theme—I am happier now. When I was having significant struggles with homosexuality, I felt like I was on a roller coaster. Sometimes I felt great, but I was frequently depressed because of homosexual thoughts or activity. I felt like I wasn't in control, and my happy moments were always tainted by the fear that the bad periods would soon return. I had two sets of friends, the good ones and the bad ones. I wondered when or if it would end, and my life was a perpetual state of “marking time”—never escaping from the enemy that was me.

My life is dramatically different now. It is not perfect, and it is not without struggles, but I know who I am and I am no longer waiting for the day when I will overcome. I feel like I am in control, and I have put behind me those bad habits that created so much personal anguish. I am confident in my relationships with family and friends, and I have never been as successful at work. Most of all, I have a wonderful wife and two beautiful daughters, and nothing means more to me. I am committed to spending the rest of my life taking care of them, and I find inexpressible joy in that blessing.

I think my wife would tell you that I am a good husband, and because of the challenges I have faced, I might have some added sensitivity and concern, which makes me more attentive and caring than I might otherwise be. I look back on the perceptions I had as a child and remember those things as we raise our children. I will always be mindful of the love that I need to have and *show* to my wife and children. I am making conscious efforts to spend time with my family and to not forsake them for the fleeting things the world thinks are important.

A Letter from My Wife

The following is a letter from my wife, written to those who are struggling with same-sex attraction:

“Several years ago, I met and fell in love with Todd. Everything seemed to be moving along well with our relationship, until one evening he tried to explain to me the troubles he had faced with same-sex attraction. I was taken completely by surprise, and I was not sure what all of it meant. I figured that his problem meant we should stop dating and remain only friends. After all, I would be foolish to put myself in a position where I would be hurt. I had heard of women who were left by their husbands who had chosen to pursue homosexual lifestyles. I didn’t want this to happen to me.

“Over the next few weeks, as we discussed what we should do about our relationship, I felt that the whole issue came down to one point: do we have the power to choose our own destiny, or are we fated to a certain life that we cannot change? I had thought of this question several times before I met Todd and had always believed we could determine our own course in life.

“Some people are faced with difficult obstacles to overcome. Our upbringing or environmental influences make some situations hard to alter, but they can be altered. I strongly believed in this concept, but did I have the faith to believe Todd could change and had actually changed enough to risk marrying him?

“I could not see Todd’s heart to know if he was sincere, so I turned to God. After all, God knew Todd and knew if he had changed. I prayed to God to help me decide if I would be wise to marry Todd. The answer came, and it came with such surety I knew my prayer had been heard. Our Heavenly Father knows that Todd has a good heart and loves him very much. He is worthy and deserving of that love.

“The answer to my prayer reassured me that marrying Todd was a good choice. Many experiences occurred during our engagement that reaffirmed this decision. We have been married for over a decade, and I am more certain now than ever that I am lucky to

have Todd as a husband. I do not doubt his commitment to me and to our children. Our lives are happier, because we share them with each other.”

About the Author

Todd Daniels (not the author’s real name) overcame the struggle of homosexuality to marry and become father and dad to several children. Todd describes his life before and after, including the successful marriage to his wife, who has written a letter to the readers about her marriage to Todd. An active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mr. Daniels has served in a variety of callings.

EPILOGUE

Return to Reason

Drawing Upon the Three Pillars of Wisdom to Address Same-Sex Attraction

Dennis V. Dahle, JD

Watching news reports about the political contests across the nation over same-sex marriage, and particularly the political campaign over California's Proposition 8 and the protests that occurred against religious groups in the aftermath, one might wonder whether those who are on opposite sides of this issue can find areas of common concern regarding homosexuality. Some recent conversations with a friend whom I will call Richard tells me there is hope.

Richard, who is openly gay, asked my opinion about the legalization of same-sex marriage in several states. As an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a supporter of its positions on this issue, I felt some discomfort in discussing my feelings about the issue with Richard. At first blush we seemed to be worlds apart on the issue of homosexuality. As a bishop and stake president of single university students, I have counseled with a number of young men with same-sex attraction in ecclesiastical settings, giving them encouragement and advice in remaining true to their faith. I founded an organization, Foundation for Attraction Research, to help people keep the expression of their attractions within traditional Judeo-Christian standards of conduct, including resolving unwanted same-sex attractions.

I believe that same-sex marriage is not good for people or for society. Richard is a gay man who is married to his partner under the laws of a jurisdiction where such relationships have been legalized. They are raising children together. They support the legalization of same-sex marriage and gay rights. I wondered whether we could find anything in common. Could we disagree but still be friends? Is there anything about same-sex attraction that we could agree on? I found that there is.

When I first told Richard that I was working on a book about same-sex attraction from an LDS perspective I was worried that it would negatively affect our friendship. I began, however, by relating a personal experience that captures the feeling I and the other editors hope this book conveys. As a new bishop a young man disclosed to me through many tears that he struggled with feelings of same-sex attraction. I knew little about the issue, and at that moment the only thing I felt impressed to say was, "I don't know very much about this issue, but I testify to you that the Lord loves you, and as your bishop, I love you too, now let's see if we can find some answers." As I related this experience to Richard his response both surprised me and gave me hope we could find areas of agreement. He said simply, "I think you were inspired," despite knowing full-well that my approach to counseling this young man was directed toward helping him reduce or eliminate his same-sex attractions, not yield to them. I found that Richard supports my efforts to help people struggling with same-sex attractions feel loved, valued, and accepted, even though my efforts are directed toward helping them overcome the attractions. The common ground we found was in helping people in distress.

I have often thought about Richard and his partner, and wondered if their lives would have turned out differently had the general understanding of same-sex attraction been more advanced in their youth. Instead of coming to feel in their early teen years that they possessed a dark and shameful secret they could not share, what if they had been given accurate information? What if a church leader or family member would have asked in a caring way if they had ever felt same-sex attractions, and if they had, helped

them work through such feelings during a time when the attractions may have been more fluid and not affected by sexual activity? What if they would have had access to a competent therapist trained in same-sex attraction issues? There are a hundred “what ifs.” And while we might view these what-ifs as lamentable and unanswerable, a more positive approach is to view each as a starting point from which we can learn to do better. Each what-if also represents a potential area of mutual concern.

And so instead of debating the merits of same-sex marriage with Richard, I answered his question about my views by saying, “You and I have differences of opinion about this issue and we are not likely to agree, but that should not stop us from agreeing on other things.” I told Richard that I wished the public discussion about homosexuality was more focused on health, both mental and physical, subjects often lost in the political debate. Issues of health exist independent of political rights. And indeed, were same-sex marriage to become the universal law of the land it is unlikely to have any effect on matters of health. Such laws would do nothing for the individual who desires to eliminate or diminish his or her same-sex attractions. Moreover, laws cannot change human physiology.

The political debate over same-sex marriage exists in part because we have failed as a society to properly understand and respond to this issue. The notion that same-sex attractions are innate and immutable is appealing to many. It lets everyone off the hook and provides a seemingly universal validation. If innate and immutable, the attractions must not only be unalterable, but natural. And if natural then they should be acceptable. The extension of this line of reasoning is that if no one is responsible for the occurrence of same-sex attractions, nothing could have been done to prevent them and nothing can now be done to change them. And since nothing can be done to prevent or change same-sex attractions, no one has any responsibility to do anything beyond being kind and accepting, something all good people want to be. Such a simplistic perspective represents an abdication of responsibility symptomatic of intellectual and moral apathy.

But if this logic is based on a false premise, people with same-sex attractions will be denied the opportunity to explore their potential to change, denied the opportunity to even consider whether they can develop heterosexual attractions and live in a traditional marriage and family. If same-sex attractions are not innate and immutable, then by accepting and encouraging homosexuality as an equal alternative to heterosexuality, society will have replaced the oppression and mistreatment of same-sex attracted persons with something more subtly pernicious—the relegation of such persons to alternative relationships that they may not have chosen first, or that may not be good for them or for society. One can only speculate as to how much damage has been caused to individuals and to society by the shallowness with which same-sex attraction has too often been approached by both sides of the issue—oppression and cruelty on the one hand, and blind acceptance on the other.

And what then is the higher form of love by friends, family, church leaders, and others to express to same-sex attracted persons—the offering of help, encouragement, and resources to attempt to change, or the unqualified acceptance of the choice to live a homosexual lifestyle? The unqualified acceptance is certainly the easiest in the short run because it is the path of least resistance and satisfies our private and public longing to be tolerant and diverse. But is this good medicine for same-sex attracted people or is it like the mercury-laden calomel (the “medicine” that killed Joseph Smith’s older brother Alvin) of days gone by? Politics alone will not answer this question.

The editors of this book have sought to bring together three pillars of wisdom: religious doctrine, secular science, and personal witnesses from those with experience. Same-sex attraction is a multifaceted, esoteric, perplexing subject that defies simplistic explanations. We can be far more helpful when we draw upon all three sources or pillars of wisdom. Too often, however, people on both sides of the debate over homosexuality fail to thoughtfully consider vital information, either because they do not have it readily available or because it is contrary to their inflexible agenda. By their own limited arguments people paint themselves into their

respective corners of extreme thought. Proponents of gay rights are prone to elevate individual liberties, tolerance, and diversity to the highest pinnacle of moral rectitude, identifying them as basic human rights while ignoring many of the consequences of their actions. Proponents of traditional moral values often only identify the dangers posed by homosexuality, but fail to achieve and radiate personal understanding, or address the true nature of same-sex attractions and the anguish of those who experience them.

It is heartbreaking to hear reports of people with same-sex attraction bearing secret burdens of shame and guilt over a condition that they did not choose, and of being ostracized or disowned by family members if they choose to adopt a gay lifestyle. It is equally heartbreaking to witness the ill-informed and injurious responses of the well-intentioned, including friends and family so eager to embrace and validate those who struggle that they fail to see that their embracement of their loved-one's homosexuality does more harm than good. On the whole, perpetuating the false notion that same-sex attractions are innate and immutable surely does more damage to individuals, families, and society than some of the early misguided efforts to "cure" same-sex attraction through improper means.

There are better ways to address the issue of homosexuality. Foremost among them is approaching the issue of sexuality in general, not just homosexuality, as an issue of individual and public health. The dilemma facing persons who experience same-sex attraction is most often posited as a decision between living traditional Judeo-Christian standards and yielding to one's homosexual attractions. For many who experience same-sex attraction, the pull of their faith alone is not enough. Little discussed, however, are the mental and physical health consequences of sexual behavior. Too often, people do not have enough correct information to be able to make informed choices. Tragically, the information they do receive is often false.

One thing we need more of is solid, honest, academic endeavor. We need to ask and find answers to the tough questions, whether or not they are currently politically correct. To do this,

proponents and opponents of homosexual behavior need to reach out to each other in cooperative, honest, academic discussion and research. Many people who identify themselves as homosexual would rather have been heterosexual, and given the opportunity to “change” they would do so. Would it not lead to greater understanding to address such issues together?

Academic integrity is crucial to the decision making process on both individual and societal levels, and this is particularly so when the health and well being of children are concerned, a class of citizens completely dependent upon us. The current generation of easy divorce and inner city familial degradation should be enough to convince anyone of the essential value of the family to society. Setting social policies such as marriage and adoption based solely on a foundation of individual choice, based on a false concept that any choice is as good as another, carries great potential for harm to the individuals involved and for our society.

Principles, either religious or political, should only be used to bless, never to bludgeon. Academics focused on issues of health can be a bridge between the religious right and the political left. The fabric of society is being torn by many issues relating to sexuality, including same-sex attraction, pornography, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, and abortion. In a recent conversation Dr. Julie Harren-Hamilton, a professor of Psychology at Palm Beach Atlantic University and current president of NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) asked the provocative question in reference to traditional moral conduct, “What if everyone obeyed this one law of God?” This question is subject to academic analysis. The benefits to individuals and society of traditional standards of moral conduct are demonstrable through social science research and the personal witnesses of those with experience.

It is not enough to show the “evil” side of an issue. To bless the lives of those struggling with same-sex attraction we would do better to show them realistic alternatives and lead the way in love. And while more compassion and tolerance are needed on all sides, these virtues alone will not relieve the individual and

societal ills that universally and ultimately result from poor choices. The greatest display of compassion, and the greatest blessing that can be given, is to find and share the whole truth of the matter. We need all of the understanding we can get from the three pillars of wisdom: religion, science, and human experience. To this end we should spare no effort.

APPENDIX A

Where to Find Additional Help

Resources for Individuals and Families Dealing with Same-Sex Attraction

The following information has been prepared by the organizations mentioned.

LDS Family Services

LDS Family Services has fifty-seven offices throughout the United States and twelve international offices in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Mexico, Chile, and Brazil available to provide counseling services to individuals, couples, and families. At a minimum, each of the professional counseling staff holds a master's degree in the behavioral sciences..

Professional counseling can assist members in a variety of situations. Common reasons for counseling include, but are not limited to, marital conflict, parent-child conflict, addiction, abuse, depression, anxiety, and same-gender attraction. Working with the member and the member's bishop is often helpful in changing destructive behaviors and creating healthier relationships. A bishop and member can often determine together if professional counseling might be helpful. To receive counseling services, members may be referred by their bishop or branch president, or they may contact the agency directly.

There is a fee for counseling services.

See LDS Family Services' website for an office near you: <http://www.ldsfamilyservices.org>

LDS Family Services' home office is

LDS Family Services
Utah Salt Lake City Agency
132 South State Street, Suite 100
Salt Lake City, UT 84133-1506

PH: 801-240-6500
FAX: 801-240-5508

Evergreen International

Evergreen International is a nonprofit organization aligned with the principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that offers help to people who want to diminish their same-sex attractions and overcome homosexual behavior. It is also a resource to their loved ones, professional counselors, religious leaders, and friends.

Evergreen is founded on the belief that the Atonement of Jesus Christ enables every soul the opportunity to turn away from all sins or conditions that obstruct temporal and eternal happiness and potential. Evergreen attests that individuals can overcome homosexual behavior and can diminish same-sex attraction and is committed to assisting individuals who wish to do so. Evergreen provides education, guidance, and support to those involved in the transition from homosexuality and is available as a resource to family, friends, professional counselors, religious leaders, and all others involved in assisting individuals who desire to change.

Evergreen sustains the doctrines and standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without reservation or exception, but it is not affiliated with the Church. Evergreen welcomes all people who wish to participate in the pursuit of these goals. Evergreen's Board of Trustees usually includes one or more

emeritus General Authorities and continues to build relationships with Area Presidencies and other Church leaders. Evergreen provides training to hundreds of stake and ward leaders each year.

Evergreen is not directed by any public or private mental health-care agency or individual, nor does it claim to have any professional training or licensing. Evergreen is not a clinical therapy program, espouses no curriculum or specific therapeutic approach, and assumes no liability for any individual's emotional or physical well-being. If clinical or therapeutic advice is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

Evergreen provides referral information regarding support groups, therapists, and other organizations available in many areas of the world, and its website database is the world's largest listing of resources for help with unwanted same-sex attractions. Experience shows that individual counseling is critical to overcoming problems associated with same-sex attraction. Only licensed professionals who adhere to Evergreen's philosophy are included in its database.

Evergreen has over fifty affiliate support groups for men, women, spouses, friends, and family. Most are in the United States, although a growing number are in other countries. Evergreen maintains contact with group leaders, assists in the development of new groups, and provides guidelines and support materials.

Each year Evergreen distributes over a thousand information packets and sells more than 1,500 books. Evergreen also provides materials in twenty languages, most of which appear on its website. Evergreen also publishes an email newsletter, *The Journey*, six times a year, as well as other written and audiovisual materials. Evergreen hosts an annual conference in September of each year in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Evergreen can be contacted at

Evergreen International
307 West 200 South, Suite 4006
Salt Lake City, Utah 84101

800-391-1000 (toll-free)

801-363-3837 (801-363-EVER) in Salt Lake City

<http://www.evergreeninternational.org>

NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality)

NARTH's primary goal is to make effective psychological therapy available to all homosexual men and women who seek change. NARTH wishes to open for public discussion all issues relating to homosexuality.

NARTH wants to build an atmosphere that allows an honest debate—balancing the one-sided distortion that has characterized the discussion.

To achieve these goals, NARTH's ongoing projects and services include the following:

- An international referral service of licensed therapists offering sexual reorientation treatment in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia.
- Research
 - A worldwide survey of homosexuals who have changed.
 - Review of scientific studies documenting the psychological factors associated with a gay lifestyle.
 - Review of the psychological literature documenting treatment success.
- Lectures by respected mental-health professionals.
- Scholarly publications and literature for the general public.
- Literature distribution into college, high school, and community libraries.
- Distribution of NARTH's own pamphlet, "All the Facts." NARTH's pamphlet is a response to "Just the Facts," a publication sent to all 14,700 school superintendents in the country to warn them not to inform students about the availability of ex-gay ministries and sexual reorientation therapy.

- Promotion of teen awareness that homosexual attractions do not necessarily make one a homosexual. Many a teen goes through temporary episodes of idealization of same-sex peers. Led to believe he or she is gay, such a young person may later find himself or herself trapped in an unwanted—and even life-threatening—sexual habit pattern.
- The public must be made aware that some homosexual people do seek and achieve change. The change is neither quick nor easy, but many believe—as we do—that the goal is a worthy one.

NARTH can be contacted at

NARTH
16633 Ventura Blvd., Suite 1340
Encino, CA 91436-1801

(818) 789-4440

<http://www.narth.com>

AMCAP (Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists)

AMCAP's mission is to provide information and support for the Latter-day Saint mental health professional.

AMCAP is unique from all other professional organizations in that its members are brought together, not by sharing the same professional orientation, but rather by a united commitment to the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members who are richly diverse in their geographic location, professional training, age, gender, and specialty come together to edify one another in a spirit of brotherhood and an atmosphere of faith.

The “counselors and psychotherapists” who make up AMCAP come together to share strategies for helping those in their care who struggle with depression, marital conflicts, family disruption, and other problems. Through person-to-person networking,

semi-annual conventions, AMCAP publications, and a website, AMCAP members strengthen one another in their capacity to help the struggling and downhearted.

The spirit of friendship and fellowship, the desire to learn from one another, and the impulse to share treasures of knowledge so acquired has always motivated AMCAP members to assemble and to communicate with others. AMCAP began with informal office meetings in the early 1960s, grew in 1975 to the stature of a professional organization, and now is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Through its semiannual conventions, published professional journal, and now through the Internet, AMCAP is expanding its reach to the world, seeking to make a positive difference for good both for its members and for those outside its membership.

In their commitment to spiritual and professional excellence, AMCAP therapists seek to be informed in their practices by theories consistent with revealed truth and by solid research undergirding their chosen clinical strategies. In their analyses and investigations, in their insights and interventions, they seek to share their findings that the benefit of their labors may be extended to others. The AMCAP Journal, the AMCAP Networker, semiannual conventions, convention tapes and reports, and area networks are among the means utilized to facilitate that sharing of the gospel-based clinical treasures that have developed steadily over AMCAP's twenty-five-year history.

AMCAP also provides a list of LDS counselors at LDSCounselors.net.

AMCAP can be contacted at

AMCAP
2540 East 1700 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84108

(801) 583-6227

Email: mail@amcap.net

APPENDIX B

Introduction to Foundation for Attraction Research

Foundation for Attraction Research was founded by Dennis V. Dahle, JD; A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH; and Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW in 2005 for the purpose of developing resources and conducting research supportive of traditional Judeo-Christian standards of morality.

The book *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* is the first in a series of *Where to Turn and How to Help* books. Books on other topics are in the planning stages. The members of the Foundation's board of directors, all of whom served as editors of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction*, follow:

- A. Dean Byrd, PhD, MBA, MPH
- Shirley E. Cox, DSW, LCSW
- Dennis V. Dahle, JD
- Doris R. Dant, MS, MA
- William C. Duncan, JD
- John P. Livingstone, EdD
- M. Gawain Wells, PhD

Foundation for Attraction Research is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) charitable organization and contributions to it are tax-deductible. The Foundation can be reached and contributions can be made at

<http://www.foundationforattractionresearch.org>

All profits from the sale of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* will remain in the Foundation to further its mission.

INDEX

A

- Abraham, testing of, 33
- acting out, in sexual addiction, 282–83
- adolescence. *See also* adolescents; children
father of concept of, 323
life stage of, 324
- addiction. *See* sexual addiction
- adolescents. *See also* adolescence; children
fostering heterosexuality in, 302–45
immaturity of, 333–34
neurological development of, 333, 336–37
sexual activity of, 332–34
sexual fluidity of, 334–37
support for, 337–42
- adversary, the. *See* Satan
- affliction
acquired, 25, 27
Atonement helps with, 29, 41–42
challenge of, 23, 31
congenital, 23–26
Fall and, 88–89
healed in Resurrection, 39–41
part of opposition, 29
reasons for, 34–37
not result of sin, 34
of same-sex attraction, 27
spirits unaffected by, 29
used to bless us, 31–33
view, from eternal perspective, 28–31
- agency. *See* choice
- allegory, of the cave, 13–14
- AMCAP (Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists), as resource, 483–84
- American Psychiatric Association (APA), politics concerning homosexuality, 164, 165
- APA. *See* American Psychiatric Association
- arm, of flesh, not a superpower, 53
- Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, as resource, 483–84
- Atonement, 63–85. *See also* change; grace; healing; Jesus Christ
affliction and, 29, 41–42
available to all, 64–69, 70–73, 94
choice and, 68–69
faith and, 91–93

Atonement, *continued*
 and forgiveness
 of others and, 79–91
 of self and, 77–79
 of sins and, 69–73, 94
 healing and, 130–31
 about individuals, 66–67
 perfection and, 83–84
 personal accounts of, in lives,
 388–471
 power of, to change and heal,
 3, 11
 remembering, builds faith,
 91–93
 repentance possible by, 69–73
 temptations and, 73–75
 types of healing and, 82
 authority, as source of knowledge,
 17. *See also* empiricism;
 rationalism; scientific
 method

B

Bailey, J. Michael, identical-twin
 studies of, 153–54
 baptism, power of, 46–47. *See also*
 power, divine
 Beck, Aaron, and cognitive
 therapy, 238
 Bem, Daryl C., EBE theory of,
 161–62
 Berne, Eric, and transactional
 analysis therapy, 233
 biological causes of SSA,
 unproven, 149–58, 186
 biopsychosocial model of SSA
 causation, 163

bisexual individuals, have
 increased risk of mental
 illness, 361. *See also*
 homosexuality
 bishop. *See also* priesthood leaders
 accounts of working with
 Robert James, 392–95, 401,
 406, 407, 409–10
 Katie Merrill, 443
 Todd Daniels, 461
 impact of societal trends upon,
 209–10
 love of, 198
 role of, in helping with SSA,
 217–19
 telling, 213
 Bowen, Murray, and family system
 therapy, 240
 Bugental, James, and existential-
 humanistic therapy, 229–30
 Byrd, Dean, and gender
 affirmative therapy, 233–34

C

cancer, increased risk of,
 associated with homosexual
 behavior, 365. *See also* health
 issues, of homosexuality
 causes, of same-sex attraction
 biological, 149–58, 186, 303
 biopsychosocial model of, 163
 choices not changed by, 27
 General Authorities on, 140
 psychological theories of,
 158–62

- change. *See also* Atonement;
 healing
 accounts of, 1–4, 388–449,
 460–71
 chastity, restoration of,
 necessary for, 275
 controversy concerning, 10
 defined, 10–11, 262–64
 degree of, clarified, 262–64
 of heart, 11, 445–49
 possible, 3, 210, 228, 261–62,
 304–5
 matter of choice, 3–4
 motivation for, 178–80
 in sexual attractions,
 distinguished from
 change of heart, 11
 sources of, 3
 spiritual growth, necessary for,
 275–78, 391–96, 442–49
 steps to, 272–78, 442–49
 support for, 180–81
 unpredictable, 210
 chastity, in change, 275
 children. *See also* adolescence;
 adolescents; parent-child
 relationships
 fostering heterosexuality in,
 302–45
 of God, 134, 448, 449
 helping, at risk, 351–54. *See also*
 heterosexuality
 modesty in dress of, 314
 sexualization, prevent in,
 314–15
 telling, about one's SSA, 199–
 200, 300
- choice
 Atonement and, 68
 children have, cannot force
 compliance, 355–56
 freedom of, for those with SSA,
 142
 role of, in homosexual
 behavior, 162
- choices
 causes of SSA do not change,
 27
 those with afflictions must
 make, 25
- choice therapy, 230
- Christ. *See* Jesus Christ
- client self-determination, 216. *See*
also therapy
- communication, about SSA, 118,
 119, 346–50. *See also* parents
- concepts. *See* critical concepts
- confidentiality, 118
- confirmation, power of, 47. *See*
also power, divine
- constructivist therapies, 241–42
- context-specific therapy, 243
- core beliefs, of sexual addiction,
 284–86
- counseling. *See* therapy
- counselor. *See* therapist
- couples therapy, when SSA
 involved, 290, 299
- critical concepts, of same-sex
 attraction, 6–10
- cycle, of sexual addiction, 282–83

D

- dating, prevent early, 314. *See also* sexualization, of children
- dating partner, disclosure to, 294–96
- David, succumbed to temptation, 32–33
- depression, increased risk of, associated with homosexual behavior, 361. *See also* health issues, of homosexuality
- disclosure. *See* telling others
- discouragement, 187–88
- divine nature. *See also* children, of God
connecting to, 448
gained through grace, 83–84
- domestic violence, in homosexual couples, 362–63. *See also* health issues, of homosexuality
- drive*, misuse of term, 258–59, 261
- DVDs, prevent sexualizing influence of, 314

E

- EBE. *See* Exotic Becomes Erotic theory
- Ellis, Albert, and rational-emotive therapy, 237–38
- EMDR (therapy), 235–36
- emotional sensitivity, in men with SSA, 253, 254, 257, 308–9
- emotions, versus feelings, 350–51
- empiricism, 16. *See also* authority; rationalism; scientific method

- endowment, power of, 47–48. *See also* power, divine
- Erickson, Eric, and stages of life span, 324
- eternal marriage. *See* marriage
- eternal perspective, 28–31
- Evergreen International
accounts of, 418–23, 428–29, 463–64
as resource, 480–82
- existential predicament, 17–18
- existential therapy, 229
- Exotic Becomes Erotic theory, 161–62

F

- faith, 86–102
without answers, 87–88, 89
Atonement and, 91–93
Christ is finisher of, 100–101
God's nature and, 86–87
humility and, 96–100
leads to source of love, 90
redemptive, 90
to resolve problems, 459
SSA and, story of, 388–434
a superpower, 49–50
- family, eternal happiness and, 58–59
- “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 46, 304
- family system therapy, 240
- fasting, for children, 318–19
- fathers, advice for
to help daughters, 309
to help sons, 307–9

- feelings
 control of, beyond us, 351
 emotions versus, 350–51
 handling your own, 350–51
- Foa, Edna, and prolonged
 exposure therapy, 235–36
- forgiveness. *See also* Atonement
 of others, 79–91
 of self, 77–79, 449
 of sins, 69–73
- Foundation for Attraction
 Research, 107, 472, 485
- Frankl, Viktor, and logotherapy,
 229–30
- friends, telling, about one's SSA,
 200
- friendship, healthy
 disclosure may help develop,
 192–93, 202–203
 encourage same-sex, in
 childhood, 313
 people with SSA need to
 develop, 184–85, 299
- G**
- gay*
 defined, 11–12
 as label, 106
 misunderstanding of term,
 256–58
- gays
 have increased risk of mental
 illness, 361. *See* health
 issues, of homosexuality;
 homosexuality
 promiscuity of, 364–65
- gender, an eternal attribute, 8, 134,
 304
- gender-affirmative therapy, 233–34
- gender identity, 325–27, 335–37.
See also children; gender-
 nonconforming behavior
- gender-nonconforming behavior,
 303, 327. *See also* children;
 gender identity
- gender wholeness therapy, 232–33
- General Authorities
 on Atonement, 63–85
 on causes of SSA, 140
 love of, for persons dealing
 with SSA, 105–6, 139
 on same-sex attraction, 138–45
 study words of, 108
 on helping those with SSA,
 142–43
- Glasser, William, and choice
 therapy, 230
- God. *See also* Jesus Christ
 afflictions and, 31–33
 children of,
 love of, 4, 90, 432–33
 nature of, 86–87, 304
 Satan is cast out by, 73–74
 truths about, 58
 worship of, is step to healing,
 447
- grace. *See also* Atonement
 and divine nature, 83–84
 makes up the difference, 448
- grief
 at losing husband to
 homosexual lifestyle,
 451–59

- grief, *continued*
 of parents of children with
 SSA, 358
- H**
- Hall, Stanley, father of
 adolescence, 323
- Hamer, Dean, genetic study of,
 154–56
- happiness. *See* plan for happiness
- healing. *See also* Atonement;
 change; heart, change of
 and Atonement, 82
 defined, 12
 difference between spiritual
 and physical, 130–31
 and forgiveness, 81
 personal accounts of, 388–471
 priesthood power and, 130–31
 Savior’s power of, 130–31
 therapy and, 131–32
- health issues, of homosexuality,
 474. *See also* sex,
 unprotected
 mental illnesses associated
 with, 328, 361–67
 need to address, 474
 physical illnesses associated
 with, 328, 332–33, 367
- heart, change of, 11, 445–49. *See
 also* Atonement
- Hershberger, Scott, and analysis of
 Spitzer’s data, 166–67
- heterosexuality
 default program for humans,
 303
 encouraging, in children, 302–
 45. *See also* children
- HIV/AIDS, risks of, associated
 with homosexual behavior,
 366–67. *See also* health
 issues, of homosexuality
- hole, filling the, 56
- Holy Spirit, heals if submit to, 442
- homophobia, 149–50
- homosexuality. *See also* gays;
 homosexual men and
 women; labels; lesbians;
 same-sex attraction
 applying wisdom to issues of,
 472–78
 behavior of, a sin, 7, 133
 changeable, 168, 228, 474
 complex issue, 2, 349
 education of children about, 199
 mental illnesses associated
 with, 328, 361–67
 message of acceptability of,
 207–10
 misunderstanding of term,
 256–58, 327
 need to address health issues
 of, 474
 physical illnesses associated
 with, 328, 332–33
 scientific research on, 149–72
- homosexual men and women. *See
 also* gays; homosexuality;
 lesbians; same-sex attraction
 have increased mental health
 risks of
 depression, 361

homosexual men and women,
continued

mood disorders, 362
psychopathologies, 361
substance abuse, 362, 363,
367
suicidality, 361, 362

have increased physical health
risks of
cancer, 365
HIV/AIDS, 366–67
parasitic and other intestinal
infections, 366
sexually transmitted
diseases, 365, 366
intentional infection of others
by, 368–69
reasons for higher rates of
disease and death of,
369–71
shorter lifespan of, 370

Hughes, John, addiction study of,
280

humanistic therapy, 229–30

humility

in disclosing to bishop, 198
weakness and, 96–100

I

identity

as children of God, 134, 448,
449
confusion in gender, 335–37
development of healthy, a
process, 324–28
feminine vs. masculine, 185–86
gender, 325–27, 335–37

implosive therapy, 235–36

infection, intentional, of

homosexual men, 368–69.
See also homosexual men
and women

interactional theory, of

homosexuality, 161–62

Internet, prevent sexualizing

influence of, 314. *See also*
sexualization, of children

interpersonal therapy, 233–34

intervention, religious, 132–33,
217–19. *See also* therapy

intimacy, overcoming fear of,
293–94

isolation, feeling of

account of overcoming, 400,
426–28

in development of SSA, 269–
70, 274–75

help needed in overcoming,
298–99

J

Jesus Christ. *See also* Atonement;
God

as finisher of faith, 100–101

healing power of, 130–31

love of, 67

makes up the difference, 448

succors the suffering, 75–76

K

knowledge, sources of. *See also*
three pillars of wisdom
authority as, 17

knowledge, sources of, *continued*
 empiricism as, 16
 rationalism as, 16
 revelation, about SSA, 122–28
 scientific method as, 16, 122–24,
 128–30
 Kosterlitz, Hans, addiction study
 of, 280

L

labels, 2, 106, 134, 335
 Lazarus, Arnold, and technical
 eclectic therapy, 243
 LDS Family Services, as resource,
 479–80
lesbian, defined, 11–12
 lesbians. *See also* homosexuality;
 homosexual men and
 women; same-sex attraction
 bacterial vaginosis, have
 increased risk of, 365
 hepatitis B and C, have
 increased risk of, 365
 substance abuse, have
 increased risk of, 365
 LeVay, Simon, brain research of,
 150–53
 life experiences, differences
 between women and men
 with SSA, 173–74
 lifespan, shorter, result of
 homosexual behavior, 370.
See also homosexual men
 and women
 logotherapy, 230
 Lord. *See* God; Jesus Christ

love
 child with SSA always, 347
 of General Authorities, 105–6
 looking for, in wrong places, 90
 sandwich, around negative
 feelings, 347–48
 showing God's, for those with
 SSA, 103–20, 356–58,
 475–78

M

marriage
 accounts of
 Rebecca Smith, 451–53,
 457–59
 Robert James, 416–17,
 429–30
 Todd Daniels and wife,
 465–72
 best for children, 376–77,
 378–79
 challenges to expect in, with
 SSA partner, 296–98
 defending, appropriately,
 379–81
 eternal, essential, 37–39
 influence of parents', on sexual
 orientation of children,
 312–13
 not a solution, 107, 143–44,
 292–93, 349, 416
 promise of, to all worthy
 members, 143–44
 redefining, perils of, 377–79
 same-sex, 9, 375, 474–75

- Matheson, David, and gender wholeness therapy, 232–33
- meaning, assigned to experiences, 259–61
- Meichenbaum, Donald, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, 238–39
- men, with SSA, differences from women, 173–91
- Minuchin, Salvador, and structural therapy, 240
- misconceptions, of SSA, 2. *See also* Satan
- mission, accounts of serving a, 406, 461
- modesty, helps prevent early sexualization, 314. *See also* sexualization, of children
- mood disorders, increased risk of, associated with homosexual behavior, 362. *See also* health issues, of homosexuality
- moral agency, teach at home, 317–18
- mothers. *See also* parent-child relationships; parents
to help daughters, 311–12
to help sons, 309–11
- motivation, for change, 178–80
- N**
- narrative therapists, 241–42
- NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality), as resource, 482–83
- natural man, 83
- nature, divine. *See* divine nature
- neurological development, of teens, 333, 336–37
- Nicolosi, Joseph, and reparative therapy, 227–28
- O**
- opposition
affliction and, 29
power and, 51–53
- outcomes, of therapy for SSA, 164–67
- overfocus, in development of SSA and change, 268, 272–74
- overinterpretation, in development of SSA and change, 268, 272–74
- P**
- parable of two keys, 38–39
- parasitic and other intestinal infections, increased risk of, associated with homosexual behavior, 366. *See also* health issues, of homosexuality
- parent-child relationships, need for healthy, 307–12. *See also* fathers; mothers; parents
- parents. *See also* fathers; mothers; parent-child relationships
fast for children, 318–19
grief of, with child with SSA, 358
pray for children, 318–19

parents, *continued*
 recommendations for, to
 respond to SSA, 346–67
 telling, about one's SSA, 194–
 96, 212–13
 pathways, into SSA, 186–87,
 264–72
 peace, finding, 441–49, 452
 peer bullying, 160, 399–400
 peers, role of, in homosexual
 development, 160. *See also*
 peer bullying
 perfection, and the Atonement,
 83–84
 perfectionism, in men with SSA,
 254, 257
 Perls, Fritz, and gestalt therapy,
 231–33
 person-centered therapy, 230–31
 Pillard, Richard C., identical-twins
 study of, 153–54
 pillars of wisdom, three, 475, 478
 plan for happiness, 45–46
 Plato's allegory of the cave, 13–14
 power, divine
 of agency, 50–51
 arm of flesh not source of, 53
 baptism and, 46–47
 confirmation and, 47
 earth's education in, 50–51
 endowment and, 47–48
 faith, a, 49–50
 of procreation, 56–59
 scriptures, source of, 54–56
 sealing and, 48
 prayer, for children, 318–19

priesthood leaders. *See also* bishop
 can support a couple when SSA
 involved, 299
 role of, in helping with SSA,
 217–19
 telling, 197–99
 prolonged exposure therapy, 235–36
 promiscuity, of homosexual men,
 364–65. *See also* health
 issues, of homosexuality
 psychoanalytic theory, of
 homosexuality, 158
 psychoanalytic therapy, 226–28
 psychodynamic therapy, 226–28
 psychological theories of
 homosexuality, 158–62
 psychopathologies, increased
 risk of, associated with
 homosexual behavior, 361.
 See also health issues, of
 homosexuality
 psychotherapy. *See* therapy
 psychotherapy integration, 242–43

R

rationalism, as source of
 knowledge, 16. *See also*
 authority; empiricism;
 scientific method
 reality therapy, 230
 relationships, of people with SSA,
 182–84. *See also* parent-child
 relationships
 religious intervention. *See*
 intervention

- religious turmoil, in development of SSA, 271–72
- reparative therapy, 227–28
- repentance, 395, 94–96. *See also* Atonement; change
- research, scientific
- deletion of diagnosis and, 164
 - on homosexuality, 149–72, 305
 - on psychological treatment, 163–69
 - repression of, 15
- resources, for SSA issues. *See also* therapy
- AMCAP (Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists), 483–84
 - Evergreen International, 480–82
 - Foundation for Attraction Research, 485
 - LDS Family Services, 479–80
 - NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality), 482–83
 - Sexaholics Anonymous (SA), account of, 411–15, 423
- Resurrection
- afflictions healed during, 39–41
 - restoration and, 40
- revelation, source of truth about SSA, 122–28. *See also* knowledge, sources of; three pillars, of wisdom
- ritualization, in sexual addiction, 282
- Robinson, Jeffrey, and context-specific therapy, 243
- Rogers, Carl, and client-centered therapy, 230–31
- ## S
- SA. *See* Sexaholics Anonymous
- same-sex attraction (SSA). *See also* homosexuality; gay; labels; lesbian
- accounts of change from, 1–4, 388–449, 460–471
 - alone is not a sin, 7, 94, 133, 141, 144, 349
 - causes of
 - biological, 149–58, 186, 303
 - biopsychosocial model of, 163
 - choices not changed by, 27
 - General Authorities on, 140
 - psychological theories of, 158–62
 - changeable, 168, 210, 228, 262, 304–5, 474
 - comparison of women vs. men with, 173–91
 - defining self by, 134, 142–43
 - development of, 186–87, 264–72
 - differences of those with, overstated, 261–62
 - embracing, 134–35
 - emotional sensitivity, in men with, 253, 254, 257
 - hope for teens with, 328–29
 - introspection in men with, 253, 254, 257
 - language affects views of, 254–64

- same-sex attraction, *continued*
 much still unknown about, 135
 outcomes of therapy for, 164–67
 overfocus in development of,
 268
 overinterpretation in
 development of, 268
 pathways into, 186–87
 patterns of development of, for
 men, 264–72
 perfectionism in men with,
 254, 257
 redemptive faith and, 90–91
 religious turmoil in
 development of, 271–72
 removed after Resurrection,
 39–41, 144
 resolving, accounts of, 388–50
 secrecy in development of,
 269–70
 self-loathing in development
 of, 268
 sexuality, compulsive, in
 development of, 270–71
 support for those dealing with,
 2, 8, 103–20, 139, 180–81,
 337–42
 traits, in men with, 253–54
 treatment of, success of, 164–67
 truth about, sources for, 122–30
 what can help, General
 Authorities on, 142–43
- same-sex marriage. *See also*
 marriage
 defending marriage against
 proponents of, 375–82
- political debate about, is
 simplistic, 474–75
 threat to religious freedom, 9,
 375
- Satan
 encourages guilt, 77–78
 false messages of, 2, 67, 448
 God casts out, 73–74
- Savior. *See* Jesus Christ
- scientific method, as source of
 knowledge, 16, 122–24,
 128–30. *See also* authority;
 empiricism; rationalism
- scientific research
 deletion of diagnosis and, 164
 on homosexuality, 149–72, 305
 on psychological treatment,
 163–69
 repression of, 15
- scriptures
 source of power, 54–56
 Topical Guide for study of, 54–56
- sealing, power of, 48. *See also*
 power, divine
- secrecy, in development of SSA,
 269–70
- self-assertion, 181–90
- self-determination, in therapy,
 216. *See also* therapist;
 therapy
- self-esteem, misunderstanding of,
 255–56
- self-image, in sexual addiction,
 284
- self-loathing, in development of
 SSA, 268

- self-worth, a factor in sexual
addiction, 283
- sensitivity. *See* emotional
sensitivity
- service, as way to deal with family
problems, 355
- sex
unprotected, by homosexual
men, 367. *See also* health
issues, of homosexuality
without disclosure of HIV,
367–68
- sex addict
core beliefs of, 284–86
needs of, 285
relationships of, 284–85
self-image of, 284
sexuality of, 285
support network for, 279–91
- Sexaholics Anonymous (SA)
account of, 411–15, 423
and concept of surrendering to
God, 413–15, 423–24
- sex drive, misunderstanding of,
259, 261
- sex-education, needed at home,
315–16
- sexual abuse
in childhood of homosexual
men and women, 362
in children, must be
remediated, 315
role of, in development of
homosexuality, 159–60
- sexual addiction
account of, 411–15
acting out in, 282–83
couples therapy for, 290
cycle of, 282–83
defined, 280
despair in, 283
majority of people with SSA
have, 280
pain in, 283
physiology of, 280–81
preoccupation in, 282
ritualization in, 282
self-worth a factor in, 283
trauma work for recovery
from, 289
treatment of, 286–90
types of, 281–82
- sexual fluidity, 165, 334–37. *See
also* sexual preference
uncertainty
- sexual identity therapy, of
Throckmorton and
Yarhouse, 228
- sexuality, compulsive, in
development of SSA, 270–71
- sexualization, of children, 314–15,
329–31
- sexually transmitted diseases, 332,
365, 366. *See also* health
issues, of homosexuality
- sexual orientation, 258, 302–22
- sexual preference uncertainty,
discuss at home, 316–17. *See
also* sexual fluidity
- sharpness*, in D&C 121 means
clarity, 348
- siblings, telling, about one's SSA,
194–96

- simulator, earth a, 50–51
- sin. *See also* temptations;
transgression
not compelled to, 65–66
same-sex attraction alone is not,
7, 94, 133, 141, 144, 349
- social learning theory, of
homosexuality, 158–61
- solution-focused therapy, 241–42
- Spirit, Holy. *See* Holy Spirit
- spirits, eternal, unaffected by
afflictions, 29
- spiritual growth, in change, 275–
78, 391–96, 442–49
- Spitzer, Robert L., study on
reorientation therapy, 165–67
- sports, for men with SSA, 424–27
- spouse, telling, about one's SSA,
196–97, 299–300
- SSA. *See* same-sex attraction
- stories, to assign meaning, 259–60
- structural therapy, 240–41
- struggle, those who
do exist, 1–4
support for, 2, 8, 103–20, 139,
180–81, 337–42
- substance abuse, increased risk of,
associated with homosexual
behavior, 362, 363, 367.
See also health issues, of
homosexuality
- suffering. *See* affliction
- suffering, Christ succors the,
75–76
- support
for change, 180–81
responsible, for teens, 337–42
- surrender, to God, 413–15, 423–24
- systemic therapies, 239–40
- ## T
- technical eclectic therapy, 243
- techniques, therapeutic, 211–12.
See also therapy
- teenagers. *See* adolescents
- telling others, 192–205
accounts of
Katie Merrill, 442–43
Robert James, 408
Todd Daniels, 461, 465–67
appropriateness of,
determining, 193–94
benefits of, 192–93
coaching helpful before,
299–300
disclosure may help develop,
192–93
during dating, 294–96
dependency and, 202
initiating help by, 212–13
is responsibility of those with
SSA, 119
public meetings and, 200–202
risks of, 194, 202–3
- temptations. *See also* sin;
transgression
Atonement and, 73–75
can be withstood, 32
different from transgression,
349
small, succumbing to, 32–33
- therapist, 206–24. *See also* therapy

therapist, *continued*

- care in selecting, is necessary, 315
 - client self-determination and, 216
 - ecclesiastical leaders and, 219
 - finding, guidelines for, 211–15
 - pressure on, to not help with SSA, 215–16
 - qualifications of, needed, 214–15
 - teamwork with, 217
- therapy. *See also* intervention; resources; therapists
- accounts of
 - Erin Eldridge, 395
 - Katie Merrill, 443, 446
 - Robert James, 403–6, 408, 410–11
 - Todd Daniels, 461–62
 - behavioral, 236–37
 - bishop's role in, 217–19
 - brief, 227
 - choice, 230
 - client-centered, 230–31
 - client's role in, 219–22
 - cognitive, 237–38
 - cognitive-behavioral, 238–39
 - comparison of, for women vs. men with SSA, 173–91
 - constructivist, 241–42
 - context-specific, 243
 - couples, when SSA involved, 290, 299
 - EMDR, 235–36
 - existential, 229
 - family system, 240
 - implosive, 235–36
 - gender-affirmative, 233–34
 - gender wholeness, 232–33
 - gestalt and experiential, 231–33
 - humanistic, 229–30
 - interpersonal, 233–34
 - logotherapy, 230
 - narrative, 241–42
 - opposition to, 14–15, 165–166, 215–16
 - person-centered, 230–31
 - prolonged exposure, 235–36
 - psychoanalytic, 226–28
 - psychodynamic, 226–28
 - rational-emotive, 237–38
 - reactions to, women's vs. men's, 188–89
 - reality, 230
 - reciprocal inhibition or counterconditioning, 236–37
 - reparative, 227–28
 - research on, 164–67
 - for same-sex attractions, 3, 116, 131–32, 164–67
 - scientific research on, 163–69
 - for sexual addiction, 286–90
 - solution-focused, 241–42
 - spirituality used in, 244
 - structural, 240–41
 - systemic, 239–40
 - technical eclectic, 243
 - transactional analysis, 233
 - transtheoretical model of, 243
 - treatment success of, for SSA, 164–67

- therapy, *continued*
 trends in, 244
 types of, 225–48
 three pillars, of wisdom, 475, 478.
See also knowledge, sources
 of
 Throckmorton, Warren, therapy
 and contributions of, 228
 Topical Guide, for scripture study,
 54–56. *See also* scriptures
 traits, in men with SSA, 253–54
 transgression, different from
 temptation, 349
 transtheoretical model, of therapy,
 243
 treatment for. *See* therapy
 trust, relationship of, 174–75
 truth, sources of, about SSA, 122–
 33, 475, 478
 TV, prevent sexualizing
 influence of, 314. *See also*
 sexualization, of children
- U**
 unprotected sex, of homosexual
 men, 367. *See also* health
 issues, of homosexuality
- W**
 Wachtel, Paul, and technical
 eclectic therapy, 243
 weakness
 Atonement and, 74–75
 humility, faith, and, 96–100
 White, Michael, and narrative
 therapy, 241–42
 wisdom, three pillars of, 475, 478
 Wolpe, Joseph, and reciprocal
 inhibition therapy, 236–37
 women, with SSA, differences
 from men, 173–91
- Y**
 Yarhouse, Mark, therapy and
 contributions of, 228