

Elder Bruce C. Hafen

Speaks on Same-Sex Attraction

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During a recent stake conference in Europe, I asked the stake president if Sister Hafen and I might visit one or two of his members who could use a little encouragement. As we visited one young man, a single returned missionary, we found that he cared deeply about the Church but was also very troubled. When we asked how he was doing, he began to cry and said, with a look of real anguish, “I suffer from same-gender attraction.” My heart went out to him. The longer we talked, the more compassion I felt, as I learned that the operative word for him really was “suffer.”

He said he’d heard of an organization called Evergreen and he wondered if I thought they could assist him. I encouraged him to find their website, contact them, and follow their counsel. He then asked for a blessing, which I gladly gave him.

I admire your courage and your righteous desires. You may not have consciously chosen to have same gender attraction, but you are faithfully choosing to deal with it. Sometimes that attraction may make you feel sinful, even though the attraction alone is not a sin if you do not act on it. Sometimes you may feel frustration or anger or simply a deep sadness about yourself. But as hard as same-gender attraction is, your feeling it does not mean that your nature is flawed. Whenever the Adversary tries to convince you that you are hopelessly “that way,” so that acting out your feelings is inevitable, he is lying. He is the Father of Lies.

Remember President Hinckley’s confidence in you: “Our hearts reach out to [you]. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and sisters.” [i] And President Packer has echoed, “We do not reject you... We cannot reject you... We will not reject you, because we love you.” [ii] With that kind of leadership, I pray that all Church members are learning to be more compassionate and understanding.

Some may wonder how the Church’s leaders can empathize with you when they haven’t been in your shoes themselves. Some may even wonder how the Savior himself can really understand you when he hasn’t been where you are. But remember: Christ not only descended TO our conditions, he has descended BELOW our conditions, whatever they are, because “The Son of Man hath descended below [all things].” [iii] The Atonement was possible only because of that descent, which Elder Neal A. Maxwell called Christ’s “earned empathy.” He knows that every day may feel like a major battle for you.

Many other people also live heroically with uninvited daily struggles. The victims of childhood sexual abuse also live with agonizing daily battles that may echo the experiences of some who cope with same-gender attraction. A young woman I know has spent years trying to put her spiritual and emotional life back together, trying to regain her trust in men--and in God. She was devastated when a Church leader to whom she went for counsel told her, “Oh, get over it and get on with your life.” He simply didn’t grasp her condition. Another more seasoned priesthood leader said that many abuse victims are like emotional quadriplegics—yet they look so normal that other people may have no idea what they deal with. She went through an arduous recovery process, stretching her soul in faith almost to the breaking point; but she has developed a remarkable spiritual maturity.

Elder Maxwell once taught a group of people who lived with really hard daily challenges. He had been watching the Olympic diving competition, where he had learned that the judges grade a dive not just by how graceful it looks to the public, but by how difficult the dive is—which only the judges can understand enough to measure. Elder Maxwell told this group that the Lord will judge their lives by the difficulty of their dive, which He understands in every detail. And your own difficult dives are being made much harder by the increasing cultural confusion that now swirls around the topic of homosexuality.

Before discussing that confusion, I first want to draw on a few doctrines that apply to your concerns. The doctrinal foundation is in the nature of God and how he feels about you. He is the greatest being in the Universe, and He knows and loves you. He wants you to find joy. His power is greater than all the powers of darkness combined.

You are literally God's spirit child. Having same-gender attraction is NOT in your DNA, but being a child of God clearly IS in your spiritual DNA—only one generation removed from Him whom we call Father in Heaven. As the Family Proclamation states, "Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." As part of an eternal plan, our Father placed us in this world subject to death, sin, sorrow, and misery – ALL of which serve the eternal purpose of letting us taste the bitter that we may learn to prize the sweet.

If you are faithful, on resurrection morning—and maybe even before then—you will rise with normal attractions for the opposite sex. Some of you may wonder if that doctrine is too good to be true. But Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said it MUST be true, because "there is no fullness of joy in the next life without a family unit, including a husband and wife, and posterity." And "men (and women) are that they might have joy." [v]

It's true that the law of chastity forbids all sexual relations outside the bonds of a married heterosexual relationship. And while same-gender attraction is not a sin, you need to resist cultivating immoral, lustful thoughts toward those of either gender. It's no sin if a bird lands in your tree, just don't let him build a nest there. The Adversary will tempt you by constantly "enticing" you to "do that which is evil," because "there is an opposition in all things." (2 Nephi 2:11) But God will also constantly "entice" you "to do good continually." (Mor. 7:12-13) No temptation is so strong that you can't resist it, unless you have already given away some portion of your agency to a total addiction. So will you choose to "yield" to temptation, or will you "yield to the enticing of the Holy Spirit"? (Mosiah 3:19) It's up to you.

There's an old Native American parable, a young brave is brought before the tribal elders, who are concerned about his aggressive tendencies. One of the tribal elders is assigned to teach this young man that his anger is understandable, but he needs help. So he tells the young brave all humans have within them two dogs. One dog is good and peaceable. The other dog

is angry and evil. The two dogs are in a constant battle with one another, since neither is powerful enough to destroy the other. The young brave asks, "If they are of equal power, which dog will win?" The elder replies, "The dog you feed the most."

You feed the angry dog when you cultivate lustful feelings, view pornography, label yourself as gay, or associate with activists who aggressively promote gay lifestyles. Those activists have an agenda, and it includes constantly feeding your angry dog.

You feed the peaceful dog when you seek the Lord's Spirit. You feed the peaceful dog when you simply stop fighting the angry dog. Don't let your challenge define your entire identity. As Dr. Jeff Robinson said, [vii] you can't hate your way out of your attraction. Just walk away from fighting the angry dog and focus on all the good things you may have put on hold your education, career plans, social experience, and Church service. Stop focusing so much on yourself, including hating yourself, and spend more energy caring about other people. Build good associations with people of your gender. Find a therapist who can help you identify the unmet emotional needs that you are tempted to satisfy in false sexual ways. As you do such things, the peaceful dog will grow stronger than the miserable, angry dog.

Now how does our most central doctrine, the Atonement, apply to same-gender attraction? If you have engaged in immoral behavior, you need to repent fully by confessing your sins and forsaking them. These actions unlock the door to the Savior's mercy, which allows your complete forgiveness. But if you feel an attraction you didn't seek and haven't acted on, you have nothing to repent of. You have nothing to repent of. So how can you qualify for the Atonement's power?

The Atonement means just what the word says: at-one-ment. Its purpose is to make us "at one" with God, or bring us into harmony with Him, after being separated from him by death, by sin, or any other force. In that sense, the atonement can heal us not only from sin, but also from carelessness, imperfection, and all mortal bitterness—intended and unintended. Even though same-gender attraction is by itself not a sin, its presence can make us feel estranged from God. That sense of separation arises from our knowing that this attraction runs counter to our eternal nature as a son or daughter of God. These feelings can terribly damage a conscientious person's sense of both worth and worthiness in God's sight.

The blessings of the Atonement include its healing and compensating power when one has been separated from God by sin, by unintentional mistakes, or simply by adversity. I classify same-gender attraction within the category of “adversity,” because typically you haven’t brought it upon yourselves. It has consequences similar to being harmed by the sins of others, such as the separation from God felt so commonly by the victims of childhood sexual abuse.

The Savior described this part of His healing power to the Nephites: “Will ye not return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted that I may heal you?” Consider also Alma’s description of Christ’s broad healing power, which includes “afflictions,” “infirmities,” and “sicknesses,” in addition to death and sin: “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 their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy.” [viii]

The Atonement’s healing blessings are conditional, just as receiving the mercy that allows forgiveness is conditioned on our repentance. The conditions we must satisfy include repenting fully of any actual sins in our lives. Beyond that, Nephi teaches us this about the other conditions we must satisfy: “[I]t is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23) In other words, we must do “all we can do” within our own power, then his grace overcomes our separation from God as it heals us.

How much is “all we can do” for one who suffers same-gender attraction? I don’t know. But I do know that “all we can do” is less than many of you think it is, because some of you are so conscientious that you think you have to do it all. Don’t beat yourselves up needlessly. You don’t have to do it all. Grace shall be “as your day”—whatever your particular dive requires.

To those challenged by same-gender attraction, the Atonement offers two healing blessings. First, Christ helps us draw on His strength to become more at-one with God even while still overcoming the attraction. He helps us bear the burden of our afflictions. In Alma’s words, when our testimony of the Atonement grows within us like the tree of life, “then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son.” (Alma 33:23) For example, when the king cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into that fiery furnace, their faith in the Lord’s power saved them from being burned. Remember the story. As the

astonished king looked into the furnace, he saw not just the three men but “four men walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” (Daniel 3:25) The Savior’s presence in that fire symbolizes the way he is truly “with us” in our afflictions, not just passively observing us or waiting until our trial is completed. Think of that next time you partake of the sacrament. He will be with you.

As a second healing blessing, the Atonement enables the grace that assures us of this grand promise: No eternal blessing—including marriage and family life--will be withheld from those who suffer same-gender attraction, if they do “all they can do” to remain faithful always. That story from the Book of Daniel applies to this blessing as well. You will remember that when the three men refused to worship the Babylonian idol, they weren’t afraid of being thrown into the fiery furnace. They said “Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us. But if not, we [still] will not worship the golden image.” (Daniel 3:17-18)

Applied to you, what does “but if not” mean? It means that your faith in God must run so deep that, first, you know he has the power to remove your unwanted same-gender attraction—“he is able to deliver us from the furnace.” But, second, if he doesn’t deliver you right now (“but if not”), for whatever reason, you will not give up on Him or on yourself. There truly is light at the end of your tunnel, no matter how long it is. That light is the Light and the Life of the world.

Now let’s discuss how today’s cultural and legal climate is making your challenge much harder than it would otherwise be. First a little historical background. I began teaching family law in the early 1970s, during the U.S. civil rights movements that sought for much-needed racial and gender equality. During that period, almost no one considered people with homosexual attraction as a distinctive demographic group (like race or gender) who were the victims of discrimination. The main legal goal of gay activists then was to eliminate criminal penalties against homosexual acts, as a first step toward their goal of greater public acceptance.

Even though criminal laws against homosexual acts were seldom enforced, the Supreme Court considered those laws constitutional as recently as 2003. In the early 1970’s, the public and most lawyers, doctors, and therapists saw homosexuality not as normal adult

behavior but as a psychological disorder. As recently as 1982, the mayor of San Francisco vetoed a proposal to grant spousal-type benefits to both straight and gay unmarried couples. An editorial in a major San Francisco newspaper agreed with the mayor, saying: “The notion that an unmarried relationship is the equivalent of marriage is an attack upon social norms, the destruction of which concerns a great many people in the nation and...in San Francisco.” [xi] Sounds pretty long ago now, doesn’t it? No country anywhere in the world recognized gay marriage until 2001. Since then, however, a few countries and six U.S. states now recognize same-gender marriages.

So what’s been going on during the last few years to cause the cultural earthquake we’re now feeling on this subject? We have witnessed primarily an aggressive political movement more than we’ve witnessed substantive change in the medical or legal evidence. In 1973, in response to increasing disruptions and protests by gay activists, the American Psychiatric and Psychological Associations removed homosexuality from their official lists of disorders. Significantly, they took this action by simply putting the issue to an open vote in their professional meetings--not because of any change in actual medical findings. As LDS psychologist Dean Byrd writes, “This was the first time in the history of healthcare that a diagnosis was decided by popular vote rather than scientific evidence.” [xii]

The activists have used similar methods in the years since then, trying to prove that they are a legitimate demographic category with fixed and unchangeable characteristics. They must present themselves in this way in order to justify their demand for the same legal protections now given to race and gender. That is a crucial point in understanding both the agenda and the tactics of intimidation used by today’s activists. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said, in recent years “we have seen unrelenting pressure from advocates of [the homosexual] lifestyle to accept as normal what is not normal, and to characterize those who disagree with them as narrow-minded, bigoted and unreasonable. Such advocates are quick to demand freedom of speech and thought for themselves, but equally quick to criticize those with a different view and, if possible, to silence them by applying labels like ‘homophobic.’... 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.” [xiii]

Consider now four misconceptions the activists seek to establish as facts in the minds of policymakers and the public. I do this here because these misconceptions, if believed, will seriously undermine the efforts of Latter-day Saints or others who desire to overcome their own same-gender attraction. First is the misconception that same-gender attraction is an inborn and unalterable orientation. This untrue assumption tries to persuade you to label yourselves and build your entire identity around a fixed sexual orientation or condition. How would that affect you? As President James E. Faust wrote, “The false belief of inborn homosexual orientation denies to repentant souls the opportunity to change and will ultimately lead to discouragement, disappointment, and despair.” [xiv]

However, the activists have almost convinced the American public about this point. A reliable 2009 poll asked U.S. adults what causes people to be gay or lesbian. In the two most common responses, 42% of this public sample said gay or lesbian people are born that way, and 36% said they choose to be that way. [xv] Both of those responses are factually wrong.

So much individual variation exists with so many possible explanations that there is simply no scientific consensus about what causes homosexual tendencies. As the American Psychological Association has stated, “[N]o findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any factor or set of factors... [N]ature and nurture both play complex roles.” [xvi] So, even though natural personality traits do influence one’s inclinations, the idea that there is a “gay gene” has little scientific support. As two Columbia University researchers put it, “the assertion that homosexuality is genetic . . . must be dismissed out of hand as a general principle of psychology.” [xvii]

Now we do know that inherited susceptibilities, childhood experiences, and agency all influence a given person’s development. And even though no universal explanation exists, some patterns do fit many same-gender attraction cases. For example, we know from the research that among women up to 80% who have same-gender attraction were abused in some way as children. [xviii] Among men, especially during the years just before and during puberty, as President Boyd K. Packer has said, “What would have only been a more or less normal passing phase in establishing [your] gender identity can become implanted and leave you confused, even disturbed.” [xix]

In other words, before puberty, boys are typically more interested in other boys than in girls. Then their interest gradually shifts to girls, but a few boys don't make this transition. Often these boys are emotionally sensitive, introspective, and, especially among Church members, perfectionistic. When puberty hits this group, they can be sexually aroused by many factors. When those factors include other boys, they can become fixated on the fear that they are "gay," especially if they have male sexual experiences, including male pornography. Then their fixation can block their normal emotional-sexual development. Adult men who have had such childhood experiences can often resume their normal development by identifying and addressing the sources of their emotional blockage, which usually includes restoring healthy, appropriate male relationships. [xx]

A second misconception the activists promote is that therapy cannot treat, let alone change, same-gender attraction. This false assumption is linked to the first one: if you're born gay, there is no need to change; and since you have a permanent condition, you can't change anyway. Evidence that people have indeed changed threatens the political agenda of the activists, because actual change disproves their claim that homosexuality is a fixed condition that deserves the same legal protections as those fixed conditions like race and gender. So they don't want you, or anyone else, to change, or even to believe that change is possible.

But as President Packer said, "The angels of the devil convince some that they are born to a life from which they cannot change 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." [xxii] If you believe that no change is possible, you have only two options, neither of which is acceptable to a believing Latter-day Saint—you must either give in or give up. Thankfully, you have other options.

Nonetheless, the American Psychiatric Association has considered making it unethical for a therapist to treat someone with same-gender attraction who desires to change. But in the year 2000, when such a proposal was pending before that organization, they were met with a very different form of activism than what they had seen earlier. Busloads of formerly gay men appeared at their national meeting, claiming their right to choose therapy for their unwanted attraction. In an ironic twist of history, the APA representative who met with them, Dr. Robert L. Spitzer, just happened to be the same man who had met with the gay activists

nearly thirty years earlier, when the APA voted to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders.

Dr. Spitzer listened again, and he decided to study two hundred people who had changed to a heterosexual orientation that had lasted more than five years. Dr. Spitzer published his research findings, despite the objections of activists who thought his work threatened their political agenda. He concluded, "Like most psychiatrists, I thought that . . . sexual orientation could not be changed. I now believe that is untrue—some people can and do change." [xxiii]

Just last month the American Psychological Association adopted a resolution stating that there is insufficient evidence to prove conclusively whether sexual orientation can be changed. But in what the Wall Street Journal called "a striking departure" from that Association's earlier hesitation about encouraging such therapy, the same resolution also stated that "it is ethical—and can be beneficial—for counselors to help some clients reject gay or lesbian attractions," especially clients with a strong religious identity. [xxiv]

Now, to be sure, not everybody who seeks treatment succeeds. We have got to be realistic and honest about that. Not every experience with therapy is completely positive. That is why responsible therapists can't promise particular outcomes. And, the Church does not endorse specific methods of treatment. Success rates vary, and "success" can be defined in various ways. The client's level of commitment to the treatment process is probably the most significant variable in successful outcomes. [xxv] The skill and attitude of the therapist also matters a great deal. But in general, well over half of those seeking treatment can be significantly helped by it. That is roughly the same success rate as treatments for clinical depression. One non-LDS therapist who has treated both men and women for many years reports that 40% of his clients find full heterosexual resolution, another 40% achieve enough resolution to control their attraction and behavior, and 20% are unsuccessful. [xxvi]

The third misconception is that most Americans favor same-gender marriage, which means the Church is outside the mainstream in opposing it. For example, last June Time magazine carried a story that described the aftermath of California's Proposition 8 campaign as a "vicious backlash from gay-rights activists, some of whom accused Mormons of bigotry and blind religious obedience." This statement ignores the fact that aggressive intimidation has long been a primary

political tactic of these activists against any group that opposed them—including their intimidation of professional associations in the early 1970s.

The Time writer went on to say that “Gay marriage...belongs to a class of behaviors increasingly tolerated in the broader society.” It is true that six American states now permit same-gender marriage. But forty states have already passed laws opposing such marriages. And the most recent national polls reinforce that large majority opinion, despite some modest recent gains by the activists.

For example, last June a CBS News/New York Times poll asked whether U.S. adults favored gay marriage, gay civil unions without marriage, or no legal recognition for same-gender couples. Only 33% preferred gay marriage; 30% favored civil unions; and 32% would give no legal recognition. When civil unions were not offered as an alternative, the percentage favoring same-gender marriage was higher. [xxvii] A recent USA Today/Gallup Poll also asked whether allowing people of the same gender to marry will improve society, have no effect, or will harm society. Only 13% thought gay marriage would make society better, while 48% thought it would make society worse, and 35% thought it would have no effect. [xxviii]

These poll numbers hardly put the Church on the public fringe with its view that same-gender marriage is not a good idea. But let us finally consider the more important question—what’s wrong with same-gender marriage?

The fourth misconception is that there are no rational, non-religious reasons for opposing same-gender marriage. The Time Magazine writer said the only “rational side” to the Church’s efforts in California was its fear of losing its tax-exempt status. He acknowledged no serious sociological or other argument for limiting marriage to a man and a woman. This description of the marriage debate is so limited that it invites a response. I therefore briefly offer a non-religious case against same-gender marriage.

First, the American public has always distinguished between what the law tolerates and what the law should endorse—a clear line between “passive toleration” and “active support” of homosexual conduct. [xxix] To tolerate behavior is to move it, legally, from being prohibited to being permitted, which we did in deciding not to prosecute homosexual behavior as criminal. However, we can tolerate or

permit that behavior without also endorsing it—that is, promoting and encouraging that behavior, which we have historically done only when the behavior serves a significant public purpose.

Our society and our laws have long endorsed man-woman marriage with an honored priority, not just to support happy lovers, but because marriage is our most significant social institution—not merely a private project. This “public interest” or “social interest” separates the marriage contract from every other contract in society. We don’t invite guests and have receptions when people sign a business deal; but we do celebrate marriage as a publicly significant event. Why? Because the children of that marriage are the future society and they clearly thrive best when reared in a formal family with their own father and mother.

The New York Times has reported a “powerful consensus” in the social science research [xxx] that children do best when they live with their own mom and dad. The research clearly shows that, by every measure of child well-being—such as health, emotional stability, education; and avoiding crime, drugs, and abuse—children do far better in a two-parent, married heterosexual family. That ideal child-rearing environment is not always possible because of deaths, unavoidable divorces, and births outside wedlock. But giving policy priority to the natural family establishes the social goal that, whenever possible, each child has a right to grow up with his or her own mother and father in a legal marriage. That goal binds the father and mother to each other and to their children—and to society’s long-term interests. Civilization began when the culture required men to care about their women and their children. And society has the right to expect that kind of pattern from fathers and mothers—for the sake of the future society’s well being.

Recent experience in this country has threatened this pattern, not just because of same-gender marriage, the problem dates further back, because we have shifted, in America, from being a culture of marriage toward becoming a culture of divorce. Americans have more than doubled the divorce rate. We have the highest divorce rate in the world. We’ve also more than quintupled the rate of unwed births since the 1960’s. Nearly 40% of all children born in the U.S. today are now born out of wedlock. [xxxi] These trends have inflicted untold damage upon the country’s children and families. That’s why President Hinckley said a few years ago, “The family is falling apart. Not only in America, but across the world.” [xxxii] He

also said that family disintegration is “a matter of serious concern. I think it is my most serious concern.” [xxxiii] Why the concern? Because single-parent families are, with rare and admirable exceptions, generally not as good for children. Damaged children create a damaged society; and when enough families are dysfunctional, society itself becomes dysfunctional.

The new culture of divorce began with no-fault divorce in California in the late 1960’s. That concept essentially gave any married individual the right to just walk away from a marriage as a matter of personal freedom, regardless of fault or consequences. Both no-fault divorce and same-gender marriage allow personal adult rights to trump the best interests of society and children. The radical personal freedom theory on which the Massachusetts same-gender marriage case is based is actually the logical extension of the same individualistic legal concept that created no-fault divorce. Think about it. When the law upholds an individual’s right to END a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as happened with no-fault divorce), that same legal principle can be used to justify the individual’s right to START a marriage, regardless of social consequences (as happens with same-gender marriage).

Gay rights do not claim to satisfy society’s enormous interest in its children. On the contrary, in a key early Supreme Court opinion in 1986, Justice Harry Blackmun argued that the Constitution should protect gay sexual rights “not because they contribute to the general public welfare but because they form so central a part of an individual’s life,” including one’s “right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the existing order.” [xxxiv] The Court’s 2003 majority opinion striking down state criminal laws against same-gender sexual conduct accepted Justice Blackmun’s view, basing its rationale on the personal “autonomy” rights of consenting adults, not on any benefit of that conduct to society. [xxxv]

Now this contrast between adult rights and the rights of society and children introduces the most persuasive example I have seen of the secular case against same-gender marriage. France rejected gay marriage in 2006, because its parliament concluded that these marriages run counter to the best interests of children and the future society they create. France was not ready, as a matter of conscious public policy choice, to throw out its babies with the bathwater of gay activism. They concluded that marriage should serve a child’s right to optimal personal development,

rather than primarily serving adult interests that trump children’s interests.

The French parliament’s study of same-gender marriage centered on marriage as a social institution. Its report said marriage is inevitably built around children, and every country that has adopted same-gender marriage have soon afterward authorized adoption and surrogate gestation by same-gender couples. But, they concluded, France could “no longer systematically place [the] aspirations of adults ahead” of children’s needs and rights. [xxxvi] And if they allowed individual control of family forms to persist, France would “exhaust all possibility of expression of society’s stake in marriage.” I repeat, this was a secular argument, not a religious one. Indeed, in France, as Jacques Chirac said, secularism IS their religion.

Specifically, the French report focused on children’s need for identity and stability. Insofar as possible, it said, each child has the right to know and be cared for by—and be bonded to—his or her biological parents. Biological bonding combined with legal bonding inherently creates the most lasting and stable adult-child relationship, which provide the emotional and legal security required for optimal child development. Occasional adoptions may be necessary in exceptional cases, but there are plenty of stable heterosexual married couples who wish to adopt all available adoptive children. The French report said that to accept a public policy that consciously places children with homosexual adults increases the risks to children who are already at risk because they feel identity confusion and abandonment by their biological parents. To ignore this need is to discriminate against these children. Adoption is about a child’s right to a regular family, not merely about an adult’s right to a child.

So France rejected same-gender marriage so that children “do not suffer as a result of situations imposed on them by adults. The interest of the child must outweigh the exercise of freedom by adults, whatever life choices are made by the parents.” This view takes marriage away from the private, adults-only world of gay and lesbian lifestyles and returns it to its original place as society’s primary social institution.

I return now to where I started, to the admiration and empathy I feel for you. I feel especially tender toward you who honor your covenants and wholeheartedly desire the blessings of temple marriage and family life; and who have tried repeatedly—but

not successfully yet—to diminish your same-gender feelings. I know people who feel that way. My heart goes out to them. They are waiting upon the Lord.

I was once living through a pretty difficult dive myself, though of a much different variety. One day in the Wyoming mountains I saw a bald eagle in a nearby tree. Something about that majestic creature reminded me to read these words from the 40th chapter of Isaiah: “The Lord giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” [xxxvii]

I wondered what “waiting upon the Lord” meant. Then I read in Joseph Smith’s Translation of Matthew 3:24 that when young Jesus grew up, he “waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come.” I couldn’t imagine the boy Christ just standing around the carpenter shop “waiting” for something to happen. I came to understand that “waiting upon the Lord” is a special invitation to become an active, consecrated disciple of Christ. It isn’t to sit back passively and just wait on your hands. I was moved to make changes in my daily pattern so I could “wait” with much more intense spiritual initiative. As a result, I discovered for myself that, as Isaiah said, men have not heard, “neither hath any eye seen, O God, how great things thou hast prepared for him that waiteth for thee.” (D&C 133:45) As the angel sang to Elijah, “O rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him, and he will give thee thy heart’s desire.”

An LDS medical doctor who has worked closely with many people who deal with same-gender attraction recently said to me, “This is a truly difficult problem, but in its very difficulty is something that allows those who meet the challenge to become amazingly purified and sanctified and thus qualified for special comfort and revelation from the Savior, who knows how to succor ‘all’ men and women in their infirmities.” His words prompted a memory of Elder Maxwell’s insight: “If we are serious about our discipleship, Jesus will eventually request each of us to do those very things which are [the] most difficult to do.” The apostle Paul wrote, “All things work together for good to them that love God.” (Romans 8:28) Even same-gender attraction can work for your good IF you love God.

You are not simply a child of God. You are a son or a daughter of God, with all the masculine or feminine

connotations of those words. That is your true, eternal identity. I urge you to seek a testimony, even a personal vision, of that identity. I ask you to take every possible step, every day, to align your physical and emotional life with the spiritual reality of who you really are. Even if you can open only a tiny space for God’s influence in your life now, open it up, all you can. Say “yes” to Him, over and over, and He will help you make ever more room for Him in your heart. Then your confidence will grow—not only in Him, but in yourself. I am describing a process, not an event, and it can sometimes seem hopelessly long and difficult. But I promise you that as you learn to connect your righteous desires with His love, His power will pull you home—eventually, all the way home.

Brigham Young’s words describe the promise and the fulfillment of that homeward journey: “Your spirits when they came to take [earthly] tabernacles were pure and holy. There is no spirit among the human family that was begotten in hell; none that were begotten by angels, or by any inferior being. They [are all the children of] our Father in heaven. He is the Father of our spirits; and if we could know, understand, and do His will, every soul would be prepared to return back into His presence. And when they get there, they would see that they had formerly lived there for ages, that they had previously been acquainted with every nook and corner, with the palaces, walks, and gardens; and they would embrace their Father, and He would embrace them and say, ‘My son, my daughter, I have you again;’ and the child would say, ‘O my Father, my Father, I am here again.’” [xxxviii]

Notes

[i] Ensign, Nov. 1995. P. 99

[ii] Ensign, Nov. 2000, p.

[iii] D&C 122:8; D&C 88:6

[iv] D&C 88:114

[v] LDS.org Newsroom, interview transcript.

[vi] Alma 37:36

[vii] Theguardrail.com/transcript.htm.

[viii] Alma 7:11-12

[ix] Carri P. Jenkins, "Toward the Light of Hope: Victims of Abuse," Brigham Young Magazine, May 1993, p. 35.

[x] See note 7.

[xi] San Francisco Examiner, Nov. 21, 1982, at B10, col. 1.

[xii] Dean Byrd, *Mormons & Homosexuality* (2008), p. 22

[xiii] Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, LDS.org Newsroom interview.

[xiv] James E. Faust, *Ensign*, Sept. 1995.

[xv] Quinnipiac University poll, April 21, 2009, in *PollingReport.com*.

[xvi] In Dean Byrd, *M&H*, p. 36.

[xvii] Friedman and Downey, in Byrd, *M&H*, p. 34.

[xviii] David C. Pruden, *Lead My People*, audio CD

[xix] Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, November 2000.

[xx] See generally Jeffrey Robinson, *Theguardrail.com*; Jason Park, *Understanding Male Homosexual Problems*.

[xxi] *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, p. 51.

[xxii] Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 2006.

[xxiii] Spitzer, R.L. (2003). "Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation?" *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, 5 October, pp. 403-417.

[xxiv] Stephanie Simon, "A New Therapy on Faith and Sexual Identity," *Wall St. J.*, Aug. 6, 2009 online.wsj.com/article/SB124950491516608883.html.

[xxv] Jason Park, *Understanding Male Homosexual Problems*, p. 30

[xxvi] Park, p. 31.

[xxvii] PollingReport.com/civil.htm (CBS/N.Y. Times poll June 12-16, 2009)

[xxviii] PollingReport.com/civil.htm (USA Today/Gallup poll, May 7-10, 2009)

[xxix] Bernstein, "When One Person's Civil Rights Are Another's Moral Outrage," *N. Y. Times*, Oct. 16, section 4, p. 6; Barney, "Shaky Ground: Gay Rights Confront Determined Resistance from Some Moderates," *Wall St. J.* Oct. 7, 1994, p. A1.

[xxx] Hardin, "2-Parent Families Rise After Change in Welfare Laws," quoted in *What Next for the Marriage Movement?* (New York: Institute for American Values), posted to MarriageMovement.org, 12 Dec. 2004.

[xxxi] "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in May that births to unmarried women have reached an astonishing 39.7%" of all U.S. births. Caitlin Flanagan, "Why Marriage Matters," *Time*, July 13, 2009, p. 45

[xxxii] "No Nation Can Rise Higher Than the Strength of Its Families." *Church News*, 3 Oct. 1998, p. 6.

[xxxiii] "President Hinckley Notes His 85th Birthday." *Church News*, 24 June 1995, p. 6.

[xxxiv] *Bowers v. Hardwick*, ___ U.S. ___ (1986)

[xxxv] *Lawrence v. Texas*, ___ U.S. ___ (2003)

[xxxvi] Report of the Mission of Inquiry on the Family and the Rights of Children, a study commission appointed by the National Assembly of France, January 25, 2006, p. 32 (English translation of commission report).

[xxxvii] Isaiah 40:28-31

[xxxviii] Brigham Young, *JD* 4:268 (italics added).

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