



*HELPING LDS MEN
RESOLVE THEIR
HOMOSEXUAL
PROBLEMS*

A Guide for
Families, Friends,
and Church Leaders

By Jason Park

With a Foreword by
A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D.

CENTURY PUBLISHING

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CENTURY PUBLISHING
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
2007

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Second Edition

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ISBN-10: 0-941846-07-5

ISBN-13: 978-941846-07-3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 97-67740

Printed in the United States of America.

To my wonderful wife
who has stood by my side through it all

To my therapist Dan
who by the grace of God showed me the way out

My thanks to Dr. A. Dean Byrd
for his help in reviewing this book

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Foreword

by A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D.

There are very few families in the Church or in society in general whose lives are not touched by homosexuality in some way. The AIDS crisis has catapulted the issues surrounding homosexuality to the forefront of American life. The plague of AIDS like none other in the United States continues to inflict suffering and death on young men, many of whom are involved in homosexual relationships. One estimate indicates that one third of men involved in homosexual relationships will be HIV-positive before age thirty! The eminent psychiatrist Dr. Charles Socarides, a personal friend and esteemed colleague, suggests providing treatment to those with homosexual struggles could reduce the rates of HIV infection. While this may sound like a politically incorrect idea, it is true.

There is a great deal that can be done about unwanted homosexual attractions and much more that can be done about unwanted behaviors. The strident voices of the media provide little hope to those who struggle with homosexual difficulties. It's voices like Jason Park's that need to be heard. There is hope for individuals who struggle with homosexual difficulties and their families. With wonderful clarity, Jason provides a rich source of information and practical helps to families and friends. Armed with the best available from the scientific research, Jason uses the umbrella of the gospel as he reaches out to wounded individuals and wounded families. You see, Jason can offer something that many professionals like me cannot: his own experiences. Jason made the journey out of homosexuality. He came out of the "closet." But unlike many others, his message was different. He did not come out of the closet to claim that he was "born homosexual." Rather, he came out of the closet to declare that change is possible. Like the admonition of the Savior to those who would call themselves the recipients of God's grace and like all true disciples, Jason has taken seriously the charge to "go and do likewise." The pages of this book clearly reflect Jason's desire to do so as he reaches

out to lift others.

By the way, homosexuality is always a family struggle. To the families of those who struggle with homosexuality, I add my testimony to Jason's. There is no struggle for which the atonement is not sufficient. Change from homosexuality is possible. I have witnessed such change in the lives of more than three hundred men.

Dr. A. Dean Byrd
Salt Lake City, Utah

Introduction

This book is written to the wives, parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, bishops, quorum leaders, and friends of men who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and want to follow Christ and resolve their homosexual feelings. Homosexual problems are very difficult to overcome and those who are the most successful are those who receive a lot of support from their family and friends. The fact that you are reading this book shows you care enough about your “friend” (husband, son, brother, father, or ward member) to find out what you can do to help him. You cannot solve his problems for him. He will have to do his own work, but your love and support can help. He should read the book *Resolving Homosexual Problems: A Guide for LDS Men*, which I have written as a companion to this book. That book contains specific information and practical suggestions for him that are not contained in this book.

No matter how hard your friend may have tried in the past, he may have found only temporary success in getting rid of his unwanted feelings and thoughts. Further, he may be confused by the notion that homosexuality is inborn and unchangeable. If his past efforts have failed, and if it really is unchangeable, why try to overcome it? But he may also realize that he can’t embrace homosexuality and still enjoy the blessings of the gospel, families, and eternal life. There is an answer to this dilemma. This book presents an understanding of homosexuality in the gospel context and discusses how these personal problems can be resolved.

There is hope. I know there are answers because I have gone through it myself. And for every person like me who has written a book, there are hundreds more who have gone through the same process and found the same success I have. And there are thousands more who have achieved some success. I write this book in behalf of those hundreds and thousands of people who have experienced real change in their lives.

Although homosexuality has been around for centuries, the

psychological community is still plowing new ground with this issue, still looking for answers, while the pro-gay movement is trying to stop them. We in the Latter-day Saint community need to move forward. This book is an attempt to show how the psychological know-how can be applied in harmony with gospel truths to help LDS men. Some of the theories, approaches, and ideas may also be helpful to women who struggle with lesbianism and some may not. More research needs to be done on women's issues to better determine causes and solutions.

Throughout this book, I give examples of how people have dealt with particular issues. In all cases, these examples involve real people and real events, although many of the names have been changed to protect identities. And by the way, Jason Park is my pen name. Since I've left homosexuality behind, I would rather not expose myself or my family to publicity by using my real name.

What Is Homosexuality?

This chapter defines homosexuality, including attractions, identity, and behavior. The chapter then presents Latter-day Saint doctrines concerning homosexuality, including the distinction between homosexual thoughts and behavior, and the importance of overcoming both. Finally, it offers correct information about homosexual problems.

Description

Homosexual problems include erotic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors directed toward the same gender. The psychological community uses the term *homosexuality* to refer to the entire complex that includes attractions, feelings, desires, sexual behavior, identity, and all its associated aspects, such as problems with masculinity, self-perception, emotional dependencies, and relationship issues.

These problems should not be confused with a healthy emotional and social interest in persons of the same gender. *Homoemotional* and *homosocial* interests are healthy as long as they are not excessive and do not develop an erotic dimension. When same-gender interests are eroticized, they become *homosexual*.

I use the term *homosexual* as an adjective to describe a person's feelings, thoughts, or behavior, but not as a noun to describe the person. The terms *gay* (referring to men) and *lesbian* (referring to women) include not only personal feelings and behaviors, but also describe a political, cultural, and social identity.

Homosexuality may include sexual feelings or attractions without sexual behavior or it may include complete emotional and sexual involvement. It cannot be identified simply by the presence or absence of outward sexual behavior.

Attractions

Homosexual attractions develop over time and almost always

without any conscious choice. At some point in your friend's* life, he realized he was sexually attracted to other men.** These attractions can be a major source of frustration, because in spite of his best efforts to get rid of them, he continues to have compelling sexual thoughts toward other men. These inner attractions may be intense and may consume a great deal of his thoughts and energy. If the sexual attractions are not resolved, they can grow into obsessions that interfere with his ability to function at work and at home, and can be destructive spiritually. Homosexual attractions are usually more compelling than attractions toward the opposite sex because they spring from more than sexual desires—they are attempts to fill unmet emotional and social needs.

Many men report they first noticed these attractions before puberty—before they felt or understood sexual feelings. The feelings were not inherently sexual, but at some point became eroticized. The needs involved are normal social and emotional needs that everyone has, but have become confused and sexualized toward the same gender. The attractions are actually attempts to meet the emotional and identity needs that have not yet been met in his life. As a child, some part of his normal developmental process was stopped and interfered with his ability to develop a heterosexual orientation. Ironically, sexual intimacy will not fill the needs. They should not be ignored (the conservative mistake) nor eroticized (the liberal mistake), but should be filled through legitimate, nonsexual means. Here, then, is the irony. Homosexuality itself has little to do with sex; the needs are not *homosexual*, but *homoemotional*.

Identity

Many men with homosexual attractions report they felt “different”

* Throughout this book, I use the term *friend* to refer to the person who is trying to resolve his homosexual problems—whether he is your husband, son, father, brother, nephew, ward member, or friend.

** As explained in the introduction, the focus of this book is on male homosexual problems. Although much of the information in this book can also be helpful to women who have lesbian issues, don't assume that all the theories or strategies presented in this book will work for them.

as boys but didn't know why. For them, the pain of growing up with homosexual attractions was not so much the pain of being attracted to boys, but the feelings of being different. If this describes your friend, this feeling of being different may have become a self-fulfilling prophecy as he separated himself from the very boys he needed to bond with. He may have longed to feel he was on par with other boys, but this longing only widened the gulf between him and the rest of the guys. Feeling different creates a mindset that can have a tremendous impact on a boy's self-perception and development. When other children sensed this hesitancy, they may have attacked it, which only confirmed to the boy that he was different. Thus, he withdrew from other boys to defend himself from the pain.

He knew his attractions were not right because of the "fag" jokes he heard, so he learned to keep the feelings to himself, creating further problems of isolation and secrecy, which are powerful forces that keep homosexual problems from being resolved. When the rest of the male world is normally attracted to females, he may have wondered why he was abnormally attracted to males. Knowing that these attractions were in conflict with his religious beliefs and society's norms, he realized his innermost feelings were wrong and since he didn't choose to have these feelings, he may have wondered if there was something inherently wrong with him. This likely created an internal struggle as he desperately tried to understand the unnatural feelings and make sense of them in terms of his own internal values and religious beliefs.

Our identity is an accumulation of self-perceptions. Some people come to believe they were born with homosexual feelings which are part of their core identity. They become convinced that if they are ever to be at peace with themselves, they must submit to their desires, even if it means rejecting (or at least ignoring) their religious beliefs and personal values. When a person "comes out of the closet" and identifies himself as homosexual, he often feels relief for two reasons. First, after suffering so much frustration and pain, he is relieved to have finally made a difficult decision and he may interpret this temporary relief as confirmation that he has made the right choice. Secondly, he may find the acceptance and emotional closeness with other homosexual men that he had not been able to find previously. If your friend has accepted a homosexual identity, it will have far-

reaching implications and profoundly influence how he thinks and acts. In addition to resolving the homosexual issues, he will have the additional challenge of correcting misperceptions about himself.

A very small percentage of people accept a gay identity even though they have no compelling attractions toward the same gender. These people take on a gay identity because they want to be “different” and they feel they don’t fit in with the normal heterosexual world or because they find particular acceptance by other homosexual people. Once they accept the label of “homosexual,” they begin to develop the implied characteristics. What people believe about themselves profoundly effects the way they think and act.

Behavior

Homosexual attractions can be strong if your friend entertains sexual fantasies. Because of the intensity of these sexual desires, he may have participated in sexual activities to fill the void he feels. However, this causes further confusion, leading him to believe that the needs are sexual rather than emotional. In a desperate attempt to satisfy these building tensions, he may have become involved in sexual activities that provide a temporary gratification of the sex drive, but leave him with deeper feelings of emptiness, loneliness and frustration. Rather than satisfying his real needs for acceptance and companionship, the sexual behavior only intensifies the needs. One of the greatest tragedies of homosexuality is the unawareness in most men that their needs are emotional. All they know is that they are sexually attracted to other men and they seek sexual contacts, which ironically do not fill their need for love from a friend.

Not all men find themselves involved in sexual behavior. Some have participated in only limited behavior and others have remained chaste in spite of their intense attractions. If this describes your friend, good news! His journey out of homosexuality will be much easier because of it.

Homosexuality is symptomatic of other problems

One of the reasons homosexual problems are difficult to address is that they are not the real problem. Focusing too much on homosexual problems can actually be misleading, since they are symptoms of

deeper struggles, such as rejection, envy, abuse, self-perception, gender identity, distrust, or fear. However, men who have homosexual problems seldom recognize this because they are masters at hiding the real issues in their lives. They hide them from others and even from themselves. Many of these issues are common and others vary from person to person. Once your friend identifies the causes of his painful hunger he can learn ways to feed the hunger in appropriate, nonsexual ways. Once he resolves the underlying problems, he will find that the homosexual problems resolve themselves.

Why is homosexuality a problem?

Your friend's sexual *attraction* toward other men distorts healthy, loving relationships and steers him away from the blessings that can be found in marriage and family relationships. It diverts capable priesthood holders from the roles of husband and father. Homosexual *behavior* is of particular concern because it violates God's commandments and blocks his eternal progress.

Gospel teachings regarding homosexuality

God created us as male or female (see Genesis 1:27). He wants men and women to join with each other under the covenant of marriage to procreate and fulfill their eternal destiny. In His eternal plan, there are no classifications of *homosexuals*, *bisexuals*, or *heterosexuals*. We are all on this earth having a human experience with various challenges to overcome so we can become the true men, women, priesthood holders, wives, husbands, mothers, and fathers that God wishes us to be.

Homosexual feelings

A 1991 letter issued by the First Presidency to all members of the Church stated, "there is a distinction between [1] immoral thoughts and feelings and [2] participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior."¹ Your friend likely had no fault in the emergence of the feelings that trigger the homosexual attractions. Since he made no conscious choice for them, he should not feel guilty for having them. However, he can choose how he responds to the attractions and should not deliberately feed the feelings by fantasizing

and turning them into lustful thoughts. The First Presidency letter continued, “However, such thoughts and feelings, regardless of their causes, can and should be overcome. . . .”² Your friend is responsible for his agency in the thoughts he entertains. In an article in the *Ensign* magazine about same-gender attraction, Elder Dallin H. Oaks clarified that “although immoral thoughts are less serious than immoral behavior, such thoughts also need to be resisted and repented of because we know that ‘our thoughts will also condemn us’ (Alma 12:14). Immoral thoughts (and the less serious feelings that lead to them) can bring about behavior that is sinful.”³

Sexual behavior

The scriptures are clear in condemning homosexual practices. We read in Romans, “For this cause God gave them up unto *vile* affections: for even their women did *change* the *natural* use into that which is *against nature*: And likewise also the men, leaving the *natural* use of the woman, burned in their *lust* one toward another; *men with men* working that which is *unseemly*, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their *error* which was meet” (Romans 1:26–27; emphasis added).

President Gordon B. Hinckley stated, “Prophets of God have repeatedly taught through the ages that practices of homosexual relations, fornication, and adultery are grievous sins. Sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage are forbidden by the Lord.”⁴ The First Presidency declared, “The Lord’s law of moral conduct is abstinence outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual contact, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior, is sinful.”⁵

Overcome thoughts and behavior

The 1991 letter from the First Presidency further stated, “We commend and encourage those who are overcoming inappropriate thoughts and feelings. We plead with those involved in such behavior to forsake it. We love them and pray for them. We are confident that through repentance and obtaining needed help, they can experience the

peace that comes from conforming their lives to God's teachings."⁶ President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "Our hearts reach out to those who struggle with feelings of affinity for the same gender. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and our sisters. However, we cannot condone immoral practices on your part any more than we can condone immoral practices on the part of others."⁷

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, "The struggles of those who are troubled by same-sex attraction are not unique. There are many kinds of temptations, sexual and otherwise. The duty to resist sin applies to all of them."⁸

Help those who are trying to overcome

Mormon culture focuses on progress. The typical boy is expected to systematically progress from baptism to deacon, teacher, priest, endowment, mission, and marriage. A boy who feels attracted to other boys may not know what to do about it. He may not feel comfortable about bringing up the issue with his family or the bishop. Few young men have the courage to say "Bishop, I think I'm attracted to other boys." Since they are trying to make the feelings go away, they continue to progress in the Church and try their best to perform their priesthood responsibilities. They hope that through their faithfulness, the problems will be resolved. They never intend to deceive anyone, but one day they discover they are married, forty years old, and the Elder's Quorum president, and they still have homosexual feelings.

Don't be quick to judge them. In the first chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul condemns homosexual practices, then a few verses later gives a warning that when we judge others we condemn ourselves (see Romans 2:1-4). Although God condemns the sin, He loves the sinner. After speaking in a general conference on the subject of same-gender attraction, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "Having said this, I desire now to say with emphasis that our concern for the bitter fruit of sin is coupled with Christlike sympathy for its victims, innocent or culpable. We advocate the example of the Lord, who condemned the sin, yet loved the sinner. We should reach out with kindness and comfort to the afflicted, ministering to their needs and assisting them with their problems."⁹

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said that “each member of Christ’s church has a clear-cut doctrinal responsibility to show forth love and to extend help and understanding. Sinners, as well as those who are struggling to resist inappropriate feelings, are not people to be cast out but people to be loved and helped (see 3 Ne. 18:22–23, 30, 32).”¹⁰ Elder Oaks continued, “Church leaders are sometimes asked whether there is any place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for persons with homosexual or lesbian susceptibilities or feelings. Of course there is. The degree of difficulty and the pattern necessary to forgo behavior and to control thoughts will be different with different individuals, but the message of hope and the hand of fellowship offered by the Church is the same for all who strive.”¹¹ Elder Oaks further explained that “all should understand that persons (and their family members) struggling with the burden of same-sex attraction are in special need of the love and encouragement that is a clear responsibility of Church members, who have signified by covenant their willingness ‘to bear one another’s burdens’ (Mosiah 18:8) ‘and so fulfil the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2).”¹²

How many people have homosexual problems?

Pro-gay advocates claim that 10% of the population has a homosexual orientation. More conservative estimates place the figure at 1–3%. However, estimates are problematic not only because it is hard to get accurate information, but also because it is difficult to define what homosexuality is. Do you include in the numbers everyone who has had a homosexual thought, or just those who have had a homosexual experience? How many experiences or thoughts qualify? Some people are reluctant to admit homosexual experiences, while others exaggerate the numbers. Further, since it is to the political advantage of those who seek to normalize homosexuality to establish the practice as widespread, you must be cautious about the studies that are reported.

Kinsey research

Alfred C. Kinsey conducted research on human sexuality in the late 1940s and early 1950s and published his findings in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*¹³ and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*.¹⁴ Kinsey ranked his findings on a seven-point scale with exclusive

heterosexuality at zero and exclusive homosexuality at six.¹⁵ Among twenty-five-year-old males in the United States, he claimed that 79% were at zero (exclusively heterosexual) and 2.9% were at six (exclusively homosexual).¹⁶ He claimed the following about white American males between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five:¹⁷

- ◆ 10% were “more or less exclusively homosexual (i.e., rate 5 or 6) for at least three years.”
- ◆ 8% were “exclusively homosexual (i.e., rate 6) for at least three years.”
- ◆ 4% were “exclusively homosexual throughout their lives, after the onset of adolescence.”

His findings showed that 10% of the males had seven or more homosexual experiences. Further, he claimed that as many as 37% had some kind of homosexual experience after adolescence.

Kinsey’s research methodologies have been questioned. Although he used a large number of subjects—they took sex histories on more than 18,000 people and used data from 5,000 men and 6,000 women—he did not use methods of random sampling that scientists commonly use today. His subjects came from boarding houses, college fraternities, prisons, mental wards, and wherever else he could get them. As many as 20–25% had prison experience and 5% may have been male prostitutes. Since one would expect that this group would have higher than average homosexual experiences, the findings of Kinsey’s studies may not be representative of the population as a whole.¹⁸

Current research

There has been significant research since the 1950s to indicate that the occurrence of homosexuality in America and in other countries is much lower than the Kinsey statistics would indicate.¹⁹ Milton Diamond of the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii analyzed studies of populations in the United States, Scandinavia, Asia, and Europe, and found that including all individuals who have *ever* engaged in *any kind* of same-sex behavior, the numbers would be “5–6 percent for males and 2–3 percent for females.”²⁰

A large study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute reported in 1993 that of sexually-active men aged 20–39, only 2.3% had any same-

gender sexual activity and only 1.1% reported exclusive homosexual contact during the last ten years.²¹

Perhaps the largest and most scientifically-based modern survey was concluded in 1994 by academics at the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center.²² They asked 210 pages of questions of 3,432 Americans, ages eighteen to fifty-nine, and published their findings in *The Social Organization of Sexuality*.²³ On the subject of homosexuality, this survey found the following:

Have you had sex with someone of your gender?

2.7% of men (and 1.3% of women) had sex in the past year

7.1% of men (and 3.8% of women) had sex since puberty

Are you sexually attracted to people of the same gender?

6.2% of men (and 4.4% of women) said yes

The survey also showed larger percentages in urban areas. The twelve largest cities in the United States showed more than 9% of men identifying themselves as homosexual, opposed to only 1% in rural areas. Since homosexual people tend to migrate from the rural areas and suburbs to larger cities, these larger urban groups feed the perception that a larger percentage of the total population is homosexual.

Conclusions on existing research

Different studies show different findings. Kinsey claimed that 4–10% of the male population was more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years. Other research since that time shows the figure to be a more conservative 1–3%. However, if you consider everyone who has had homosexual contact since puberty, the numbers are more in the neighborhood of 5–10%.

Whatever the numbers, homosexual problems are significant and touch the lives of many people. If we use the conservative figure of 5%, of the ten million members of the Church there are 500,000 who have some degree of homosexual problems. And if you count their parents, spouses, brothers and sisters, it could add up to ***nearly three million members of the Church directly affected***.²⁴ Add to that grandparents, uncles, aunts, and concerned Church leaders, and you can see that many more people are affected.

The truth about men who have homosexual feelings

Men do not choose to have homosexual feelings. These attractions usually develop because social and emotional needs were not met in the developmental years. It is not a matter of choice, except for a few people who just enjoy being different, which we find in any behavioral group.

Men do not develop homosexual problems because they are afraid of women. In reality, relationships with women generally have little to do with homosexual problems; instead, they have to do with relationships with men.

They are not effeminate men with limp wrists who speak with a lisp. Contrary to popular belief, only a small minority of men with homosexual problems displays effeminate mannerisms. Likewise, many men who have effeminate characteristics have no homosexual problems. It is misleading to assume that effeminate traits indicate homosexual problems.

They do not dress in women's clothing. Cross-dressing (transvestism) is not typical of those who have homosexual problems. About 80% of cross-dressers are heterosexual.²⁵

They do not feel they are women trapped in men's bodies. Very few men with homosexual tendencies feel this way. Men who want hormone treatment or surgery to become women are referred to as transsexuals.

For further reading

“Same-Gender Attraction,” Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, pp. 7–14.

Setting the Record Straight: What Research Really Says About the Social Consequences of Homosexuality, Larry Burtoft, Ph.D., Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1995, pp. 24–26.

Homosexuality in America: Exposing the Myths, American Family Association, Tupelo, MS, 1994.

Kinsey, Sex and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People by Judith A. Reisman and Edward W. Eichel, Huntington House, LaFayette, LA, 1990.

Why Are Men Attracted to Other Men?

Many factors contribute to the development of homosexual attractions. Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, author of *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, explained, “[M]any things are capable of causing the disruption in attachment that underlies the homosexual condition. It is not a question of one particular cause leading of necessity to one particular effect.”²⁶ It is difficult to develop theories about the origins of homosexual attractions because no single theory fits every situation. Although there are some commonalities among people, there are no constants. Factors are different from person to person, or at least individual reactions to the same factors vary. Humans are complex beings and our behaviors are the result of many complex interactions.²⁷ This chapter discusses how personality, biological inheritance, and developmental experiences influence the development of homosexual problems.

Personality

Before we were born, we existed as spirits, and before that as unique intelligences (see Abraham 3:21–23). Our personalities were not created at physical birth, but have been developing long before that. It is no wonder that every person has different likes, desires, dreams, and moods. We see ourselves and the world in different ways and each of us hopes for something a little different from life. One child may be content with the affection he receives from his parents, while his sibling who receives the same attention feels a deficit and requires more. Some children seem content to play by themselves, while others who have many friends seem to need even more.

Many men with homosexual attractions have a heightened sense of emotional sensitivity which can make them vulnerable to emotional hurt when their high expectations are not met. Since we all have different needs and perspectives on life, it is easy to see why two people in the same situation will react differently. For one person, a negative situation may be manageable, while for another it is a

devastating crisis.

Biology

Science has not shown that homosexuality is an inborn or biologically-determined characteristic. Biology may play some small role in influencing behavior or feelings. Some people seem susceptible to particular actions and may be drawn toward them or become addicted to them more easily than other people.²⁸ One person may be able to dabble with gambling, while another becomes a compulsive gambler. Some may drink only socially, while others have an unusual attraction to alcohol. Studies indicate that genetics may be a factor in susceptibilities to some behavior-related disorders, such as aggression, obesity, or alcoholism. Likewise, there are theories that claim biological predispositions influence the development of homosexual attractions when other life experiences are also present.²⁹

Beyond such predispositions, some scientists search for more direct genetic causes—a gene or chromosome that actually determines sexual orientation.³⁰ News reports on these studies have misrepresented the facts. If you read the reports published by the researchers, you find that they admit their current findings are not conclusive. Most scientists today give genetic theories little credibility.³¹ The more significant research in these biological areas is described below.

Twin studies

Drs. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard studied identical and fraternal twins.³² They identified homosexual males who had identical twin brothers and found that 52% of the brothers were also homosexual. Among fraternal twins, they found the ratio to be 22%. They concluded that since identical twins had a higher incidence of mutual homosexuality than fraternal twins, there must be a genetic component in the development of homosexuality.

However, if genetics caused the homosexuality, the correlation between the identical twins (who have exactly the same genes) should have been much higher—even 100%. Since all the twins in this study were raised together, it is impossible to determine whether genetics or the same family environment contributed to the brothers' homosexuality. If the genes are identical and the brothers are raised in

the same family environment, a correlation of only 52% in identical twins shows that other factors are involved.

Many question the validity of the twins study. The researchers commented that since their subjects were not selected by random sampling, they may have collected a biased sample with skewed results.³³ Another twin study was conducted a year later, which showed a correlation of only 25%.³⁴

Brain studies

In 1991, Dr. Simon LeVay, a neurobiologist at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, reported his findings from studying the brain structures of forty-one cadavers.³⁵ He concluded that an area of the hypothalamus (the INAH3) was smaller in homosexual men than in heterosexual men. (It was also found to be smaller in women than in heterosexual men.) However, these findings do not show any direct link between the hypothalamus and sexual orientation and, furthermore, are dubious at best because of the following reasons:

- ◆ It has not been determined that the INAH3 is involved in the development of sexual orientation.³⁶
- ◆ The sample size of this study was small. Furthermore, Dr. LeVay did not know the sexual histories of the cadavers he studied. Nineteen men apparently were homosexual and he assumed that the other sixteen men and six women were heterosexual.³⁷
- ◆ Since most of the subjects died of AIDS, the HIV virus may have affected the brains in various ways, especially the hypothalamus, which is a major player in the immune system. LeVay himself admitted this was a serious flaw in the study.³⁸
- ◆ There were many inconsistencies in the findings. Three of the allegedly heterosexual men had a smaller INAH3 than the mean size for the “homosexual” men and three of the “homosexual” men had a larger INAH3 than the mean size for “heterosexual” men.³⁹
- ◆ Many neuroscientists charge that LeVay deviated from protocol when he measured volume rather than the number of neurons in the INAH3. This is critical, since the area LeVay measured is very small (about the size of a snowflake).
- ◆ Dr. LeVay himself cautions that the results of his study “do not allow one to decide if the size of INAH3 in an individual is the

cause or consequence of that individual's sexual orientation."⁴⁰

Anne Fausto-Sterling, a professor of medical science at Brown University, said, "My freshman biology students know enough to sink this study."⁴¹

Chromosome studies

In 1993, Dr. Dean Hamer announced that he had found a correlation between DNA markers on the X chromosome (region Xq28) and sexual orientation in a selected group of homosexual men and their relatives over age eighteen. In other words, "it appears that Xq28 contains a gene that contributes to homosexual orientation in males."⁴² In his book, Dr. Hamer stated, "We can make only educated guesses about the importance of Xq28 in the population at large." He concludes that "Xq28 plays some role in about 5 to 30 percent of gay men. The broad range of these estimates is proof that much more work remains to be done."⁴³ Scientists have since questioned the validity of these findings and what they purport to show.⁴⁴ Dr. Hammer has been charged with research improprieties and is under investigation by the federal government for improperly excluding from his study men whose genetic makeup contradicted his findings.⁴⁵ A later study by the University of Western Ontario "found no consistent pattern of DNA similarity on the X chromosome."⁴⁶

Hormone studies

Studies have shown that in some cases the mothers of homosexual males suffered a high degree of stress during their pregnancy. Since stress affects hormonal levels, some researchers suggest that decreased levels of testosterone could lead to a demasculinization of the developing brain. However, multiple studies over the years have not been able to substantiate the theory, and the available evidence is to the contrary. Ehrhardt and Meyer-Bahlburg wrote, "In the majority of intersex patients with known hormone abnormalities, the sexual orientation follows the sex of rearing. Consequently, we have to assume that prenatal hormone conditions by themselves do not rigidly determine sexual orientation."⁴⁷ Dr. John Money also states there is no evidence that prenatal hormonalization alone determines sexual orientation.⁴⁸

Experiments have been conducted wherein testosterone was given to homosexual males, both those who were effeminate and those who were not. “When there were any behavioral changes at all, the subjects became more like themselves than ever. Their sex drives were usually increased and sometimes their effeminate mannerisms as well (when they had any), but there were never any directional changes in their sexual interests. From these experiments . . . it has become abundantly clear that the sex hormones play a considerable role in powering human sexuality, but they do not control the direction of it.”⁴⁹

Biological conclusions

Drs. Byne and Parsons of the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University reviewed the biologic theories of human sexual orientation in 1993 and concluded, “[T]here is no evidence at present to substantiate a biologic theory.”⁵⁰ No study suggests that a simple cause–effect relationship exists.⁵¹ And Dr. Earl Wilson wrote, “[T]he disputed evidence for physical causes of male homosexuality is even weaker when it comes to lesbianism.”⁵²

Regardless of the role that genetics play in the development of sexual attractions, such attractions are changeable and treatable. In analogy, although the City of Hope National Medical Center researchers found a certain gene present in 77% of the alcoholic patients they studied, we have not abandoned treatment for alcoholism.⁵³ Many former alcoholics have changed their behavior and lead productive lives. Help your friend see that he has control over his destiny. As a child of God, he has moral agency and can determine the course of his life. Regardless of any biological thread, thousands of men who struggle with homosexual attractions have made changes in their lives for the better.

Developmental experiences

Professionals agree that environment influences a child in significant ways. His family, friends, society, and his experiences influence how he feels, how he views life, and how he acts. Dr. William Consiglio refers to this myriad of social and psychological factors as a “conspiracy of factors,” meaning that many factors “conspired” or came together in the right amounts at the right time to

divert sexual desires in a developing boy toward other boys.⁵⁴ Some of these factors include the boy's relationship with his family and peers, his ability to identify with masculinity, the degree to which his emotional needs are fulfilled, his feelings of self-worth, and early sexual experiences.

Relationship with father

When I first tried to understand how my homosexual attractions had developed, I didn't think my family was dysfunctional. We loved each other and my father did not beat us. We lived in peace and love and were active in the Church. However, I later came to realize that these good things did not guarantee that all my emotional needs would be met.

It is important that a boy have a healthy emotional relationship with his father or with another significant male. (This is much more than Sigmund Freud's theory that a homosexual male child is the product of a strong mother and a passive, indifferent, or hostile father.) The boy needs to feel love from his father and needs to identify with him. It is through this male bonding that a child develops a sense of himself as an individual and as a male. If this relationship is not functional, the needs that would normally be met through it remain unmet.

This bonding may not occur if the father is physically or emotionally uninvolved in his child's life or the bond may be broken if he is punishing or authoritarian. Since this can be very painful, the child may not want to reestablish the connection. Even if the father tries to build a good relationship, the child may prevent it out of fear of further hurt. Dr. Elizabeth Moberly of Cambridge University refers to this as *defensive detachment*.⁵⁵ The child defends against further trauma by blocking himself from relating normally with his father, and in so doing, unknowingly insures that his needs for attachment will not be met. It becomes an approach-avoidance conflict. The drive for a renewed attachment shows his need for love from his father, but the defensive detachment prevents the attachment and so the needs continue unmet.

The child's interpretation of this relationship is critical. Even if the father is available and loves the child, if the child does not perceive that love or cannot connect with the father, there will be a deficit.

There is a difference between *being* loved and *feeling* loved. The more sensitive the child and the more unable to relate to his father, the greater the chance of a relationship problem. To a child, the parent is his source of being, and if the attachment to the parent is disrupted, his very being feels endangered. The hurt child may become unwilling to trust and may learn to repress his need for attachment. He may then distance himself from his father and later carry it over to men in general by avoiding closeness with his male peers. Thus he becomes emotionally needful as a result of not having the supportive, affectionate relationships he requires to develop a good sense of identity. When these psychological needs remain unfulfilled, although the boy grows to be a man, he is still essentially a child trying to fill basic emotional needs. In many respects, he may still be a dependent child who needs to be loved by his father and not yet an adult with adult needs.

To learn more about the father-son relationship and defensive detachment, read Elizabeth Moberly's book *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*

It should be emphasized that the deficit existed because the child could not connect with his father or didn't perceive that the relationship was what he desired. It doesn't necessarily mean that the father was detached or unloving—the father may have done everything in his power to develop a healthy, nurturing relationship. Father, if your relationship with your son is not what you wish it to be, it is not too late to improve the relationship.

Relationship with mother

The boy's relationship with his mother is also important. A mother can either reinforce and strengthen the boy's relationship with his father, or she can dominate and minimize the father's role. A strong relationship with the mother is not a problem unless it gets in the way of a strong relationship with the father. In the triangle of relationships between the boy, mother, and father the three sometimes become imbalanced. If the father-mother relationship is not healthy, the son misses out on learning what a husband-wife relationship should be. Further, the son may try to take care of the emotional needs of the mother and thus becomes a surrogate male companion to her. When

this disordered mother-son relationship occurs, the boy does not develop a normal male image as a boy, nor are his emotional needs met as a son from his mother. Needless to say, he also does not get his emotional needs met from the father-son relationship. The boy becomes enmeshed with mom, in part to compensate for the fact that he does not have the emotional support from his father.⁵⁶ If this describes your friend's situation, it may require the help of a therapist to unravel the relationship problems.

Gender identity

As children develop, it is important to gain a healthy sense of who they are as a man or woman. In normal development, the concept of masculinity (what it means to be a man) is internalized before puberty by interaction with, and validation from, other boys and men. If a boy is confused about what it means to be a man or does not feel affirmed in his masculinity, he may internalize the concept of masculinity in unhealthy ways with frustrating results. When this happens, he typically will not realize that anything abnormal is happening. As he enters puberty and sexual feelings emerge, they may become confused with his masculine longings.

Having diminished feelings of masculinity does not mean he sees himself as feminine—that is the case for only a small percentage of men. There is a considerable difference between feeling inadequate as a male and feeling feminine. Many men who have homosexual feelings are masculine in appearance and action. They simply have not affirmed within themselves their validity as a man.

Boys who exhibit less masculine behaviors and prefer feminine things have a higher chance of developing same-gender attractions during the socialization process.⁵⁷ Dr. Richard Green reports that although more than half of the boys who show pronounced effeminate behavior develop homosexual problems, a substantial minority of them does not. He suggests that the boy's behavior, along with contributing life experiences, can predispose them toward developing attractions toward the same gender. Dr. Judd Marmor wrote, "Thus, a little boy whose behavior is effeminate, who does not like competitive athletics, and who prefers music and art, may be disappointing to a macho father, who tends to reject the boy and distance himself from him. The mother

may respond by overprotecting her son. Such reactions disturb the boy's capacity to identify positively with his father and cause him to over-identify with his mother. He may ultimately develop homosexual erotic responses which are reinforced by later experiences."⁵⁸

It is important to respect the divinely appointed roles that are uniquely male or female. But beyond that, there is great room to provide opportunities for children to develop talents in various directions unhindered by improper stereotypes. Father, if you are concerned that your small son does not want to play catch but loves to play with dolls, take the time to sit down and play dolls with him. Once he sees you are interested in him and what he wants to do, it will be easier to help him transition to other activities.

Parents can help by providing good male and female role models for their children. Children learn from seeing the good relationship between the mother and father. For advice on helping children through their developing years, read the Church's publication *A Parent's Guide* (item number 31125).

Defensive detachment may also express itself in the development of gender identity. The effeminacy of some men with homosexual attractions and the quasi-masculinity of some women with homosexual attractions are examples of defensive detachments from the person's gender. They feel the need to identify with their own gender, but they reject it because they perceive it to be harsh or hurtful, and they prevent its normal development in a defensive way. In these cases, the development of their identity as male and female was likely stopped at an early stage of development.

Male emotional needs

A boy's need for the love and identification with other males is a normal, legitimate requirement every boy has; your friend's needs may have been greater than average. These needs are usually met by fathers or another significant male during early childhood and later reinforced by peers, teachers, and society as a whole. For many men with homosexual attractions, their perfectly natural needs for love, acceptance, and identification with other males were not fulfilled, and now because of their insecurities they do not venture out to legitimately fulfill them. They long for the companionship, love, and

acceptance of their male peers, but when it is offered they resist because of fear of hurt or rejection. They may then feel hurt that the opportunity for companionship and attention has passed them by. They may secretly fear they are not worthy of companionship or attention and therefore stay where it is safe but lonely rather than venture out to interact with other men.

Many report that during childhood they felt different from their peers—loners who did not play the rough games that boys commonly play. Others had some friends, but wished for more and felt unable or unworthy of more substantial relationships that were important to them. For these boys, their attraction to other males is rooted in the need to identify with and be accepted by other males and feel part of a group of buddies. At a time critical for making friends, their life may have been disrupted by a medical problem or a move to a new neighborhood, or overprotective parents may have interfered with peer relationships. Since they had limited contact with other boys, they did not identify with them in healthy ways, but anticipated rejection and expected they would not fit in. They desperately want acceptance and comfort from these ideal friends, but instead develop feelings of loneliness and longing.

Feeling alienated from the boys, they become attracted to them as an opposite. Watching from the sidelines, they admire the boys and wish they could be like them. Even as adults, they may be attracted to men who look or dress the way they wish they did. A man who is young and carefree may envy a professional who is responsible and mature. And the mature professional may wish he could be young and carefree.

This longing for a friend can be intense and can easily turn to adoration and idolization. One day in high school, I remember walking by the gym just as the track team was returning from a meet. I remember noticing one particular boy who was shirtless and sweaty, and in that brief moment, saw my ideal of perfect masculinity. I wondered what made the difference between him and me. Although he was my age and in some of my classes, I wondered how he could be on the track team and be so manly, and I was not. I admired him for being an athlete. He was everything I wished I was. Those were the beginnings of my feelings of envy toward other men. Although it

happened twenty-five years ago, I remember the incident as vividly as if it happened yesterday. Those kinds of feelings and longings can have significant impact in a person's life.

“Mysterious [males] are those who possess enigmatic masculine qualities that both perplex and allure,” writes Joseph Nicolosi. “Such [males] are overvalued and even idealized, for they are the embodiment of qualities that the [individual] wishes he had attained for himself.”⁵⁹ As the boy enters puberty and sexual feelings emerge, this intense envy can turn to sexual lust, and if he is not able to fill his need for love and acceptance through brotherly relating, he may begin to seek it through sexual relating.⁶⁰ The homosexual behavior may be an attempt to complete the person's masculine identity as he tries to possess valued masculine attributes through sexual intimacy with another male. It may be an effort to solve the mystery of masculinity that arises from the perception of being unlike other men. And it may also be a simple escape from his inadequacies and pain. In the heat of passion, one can momentarily believe any fantasy—that he is beautiful, masculine, loved, and accepted.⁶¹

These underlying emotional needs are the same for all men, whether they have homosexual problems or not. The homosexual drive is actually a drive to fulfill the emotional need to relate to and be accepted by other men. “Love among those of the same sex is right and good,” explain Drs. Thomas and Ann Pritt. “Only the sexualization of the attraction is inappropriate.”⁶² This attraction to other men is a reparative drive and is actually an attempt to resolve the problem, and not the problem itself. The core problem is not *homosexual*, but *homosocial*. It is a continual attempt to remedy earlier deficits and fulfill the social and emotional needs that still exist. The fulfillment of these unmet needs for love and identification can only be solved through nonsexual relationships with other men. The attractions will persist until he is able to develop a healthy identity and relate appropriately with other men in a nonsexual way.⁶³ Until these relationship needs are fulfilled, he is still essentially a child trying to fill basic emotional needs. He is still a boy who needs to identify with other boys.

Self-Worth

Low feelings of self-worth and inferiority are common breeding grounds for homosexual problems. Traumatic experiences in a child's life can lead to feelings of inferiority. Negative interactions with other boys can easily damage a vulnerable self-image and increase a boy's sense of being different from other children. This sense of feeling different is always a feeling of inferiority.

Many men who have homosexual attractions report feeling different and alone. Being different creates a mind set that has a tremendous impact on a person's development and on the way he understands the world. These feelings may separate him from his peers and he may feel that he lives his entire life from the outside looking in. Knowing that his attractions are not normal, he keeps them secret and this secret not only increases his sense of aloneness, but makes him feel he is of less value than other boys. Unfortunately, the feelings of isolation, inferiority, and fear of exposure are the very forces that keep the underlying issues from being resolved. Other children may pick up on his sense of inadequacy and attack it, causing him to withdraw further, defensively detach, and develop a fantasy life.

Even more dreaded than the attractions is the terrifying realization that the attractions are wrong—they are in conflict with his religious and moral beliefs. This creates a sense of shame, which is another proof to him that he is inferior in relation to other males. The feelings of being different, inferior, and guilty often lead to self-belittling and self-degrading thoughts. He may feel that he is inherently defective. The boy does not understand that his attractions are a result of a *deficit* and not a *defect*.

When young people reach puberty and find they don't have normal feelings toward the opposite sex, they are devastated. They try to live righteous lives and make the feelings go away, but the feelings don't go away. They grow up hating themselves and become convinced that others would also hate them if they were to find out these inner feelings. They begin to question the worth of living and thousands of young men commit suicide rather than be an awful, hated person who is attracted to his own sex.

Early Sexual Experiences

Children who have unresolved needs for affection or who experience social or emotional trauma can be particularly vulnerable to negative experiences. Early masturbation, exposure to pornography, or childhood sexual experimentation often introduce sexual thoughts before young men are able to understand them, and they can reinforce homosexual interests. Children who are victimized by sexual abuse or youth who have early sexual contacts can become confused and develop a gender misidentity and unusual sexual interests and values. Inappropriate sexual activity blurs the distinction between intimacy and sex. Studies show that boys who are sexually abused are four to seven times more likely to have homosexual problems and 65% of the victims say the abuse affected their sexual identity.⁶⁴ Somewhere between one in four and one in six boys in America are sexually abused and in more than 90% of the cases the victim knows the offender and the offender is a male. Nearly all of the offenders are *heterosexual* males.⁶⁵

A study in 1988 showed that boys who have homosexual problems started sexual activity earlier than other boys. By age fourteen, 60% of the group with homosexual attractions had genital contact with another male, and 85% had contact by age eighteen. Further, it showed that those with homosexual attractions were more sexually active during preadolescence, early adolescence, and adulthood.⁶⁶ It should be noted that some homosexual exploration occurs among all boys both before and after puberty. A national survey conducted in 1970 showed that at least 20% of adult men in the United States had sexual contact to orgasm with another man at some time in life.⁶⁷

Developmental conclusions

Many boys become aware of their same-sex attractions at an early age (sometimes before age five). The most important formative years for the development of sexual feelings and attitudes are during late infancy and before the onset of puberty, and not during puberty and adolescence. Dr. John Money explained, "The hormones of puberty activate what has already formed and is awaiting activation."⁶⁸ A child's development of heterosexual interests proceeds instinctively unless emotional maturity is obstructed by issues such as those just discussed. Dr. William Consiglio describes homosexuality as a

disorientation from the mainstream of heterosexual development. “It is not something a person is born with; rather, it is sexual disorientation when the God-designed stream of heterosexuality is blocked. Homosexuality is not an alternative sexuality or sexual orientation, but an emotional disorientation caused by arrested or blocked emotional development in the stream of heterosexuality.”⁶⁹ But the good news is that the condition is correctable. When these blockages are “successfully reduced, diminished, or removed, human sexuality can resume its natural heterosexual flow toward its proper, God-designed outlet; i.e., wholesome, mature, sexual, and emotional expression in marriage with a person of the opposite sex.”⁷⁰

The homosexual urge is not unrealistic or rebellious. It is not a fear of, or a flight from, heterosexuality. It is actually an unconscious attempt to fill normal emotional needs and when these needs begin to be filled, the person can begin again progressing toward full heterosexual maturation.⁷¹

Summary

Personality, genetics, and developmental experiences all have a place in influencing the development of homosexual attractions. Drs. Byne and Parsons at Columbia University believe it is important to “appreciate the complexities of sexual orientation and resist the urge to search for simplistic explanations, either psychosocial or biologic.”⁷² They emphasize that in addition to the influences of genetics or the environment, the individual plays an important role in determining his or her identity.

Dr. John Money stated, “Many wrongly assume that whatever is biological cannot be changed, and whatever mental can be. Both propositions are in error. Homosexuality is always biological and always mental, both together. It is mental because it exists in the mind. It is biological because the mind exists in the brain. The sexual brain through its extended nervous system communicates back and forth with the sex organs.”⁷³

Our character is the net result of our choices and life experience. An article in *Harvest News* stated, “Some of us are shy, some anxious, some have problems with anger or chemical dependence, some of us fear commitment. Did we ‘choose’ any of these things? Actually, *all*

of our adult personality is the result of a complex interplay of heredity and family environment with thousands of small personal decisions dating back as far as we can remember. The results are deeply entrenched ways of feeling, thinking, acting.”⁷⁴ Your friend had no control over the emergence of homosexual attractions, but he can choose how to respond to them.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said that “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.”⁷⁵

For further reading

Responding to Abuse: Helps for Ecclesiastical Leaders, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (item number 32248).

Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (item number 33196).

Stolen Childhood: What You Need to Know About Sexual Abuse by Alice Huskey.

The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Dr. Dan B. Allender.

Can Homosexual Problems Be Resolved?

Many young men struggle to make sense of their homosexual attractions in light of the gospel. They have a testimony of the gospel, but they also know these feelings are very real and strong. They want to be righteous, but find that their attempts to live the gospel don't make the feelings go away. They are caught between the gospel which is right and the attractions toward men that are contrary to the gospel. Their response is to (1) try to suppress the feelings and live the gospel or (2) decide that the gospel does not fit in their life and pursue the attractions, thereby losing out on the blessings of the gospel. Rejecting the gospel was not an answer for me, but suppressing the feelings did not make them go away. Suppression means a continual struggle where, at best, the person is celibate but miserable, and at worst, leads a double life by pretending to be a good member of the Church but secretly engaging in homosexual behavior. The only way to resolve the problem is to identify the needs that cause the attractions and fill them in legitimate ways.

This chapter addresses the reality of resolving homosexual problems. It gives a definition of what it means to resolve these problems, statistics on the numbers of people who have resolved them, and information about the time the process takes. Finally, it discusses how complete the change can be and the ultimate goal of doing all this work.

Is it possible to resolve these problems?

The world has defined concepts such as *homosexual* and *sexual orientation* and tells us that they are inborn and cannot be changed. Many people have bought into this theory and believe that a homosexual orientation is as genetic as race or left-handedness. They say that those who have changed are simply engrossed in a fantasy and that some day they will come back to reality and realize they are still homosexual.

Although these “pro-gay” arguments are complex and can appear

logical, they have little credibility when viewed in the broader perspective of the eternal plan of salvation. To believe that God would give us problems that we could not overcome is to deny the power of the atonement and the omnipotence of God. Dr. Charles Socarides stated, “The major challenge in treating homosexuality, from the point of view of the patient’s resistance, has, of course, been the misconception that the disorder is innate or inborn.”⁷⁶ Encourage your friend to see that he is not a “homosexual” and does not have an unalterable “sexual orientation.”

President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “After consideration of the evil aspects, the ugliness and prevalence of the evil of homosexuality, the glorious thing to remember is that it is curable and forgivable. The Lord has promised that all sins can be forgiven except certain ones enumerated, and this evil was not among those named. Thus it is forgivable if totally abandoned and if the repentance is sincere and absolute. Certainly it can be overcome, for there are numerous happy people who were once involved in its clutches and who have since completely transformed their lives.”⁷⁷

I personally attest that it is possible to diminish homosexual attractions, eliminate homosexual behavior, and lead a happy life in full alignment with the gospel. I know this because I have done it. I used to be conflicted by my feelings and tormented by my desires to act out. Now that I have resolved these issues, I feel peace and comfort as a whole person. And mine is not the only case. I personally know many other people and have read about hundreds more who have resolved significant problems and are now much happier and at greater peace with themselves and with God.

What does it mean to resolve these problems?

The process described in this book is *not* one of learning to suppress the feelings and control the behavior through willpower. The goal is to *resolve* the issues that created the homosexual attractions in the first place and that now continue to sustain them. A transition out of homosexuality might include the following:

- ◆ reducing or eliminating homosexual desires.
- ◆ eliminating homosexual behavior.
- ◆ developing a secure sense of self and male identity.

Desires

As men begin to resolve their homosexual issues, they note that their sexual attractions toward men significantly decrease. They may reach the point where they are no longer sexually attracted to men at all. Others may continue to be attracted to other men as strongly as before, but they can learn to cope with the attractions without being overwhelmed by them.

Many men still experience some attractions from time to time, but they are able to deal with them with a minimum of anxiety and they do not dominate their lives or behavior. Over time, the feelings diminish both in number and intensity until it becomes easy to dismiss these fleeting thoughts, much like they do any other unwanted thought that enters their minds. As Joe Dallas describes, for most men these desires are “reduced from a major issue into a minor one, a problem that does not dominate their lives or keep them from experiencing healthy friendships, healthy marriage, and peace of mind. If it is still a problem to them, it’s only one of many; they don’t struggle with it daily and they seldom give it serious thought. For them, the battle is not even considered a battle anymore.”⁷⁸

Most find that heterosexual feelings awaken or increase within them.

Behavior

With a greater understanding of their issues, men with homosexual struggles recognize that they can choose to avoid sexual activity with other men and most are able to control their actions. The comforting news is that as they resolve deeper issues, they find that their compulsions to act out diminish and in many cases disappear. As time passes, homosexual behavior becomes less and less appealing, and in some cases even repulsive.

Those who have been heavily involved in sexual behavior for a number of years have a greater struggle overcoming habits and sexual addictions. But if they are sincerely motivated and make a significant effort, they can overcome these addictions.

Identity

Men are attracted to other men because of a distorted view of

themselves and others. If they have accepted a “gay” identity, they can change that perception and accept themselves as sons of God with eternal potential. With increased levels of self-acceptance, their feelings of self-worth and masculinity will increase, they will begin to see their value in relation to other men, and stop comparing themselves with other men. As they become more pro-active rather than reactive, they will be able to develop increasingly healthy relationships with men and sexual attractions decrease.

How many people change?

Since homosexuality is the outward manifestation of unresolved issues that are central to the individual’s personality, deciding to work on these issues involves reevaluating his core person and working to change it. This may be a long and painful process, and not everyone who begins it sees it through.

Personal observations

For the past seven years, I have been involved with LDS support groups for men with homosexual problems. I participated for half that time to work on my own problems and during the remainder of the time have served in leadership capacities. During those seven years, I estimate there have been more than a thousand men attend at least one meeting and I have personally met probably three hundred fifty of them. Their success has varied because of several factors, chief among which I believe is their level of commitment.

- ◆ Many attend only a few meetings, then drop out. They learn a little about the philosophy of change, but do not pursue it because they don’t believe that change is possible for them, they decide they don’t want to change, they are not ready for change, or they did not find the support group helpful to them.
- ◆ Others go to support groups because they enjoy the friendships they build with others who are likewise struggling with homosexuality. It is a great relief for them to find other LDS men who understand their value system and empathize with their situation. But for them, it is a social meeting and they lack the commitment to do much beyond showing up at meetings.
- ◆ Still others attend because of feelings of guilt. They know they

should change but they are not willing to put forth the effort to change. Without much commitment, they participate on a superficial level to pacify their conscience and appease their family.

Unfortunately, the majority of the thousand people who have attended support groups for one of these reasons have found only limited success. Their token efforts may bring about some changes, but few make significant, lasting progress.

However, there is hope for those who are committed to the process and put forth a significant effort. Although it was the hardest thing I have ever done, it was worth the effort. I no longer struggle with homosexuality. It no longer controls my life or dominates my thoughts. For me to get to that point, it required the following:

- ◆ personal study, prayer, pondering, journaling over a period of four years
- ◆ building a closer relationship with my Heavenly Father and Jesus.
- ◆ reaching out and building important male relationships.
- ◆ individual therapy for five months.
- ◆ group therapy (two six-week groups).
- ◆ support group meetings for three and a half years.

Of those who make this kind of commitment, most are able to resolve their problems and make significant, long-lasting changes in their lives.

Observations of others

Fortunately, you don't have to rely solely on my word. Read the following opinions and studies by professionals in the field.

Dr. William Consiglio is an associate professor of clinical social work at Southern Connecticut State University who for more than seventeen years has worked with men and women who seek freedom from homosexuality. He finds that 40% of his clients find personal resolution and enjoy a full heterosexual life, with many entering marriage and parenthood. Another 40% achieve a functional resolution in that they are able to control their homosexual thoughts, attractions, and behaviors, and thus maintain consistent celibacy. The remaining 20% drop out of the process and eventually return to active homosexuality.⁷⁹ He reports that even for those people who do not make a complete heterosexual recovery there is great hope. They can

“achieve a significant degree of emotional healing, growth in self-worth, and spiritual well being and are able to move on in life freed of the homosexual obsession and preoccupation. It allows them to form rewarding and fulfilling relationships and live more integrated and satisfying lives which are compatible with their spiritual values and convictions. And that’s powerfully good news in itself.”⁸⁰

Dr. Charles Socarides, who teaches and serves as attending psychiatrist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, reports that in treating 45 “overt homosexuals,” 44% developed full heterosexual functioning.⁸¹ These success rates are as good as, or better than, those for treating other conditions. Let us compare the success rate of overcoming homosexual problems with that of overcoming problems from depression, one of the most commonly treated behavioral issues. Of those treated for depression, about one third get better, one third stay the same, and a third actually get worse. This division of thirds holds true for the treatment of many conditions. If homosexuality is indeed a treatable, changeable condition, we would expect about the same success rates. In fact, we find much better. Clinical evidence shows that the recovery rate for homosexual problems is even greater than for drug addiction and alcoholism. The professional community generally considers treatment a success if more than half the patients show improvement; the recovery rate for drug and alcohol addiction is about 50%. A Masters & Johnson study showed the recovery rate from homosexuality at 71.6% when motivation and support were present.⁸²

For her doctoral dissertation at Brigham Young University in 1978, Elizabeth James conducted perhaps the most comprehensive review of the literature on the treatment of homosexuality that had been conducted to date. In her analysis of 101 studies that had been published from 1930 to 1976, she found that approximately 35% of the clients recovered and 27% improved. She concluded that “significant improvement and even complete recovery are entirely possible.”⁸³ She noted an 81% recovery and improvement rate for bisexuals, 69% for long-term therapy clients, 53% for short-term therapy clients, and 42% for exclusively homosexual clients. She noted, “[T]here is certainly room for the development of new treatments and combinations of techniques that will enhance the effectiveness of those procedures

already in use.”⁸⁴ Since 1978, a great deal has been done to increase the effectiveness of treatment techniques. New theories and methodologies have been developed and many therapists are receiving specialized training. Numerous books have been written to help both therapists and individuals seeking greater insights to their feelings. Today, the outlook for successful change is even more encouraging.

Drs. Thomas and Ann Pritt state that “freedom from homosexuality is truly available to men and women as they come to recognize the underlying causes of their attractions, and as they are able to realize legitimate, healthful, identity-securing affections with valued heterosexuals of their own sex.”⁸⁵

These are just a few of the many studies and experiences that show that many people are resolving their homosexual problems. If you don’t personally know someone who has made these changes in his or her life, you might assume that no one has, because you don’t often hear accounts of people making such changes. People seldom appear on television or stand up in church meetings and admit they used to be sexually attracted to the same gender but now are not. They typically keep these issues to themselves and when they make these great internal changes, people around them are often not even aware that anything has happened. Content with having put together the pieces of this internal jigsaw puzzle, they move on quietly with their lives. Psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg said, “I think these cases are perhaps more numerous than we would presume, because many of them prefer to stay anonymous and not be public examples of ‘the converted-and-cured-homosexual.’”⁸⁶

Hopefully, the questions in your mind about changing homosexuality are no longer questions of *if*, but *when* and *how*.

How long does it take?

The length of the transition varies depending on many factors, such as the following:

- ◆ the person’s motivation and commitment to the process.
- ◆ his willingness to take responsibility for his life.
- ◆ his efforts in personal study, prayer, pondering, and journaling.
- ◆ the closeness of his relationship with his Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

- ◆ the amount and quality of individual and group therapy he receives.
- ◆ the level of support he receives from those who are close to him and from support groups.
- ◆ his efforts to reach out and build new relationships.
- ◆ the degree to which he has accepted a homosexual identity.
- ◆ the amount of abuse in his past and the severity of problems it has caused.
- ◆ his willingness to leave his homosexual past behind.
- ◆ the length and degree to which he has been involved in homosexual behaviors.
- ◆ the degree to which he has addictions and compulsions.

Those who are able to define their problems and begin working on them early, before compulsive behaviors turn into addictions and before attitudes turn into identity, may be able to make the transition in a matter of months. Those who begin the process later in life after years of sexual habits and mental conditioning find it takes much work and substantially more time. Most men I have spoken with report that it takes somewhere from three to ten years. However, don't set time frames for your friend and expect that changes will happen within a certain period of time. His problems didn't develop overnight and they likely won't be resolved in a short time.

Gradual progress

In today's society, we often expect instant results. Satellites, computers, and microwave ovens allow us to accomplish things in a matter of seconds. When things don't happen instantly, or when solutions are not forthcoming at computer-like speed, we tend to panic. We forget that some of the more important things in life take more time—usually in terms of months and years.

Don't set time limits on change. Some people begin to see progress in the first few weeks, while others don't see substantial progress for months. While God does work miracles, few people are freed from homosexual feelings in a blinding moment. Rather than a quick 180-degree reversal of their sexual attractions, most men experience gradual changes in their spiritual, physical, sexual, and emotional understanding of themselves. After some work, he will notice that his sexual attractions toward other men begin to diminish and have less

control over him than they once had. They will be less frequent and intense and he will feel less compelled to seek homosexual connections. This kind of gradual progress requires patience and endurance and is the true test of his commitment to God. The key is in recognizing he is improving and in keeping the momentum going.

Some people maintain that since the person often struggles for many years—and sometimes for his entire life—this is proof that change is not possible. However, the gospel teaches that one of the purposes of this life is to have experiences that test our faith. The scriptures exhort us to put off the natural man and become a new person in Christ (see Mosiah 3:19). It is expected that throughout this life we will struggle between our old nature and our new nature and the scriptures are filled with advice on how to win this struggle.

In the Lord's due time

Encourage your friend not to become frustrated if his progress is slower than he originally expected. This is a complex process that will not be resolved overnight. If he has righteous desires and is doing all he can, he must be patient. Answers will come and change will happen, but on the Lord's timetable and not necessarily your friend's.

Eternal progress

Homosexuality seems to be an overwhelming problem to many people because they include in it a whole life of problems. But remember that *everyone* deals with issues of self-worth, relationships, intimacy, lust, comparing themselves with others, and a whole host of problems that are part of a lifelong process of growing, overcoming, and improving. Try to help your friend see that these issues of personal growth and development are part of the larger plan of eternal progression. Changes we begin to make in this life will continue into the next. Therefore, whatever progress we can make in the short term or long term, we should begin it now.

My friend Brad has worked hard to resolve many difficult issues in his life. He has significantly increased his feelings of masculinity and sees himself in a new light. Heterosexual feelings have awakened in him, he is beginning to date, and is looking forward to marriage. However, he also has an advanced case of AIDS that he contracted

during his earlier promiscuous days. I admire that he hasn't let the progression of AIDS diminish his desire to work out his problems. It would be easy for him to stop working toward marriage, knowing that he most likely doesn't have time to get married in this life. But he has an eternal view of his growth and development and realizes that whatever progress he makes in this life will be to his benefit in the next. (See Brad's story in the Testimonials section of this book.) The goal of becoming a whole man of God is certainly attainable, and is worth whatever work it takes.

How complete will the change be?

For most people, going through this transition process does not guarantee that they will never again have a homosexual thought. Joe Dallas explained, "If a man has been a drunkard for 20 years, then joins Alcoholics Anonymous and stays sober, he has definitely changed. His sobriety will have an impact on all parts of his life, improving his attitude, relationships, and job performance. Will an occasional desire for a drink nullify his claim to have changed? Hardly."⁸⁷ Dr. Dean Byrd said, "It's not so unlike treatment outcomes for other emotional struggles. Do we expect the individual to never struggle again? No, we simply expect that they will have the resources to respond to their struggles appropriately."⁸⁸

Help your friend see that he shouldn't measure his progress simply by the types of temptation he still experiences. Remember that temptation is not sin. Satan will likely try to remind him of his past and try to get him to doubt whether he has really changed. But remember that everyone is tempted. Christ was tempted His entire life but did not succumb to temptation. Life is a continual process of putting off the natural man and moving toward God. Temptations do not define us; we are defined by how we respond to the temptations. Therefore, if he dismisses the homosexual temptations and acts responsibly, he can be confident that the changes he has experienced are real.

As Joe Dallas explained, "*All* Christians deal with sin, *all* Christians have stubborn areas of weakness, and *all* Christians at times feel overwhelmed by their personal issues. . . . Yet all Christians don't feel as though they must either completely overcome their weaknesses or else abandon the faith."⁸⁹

In the book *A Place in the Kingdom*, Leo Hall explains that his homosexual attractions have not disappeared. “I choose not to worry about *when* or *if* my SSA [same-sex attraction] feelings will go away. My immediate hope is that, day by day, I can control or master any sexualized thoughts or behaviors that come. I am learning to replace unwanted feelings with concern, love, and empathy toward all men. . . . In fact, I do not wish my SSA feelings to simply disappear. Rather, I hope that they will be replaced by or enhanced into a more celestial love.”⁹⁰

What is a miracle?

“And now, O all ye that have imagined up unto yourselves a god who can do no miracles, I would ask of you, have all these things passed, of which I have spoken? Has the end come yet? Behold I say unto you, Nay; and God has not ceased to be a God of miracles” (Mormon 9:15).

My friend Alan wrote the following: “A woman in our ward was in a terrible automobile accident last summer. Her neck and back were broken and they expected she would be paralyzed for life. But she was given a blessing that she would recover in some important ways. She went through spinal surgery and for a long time had to wear a halo cast. She has slowly regained functioning, and now is able to come to church with two canes; she doesn’t even need to use a wheelchair or walker. She can go up stairs and actually has quite good use of her hands, although not complete. I looked at her Sunday, and felt I should go up to her and tell her how much joy it gave me to see her at church because it is a witness to me of a modern-day miracle.

“It is interesting to me, because her miracle is different from the way miracles are portrayed in the Bible. It wasn’t sudden. It wasn’t complete. She is still a lot more hampered than she was before the accident. Yet in my own heart, the Spirit witnessed to me on that day—and has on other occasions when I have looked at her—that, in fact, she was incredibly blessed in her recovery. It is a miracle, regardless of the time span involved, regardless of the fact that it wasn’t all at once or that it still isn’t complete or even that it may never be complete.

“I am just now making the connection with my own situation. The

miracle of my recovery may take a long time. It may be gradual. It may not ever take me to the point I think I really want to be, in terms of no homosexual desires at all and no remnants of homosexual thoughts ever. (Even straight people have inappropriate thoughts, don't they?) But that doesn't mean the miracle won't happen in other ways that can be just as wonderful. And whatever faith and effort it takes to bring about the miracle—whatever that miracle may mean in my life—will be worth it.”

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “And again, to some it is given to have faith to be healed” (D&C 46:21). Can God change your friend? Is there anything too hard for God? “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). No matter how monumental his struggle may seem, it is not too hard with God's help. “For I am God, and mine arm is not shortened; and I will show miracles, signs, and wonders, unto all those who believe on my name” (D&C 35:8). Miracles do happen. They don't necessarily happen overnight, and they don't always happen in the way we expect. But miracles certainly happen. I have seen them in my life and in the lives of many of my friends.

How should we describe the process of change?

The phrases “*resolving* homosexual issues,” “*overcoming* the effects of homosexuality,” “*changing* homosexuality,” and “*transitioning* out of homosexuality” are good descriptions of the process. It is a process of fulfilling legitimate emotional needs. Dr. Elizabeth Moberly explained, “One should not try to cure, or ask God to cure, something for which cure is not necessary. God does not ‘cure’ people of legitimate needs. . . . It is not merely ironic, but tragic, that people have attempted to ‘cure’ what should rightly be fulfilled.”⁹¹

It would be easier to coin a term to describe the process if homosexuality were a condition that was the same for everyone and if it had a definable beginning and end. If we could measure it, we could determine how and when we moved out of it. But the individual elements that make up the homosexual condition are simply life's challenges that everyone faces to one degree or another and may have to work on for a good part of his life. For example, there may not be a definable time when he can say he has overcome issues such as envy,

lust, or denial. He may gain considerable progress toward overcoming them, but still struggle with some aspects for the rest of his life. I'm not sure that in a lifetime anyone should stop working on improving their feelings of self-worth, and we can always work toward a more correct self-perception, constantly reminding ourselves who we really are and striving to return to our loving Heavenly Father.

We are part of a human family that has challenges in life to overcome. We all work on a unique set of problems and try to become better today than we were yesterday. Our divine nature tells us that we will continue to learn and grow and improve through eternity.

The ultimate goal

The ultimate goal of this transition process is to achieve the following:

- ◆ a sense of belonging to the male gender.
- ◆ a comfortableness with heterosexual men.
- ◆ male relationships that are emotionally healthy.
- ◆ the ability to relate to women emotionally, spiritually, and physically.
- ◆ the ability to function effectively as a husband and father.
- ◆ the personal satisfaction of understanding, controlling, and feeling good about himself.

For further reading

Homosexuality: Opposing Viewpoints (William Dudley, book editor, Greenhaven Press, San Diego, CA, 1993). This book objectively analyzes the two sides of the question whether change is possible.

How to Respond

Kevin was seventeen when his parents found out about his homosexual attractions. He didn't 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 homosexual problems are serious, the solution is not to reject your friend, but to encourage him and help him work through these difficult problems. This chapter 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."⁹²

When your friend tells you he struggles with homosexual 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 and that he will grow out of it. You may wonder what you did wrong or you may think he 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 him that the information has come as a shock and that you'll 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 with him. You may need time to read up on the issues or talk with him further to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Remember that your friend is the same person you have always loved. Knowing more about him and the struggles he faces should not negate the joy he has been to you in the past. Be grateful you have this chance to know and love him on a more intimate level. Be grateful that he thinks enough of you to have been willing to share with you this secret, personal part of himself. And above all, be thankful he doesn't have to deal with this dark secret alone.

Get him to open up to you

Homosexual problems are very personal and your friend will likely be embarrassed to talk about them. For him to open up to you will require that he feels a great deal of love and trust from you. People who grow up with homosexual 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 such problems themselves. Over the years, your friend has learned that rather than admit that he is 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. Your friend can begin to solve his problems once he admits them and begins to open up and share his burdens.

Be accepting and caring

When your friend admits to you that he struggles with homosexual desires, he needs to feel you accept him as a valuable person. When a friend of mine admitted his problems to his bishop, the bishop stood up from the chair 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 your friend's struggle is that he feels people don't accept him, it is important to show acceptance and love by your words and your actions.

It will be important to him to feel that you care about him in the midst of his pain. Your willingness to develop a relationship with him on a deeper level will be an important ingredient in the healing process. Although you don't have to become an expert on the subject of homosexuality, he will appreciate any effort you make to understand his problems because it will show you care.

Express your own feelings and limitations

Remind him that you are not perfect. Explain to him that you are an imperfect human just as he is and ask him to be tolerant and understanding of your opinions and feelings just as he hopes for compassion and understanding from you about the struggles he is going through.

You don't need to subordinate your own feelings and needs to his. Don't be afraid to express to him how you hurt and struggle 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 wives tend to take responsibility for more than their share of the blame for the situation. Parents begin to think that they could have provided more for their sons than they did. Wives tend to feel they were at fault for perceived deficits in their own femininity. But parents and wives are not to blame for the man's feelings. They did not cause them and cannot cure them. On the other hand, your friend is not at fault for the emergence of homosexual feelings. 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, wives, and friends is to try to rescue their loved one. But it is up to him to accept responsibility for his actions and make firm decisions if he is to resolve his problems. Although you may think you know what is best for him, what really matters is what he perceives is best for him. Encourage him, but don't force your intentions on him because it may only alienate him from

you. It will do more harm than good to drag him to therapy if he does not want it. He has to want to resolve his problems. You cannot make the decisions for him. He must make choices and experience the consequences of his actions, even though it may be difficult for you when he experiences pain and tragedy in the process. Allowing him the freedom to make choices shows that you respect him. Since God alone can give him the desire to change, believe that God can work out your friend's situation better than anything you could come up with.

Don't offer simplistic solutions

I have heard time and again the tales of men who talked with their parents or bishops about their problems 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." Sexual identity problems can be complex and simplistic answers show a lack of understanding. The last thing they need from you is a lecture about the evils of homosexuality. They already know they shouldn't be sexually attracted to other men; 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 other forms of immorality and sin in our own lives. Remember, Christ was forgiving of the women caught in adultery, but harsh in his criticism of those who thought they were without sin.

Recognize this is a learning process

Neither you nor your friend will have all the answers or even know all the questions. Agree to learn together and recognize that it will take time. It may take years to understand and deal with all the emotions and issues.

Support his efforts

Growing out of homosexual problems will take an enormous amount of his time and energy and you can help him by being

supportive of the many things he needs to do. While he should not neglect his family duties, he will need to spend much time reading about the subject, attending meetings, and building relationships with other men. Rather than being jealous of this time, encourage him to do the things he needs to do to become a better man, father, or husband. Help him schedule time and when he is 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 Organizations section in this book) can direct you to therapists that have been trained in treating people with homosexual problems. Since homosexual attractions are a result of deep emotional deficits, they almost always require professional help to resolve. Caution your friend to use care in choosing a therapist because some can do more harm than good. (See the Therapy chapter for advice on choosing a therapist.)

Many men are tortured by their homosexual problems that can be difficult to understand and at times seem hopeless to overcome. This despair leads many to entertain thoughts of suicide. If your friend has considered suicide, get professional help immediately. The Church's booklet *Identification and Prevention of Suicidal Behavior* (item number 32253) gives good insight. You can help your friend by your continued focus on the eternal plan of salvation. When he understands his eternal nature and God's love for him, he will realize that suicide is no solution at all. The very fact that he is disturbed by his problems marks him as a spiritually sensitive soul for whom there is great hope.

If abuse has been involved, professional help may be needed. The Church booklets *Responding to Abuse: Helps for Ecclesiastical Leaders* (item number 32248) and *Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse* (item number 33196) may also help.

Take care of yourself

In your zeal to help him, don't ignore your own problems. You have needs yourself 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. See the chapter Support Groups for advice in choosing one that will help and not contribute to your problems. You may also wish to provide community service to an organization that helps individuals overcome their homosexual problems (see the Organizations section in this book). You may find it helpful to read books on how to deal with your own feelings and problems.

Friends and Church leaders may want to consider the man's spouse and family since they are also affected by his problems and have needs of their own. They may need professional counseling as well.

Show Christlike love but maintain your integrity

Your friend needs to know that even if he makes mistakes, he will find safety and reassurance with you and that his burden will be lightened (not added upon) because of his relationship with you. What he needs 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 your friend? Does He love him any less because he is attracted to other men? 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."⁹³ It can be difficult to show Christlike love when his behaviors offend you or disappoint you, but you need to stand by him. When he is at his lowest is when he needs you the most.

Loving unconditionally does not mean you accept behaviors and beliefs you disagree with; it means that you show Christlike love to the person, regardless of his behavior. You must maintain your integrity by standing up for your beliefs and standards. You do not have to excuse his lifestyle or defend his choices to others to prove your love or commitment to him. In fact, he needs your righteous example and stability. Because of the many voices he hears, he needs your strength in maintaining your standards and beliefs and being a stable influence in his life.

Unconditional love simply means that you don't hang demands or

conditions on your love. “I’ll love you as long as you don’t fantasize about men.” You extend love and support regardless of his level of progress as he struggles through his 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 him, show it by listening to him and spending time with him.

Keep the information confidential

This is a major disclosure for him and he will expect you to keep the information in the strictest confidence. A slip of the tongue may be considered an impropriety in other settings, but he will likely consider any breach of confidence in this area to be a major betrayal. Remember that he has disclosed his “deep, dark secret,” something that is embarrassing to him and very personal. Since trust is an important aspect in your relationship, it is critical to keep all information in the strictest confidence. Respect his right to decide what information he shares with whom.

If other people find out about his attractions, they may resist his attempts to develop relationships with them. An important part of his healing will be to relate to other men and develop appropriate, close relationships with them, and this may be difficult or impossible if others know about his problems. Because people are afraid of homosexuality and have many misconceptions about it, men may shun him when what he needs most desperately is their love and acceptance. Therefore, if you enlist the help of quorum leaders or others to befriend him, be sure you do not divulge any information about the nature of his problems.

Decide who to tell

Since the homosexual problems belong to your friend and not to you, he has 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. He may not find it necessary or prudent to tell anyone beyond his family or closest friends. If many others know about his problems, it may be more difficult for them to relate to him and thus for him to grow through his problems.

Priesthood leaders

He should talk with his bishop so he can have the benefit of the bishop's counsel and guidance.

Wives

If he is married, his wife deserves to know about his struggles. They cannot be of one flesh (see Matthew 19:5) if he hides such important parts of his life from her. Wives are often in tune with their husband's feelings before the husband ever understands them. I was married and had children before I realized I had homosexual problems. After I saw a therapist a few times, I knew I had to tell my wife. I spent quite a bit of time preparing just how I would tell her. I picked a holiday weekend so we would have several days to thoroughly talk things out. I explained to her that I had emotional problems I was trying to work out and that I was seeing a therapist to try to understand them. I explained my feelings of loneliness and we talked about gender identity and the need for male companionship. We talked about my difficulty in developing satisfying relationships with men. 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. There was a lot of talking and crying, then more talking and more crying. Although it was difficult, she was supportive and committed to help me through it. I am grateful that my wife knows about these challenges in my life and that she is there to support me. After a particularly good therapy session or support group meeting, I needed to be able to share my positive feelings and successes with her. This experience has helped us grow together in ways we never did before.

The following is the experience of one wife: "My husband . . . told me about his struggles with same-sex attraction (SSA) after we had been married for one year. As he talked to me that day, I remember

feeling a deep outpouring of love for him, and a profound sense of sadness that he had struggled all alone for so many years. I was impressed that he would share something so intimate and painful with me. [He], in turn, was amazed that I didn't kick him out of my life. He told me it was his first experience with unconditional love. The thought of leaving my husband never occurred to me. He was still the same man I loved, and I felt even closer to him that day because of the way he opened up his heart to me. That day was a turning point in both our lives."⁹⁴

Parents and siblings

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. Steve Andersen wrote the following about telling his parents: "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 in thirty-six years—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!"

Children

Your friend and his wife should mutually decide when—or whether—to tell their children. Scott wrote the following about his

experience telling his son: “The moment we knew would come had arrived. My oldest son (almost fourteen) finally asked the question! I was working on the computer writing about my life experiences when my son came home. He wanted to use the computer and I wouldn’t give it to him, so he kept coming in and out of the room and walking over to see what I was working on, and I kept trying nonchalantly to keep him from seeing what I was typing. I was nearly finished when my hovering son finally came out and asked, ‘Dad, are you gay?’ I dodged the question, and he said, ‘You didn’t answer me.’ So I said something dumb like, ‘Why? Are you?’ He answered that he wasn’t. Then I answered, ‘Yes. I have been.’ Then I looked at him and asked, ‘Does that bother you?’ Having the basic question answered seemed to satisfy him and he just went back to asking when he could use the computer. Later that evening he was very loving. He came by several times and hugged me and told me that he loved me. I read to him for a while at bedtime and when we finished I said to him, ‘Son, it’s important for you to know that I love Mom, and that I always have.’ He just gave me a hug and went to bed. It wasn’t nearly as painful as I’d imagined or feared it would be. In fact, it wasn’t painful at all.”

Children who are loved and respected by their parents tend to love and respect their parents. However, beware that many adolescents are not mature enough to be as accepting or understanding as Scott’s son. Your friend and his wife should prayerfully decide when—or whether—to tell their children. When telling children, explain that their father isn’t perfect (if he has made behavioral mistakes), but don’t discredit him or demean men in general. If the children don’t respect the role of men and fathers, they may develop gender identity problems themselves.

Friends

Some men have positive experiences in telling a close friend who does not share homosexual struggles. They have generally been very surprised to learn that others will still accept and love them even when they know their “deep, dark secret.” This realization helps them feel loved for who they really are—rather than for the facade they try to present—and improves their feelings of self-worth.

If you wish to tell a trusted friend or family member so you will

have someone to talk with about how these problems affect you, before you first get the permission of the man who has the homosexual problems.

Use caution

Although the above stories are positive experiences, don't expect that everyone's reaction will be positive. Some men have been ostracized from their families or have lost close friends when they told them of their attractions. The people you tell are human and come from varied backgrounds. They have their own limitations and hangups, and each will react differently. Some are able to display Christlike love; others may react negatively.

To help as you or your friend explains his struggles to a loved one, I have written a booklet, *Understanding Male Homosexual Problems: An Introduction for Latter-day Saints*, that explains in simple terms and in a condensed form the concepts discussed in this book.

How to approach someone you suspect has homosexual problems

If you suspect that your husband, son, brother, or friend has homosexual attractions, you may want to prepare the way for him to tell you about them. He may be afraid to admit his problems because he is embarrassed or afraid you will reject him. Create an atmosphere where he knows 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 homosexual attractions?" After discussing the topic, you could say, "If I knew someone who struggled with these feelings, I would still love him and would want him to tell me so I could understand him and be a support to him."

If you think your son has these feelings, talk with him about them and point him in directions that can help him start to understand them early and get help before his problems 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 he has a problem and begin to seek help. Instead, establish feelings of love and trust, then ask directly and discuss openly.

For further reading

“To Help a Loved One in Need,” Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, May 1988, pp. 60–61.

Parents in Pain by John White.

Where Does a Mother Go to Resign? by Barbara Johnson.

Fresh Elastic for Stretched Out Moms by Barbara Johnson.

How Will I Tell My Mother?: A True Story of One Man's Battle with Homosexuality and AIDS by Jerry Arterburn

The Dance of Anger by Harriet G. Lerner

Agency, Freedom, and Responsibility

In one of my support groups I developed a close friendship with a man who had a beautiful family and a testimony of the gospel. Although he tried hard and made some progress, he eventually gave up the Church and his family for a single, carefree life. I think part of the reason he made that choice was because he felt he had no choice. This chapter explains that your friend *does* have a choice. Many men are making correct choices in difficult situations and as a result are making significant changes in their lives.

Our lives are made up of small choices. Seldom do we make a large, consequential decision. The little things we do shape our character and make us who we are. Our character is the composite—the net result—of all those small choices. This chapter explores our power to choose and how those choices influence our eternal lives.

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read: “I prepared all things and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves” (D&C 104:17). What does it mean to be an agent unto yourself? Let’s look at the concepts of free agency and freedom.

Agency, *free agency*, and *moral agency* all refer to our internal power to exercise our will and make choices. *Freedom* refers to the external power and opportunity to carry out those choices.⁹⁵

Agency

Before we came to earth, God gave each of us our agency—the power to choose (see Alma 13:3). In fact, one of the principal reasons we came to this earth was to be proven, to see if we would do everything we are commanded to do (see Abraham 3:25). In the council in heaven, Satan presented an alternative plan that denied agency. When it was rejected, he rebelled, “and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him” (Moses 4:3–4).

Knowing that Satan is anxious to have us misuse the power of agency, we need to be careful in the choices we make. “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” (2 Nephi

2:16). “Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (2 Nephi 10:23). God has given us our agency—the power to choose—and no person or organization can take it away.

Freedom

What can be taken away or reduced in this life is our *freedom*, which is the power to act on our choices. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has explained that “free agency is absolute, but in the circumstances of mortality freedom is always qualified.”⁹⁶ He explains that freedom may be qualified or taken away in three ways:

1. *By physical laws.* For example, we are bound by the physical law of gravity and cannot choose to disobey it. There may also be some physical limitations with which we are born.
2. *By the actions of others.* We choose to live under governments that impose laws and restrictions for the common good of society.
3. *By our own actions.* We may choose of ourselves to impose restrictions on our individual freedom, such as when we buckle our seat belt or sign a contract. In these instances, we use our free agency to choose to temporarily limit certain individual freedoms to help us achieve more important eternal freedoms. Your friend may choose to set personal boundaries. For example, if he knows he is susceptible to certain addictive behaviors, he can decide to limit his access to places or conditions that might make it easy for him to fall into temptation.

A restriction of freedom in these ways “reduces the extent to which we can act upon our choices, but it does not deprive us of our God-given free agency.”⁹⁷

Consequences

We tend to think of agency as a personal matter. Often overlooked, however, is the fact that choices have consequences. We are free to consider our options, to make choices, and to act, but once an action has been taken we are not free from its consequences.

Responsibility, accountability, and authority

Your friend must be willing to (1) take personal responsibility for

his actions and the direction of his life, (2) be accountable to someone, and (3) exercise the proper authority by giving himself permission to take action and giving permission to someone else to check up on him.

Personal responsibility

Satan would have your friend believe he is not responsible for his agency in this life because he was “born this way” and has no control over his homosexual actions. Although he did not choose to have homosexual attractions, he *does* choose how to respond to them and his ability to change will be determined by the control he decides to take over his life.

Accountability

Accountability is an eternal principle (see D&C 104:11–13). In the parable of the talents, the servants were held accountable for the talents they received and they were expected to increase them (see Matthew 25:14–30). In Church callings, we are held accountable to our priesthood leaders who hold regular interviews with us. Accountability helps us keep our integrity and helps us grow. In his struggle with homosexuality, your friend needs to identify those to whom he will be accountable:

- ◆ *To himself*, honestly admitting his problems and weaknesses.
- ◆ *To God* in daily prayer, confessing his weaknesses and asking for His strength to make it through the day.
- ◆ *To his bishop* or branch president for sins that should be confessed.
- ◆ *To his therapist* for how well he is following through on the things he needs to do
- ◆ *To a confidant*. This may be someone who also has a personal struggle with homosexuality or simply a close friend who cares about him.

Authority

The next step is for him to give them the authority or permission to check up on him. Many men who have homosexual problems have difficulties with authority. Even though he asked them to check up on him, he may feel he is being controlled when they ask difficult questions. If you are in an accountability agreement with him, don't let

him shift to you part of the responsibility for his actions. Don't let him blame you if you don't call him or if he could not reach you in an emergency. Remind him that he is fully responsible for his actions. As he learns to be accountable, he will feel self-empowered.

Another aspect of accountability is for him to recognize he has authority over his own life if he will give himself permission to take action. Because of past failures, he may feel powerless to take action. But as he exercises authority over his own life, he will soon find that he can make significant changes in his life. He can take action and it will make a difference.

Life Choices

Each person has to find his own way of dealing with homosexuality. Some choose to espouse a homosexual identity, “come out,” and live openly in that identity. Others choose to find resolution of the homosexual problems so they can live the gospel fully. The choice to resolve the homosexual problems is a choice for growth and self expansion. Deciding to resolve homosexuality is a major life choice. Since homosexuality is the outward manifestation of unresolved issues that are central to your friend’s personality, deciding to work on these issues will involve reevaluating his core person and working to change it. This chapter outlines the steps to go through and some issues he should consider as he makes these important life decisions.

Step One: Define personal values

He must first determine his personal beliefs and core values. As I went through this process myself, I realized that I could not just accept the beliefs of my family or society, but had to identify what mattered most to me so I could make decisions based on that. In a sense, it meant getting in touch with my inner self and clarifying for me what I believe to be true. It meant identifying my own beliefs as separate from those of others. I had to question my testimony and once I discovered for myself what is eternally true and internalized those values, I could make choices based on that and not waste time trying to change what is everlastingly true or arguing that it had no right to be true.

Step Two: Consider the options

There are really only three options.⁹⁸ First, your friend could straddle the fence. Some men try to have their cake and eat it, too. They want the comfort, security, and acceptance of their family and they want to remain active in the Church. But at the same time, they seek sexual gratification on the outside. But if your friend understands

the scriptures and the plan of salvation, he knows this is not a sensible option (see Revelation 3:16).

A second option is to come down off the fence on the side of homosexuality. This includes the fantasy of finding Mr. Right and living happily ever after. Sadly, many people seek this idyllic condition but never find it. If he understands the scriptures and the plan of salvation, he will realize this is not a reasonable option.

The third option is to accept the eternal plan of salvation and devote himself to God, his family, and eternal truths. Rather than spending his energies fighting what he knows to be true, he decides to live the gospel plan his loving Father in Heaven designed for his total happiness. President Howard W. Hunter taught, “Christ’s way is not only the right way, but ultimately the only way to hope and joy.”⁹⁹ The sooner he aligns his life with eternal truth, the sooner he can find true happiness.

When I finally faced my homosexual problems and used the “h” word for the first time, I was happily married and had children. I loved them very much and felt secure in my marriage. Nevertheless, the pull of the homosexual desires was so strong that my life was turned upside down. People in the gay world told me I should be true to myself and act on my feelings. They said that if I suppressed this newfound sexuality, I would some day regret all the life experiences I would have missed. I soon realized, however, that I could not experiment with these sexual desires on the side and at the same time pretend to be a faithful Mormon husband and father. I had to make a decision. Should I leave my wife and family and dive head first into the gay world? My Mormon life seemed quite dull compared to the excitement and mystique of the gay life! I saw a gay lifestyle as powerfully alluring. It appeared romantic and sensual, and at the same time outrageous and enticing. I found it hard to be objective because rational thinking would quickly get swept away by the emotional fascination. I finally had to write down all the pros and cons I could think of.

Step Three: Discern truth from error

Consider eternal truths

Eternal truth stands on its own and is not subject to our opinions.

There are not several versions of truth that we may choose to fit our personal situations. God has a plan for the salvation of all His children. Elder M. Russell Ballard reminded us, “If we are anchored to the correct understanding of who we are, why we are here on this earth, and where we can go after this mortal life, Satan cannot threaten our happiness through any form of temptation. If we are determined to live by Heavenly Father’s plan, we will use our God-given moral agency to make decisions based on revealed truth, not on the opinions of others or on the current thinking of the world. Those who understand our Heavenly Father’s eternal plan for the joy and happiness of his children will be better prepared to make good choices. If we truly believe that we are his children and are here on earth to learn to live, by faith, the teachings and the commandments of God, we will make the choices that will qualify us to one day return to live in His presence.”¹⁰⁰

Use all the resources available

Our Heavenly Father has given divine gifts to help your friend in his journey and he must use them to receive the promised blessings. He should get a patriarchal blessing or read it if he already has one to be reminded of the blessings he has been promised. He could ask his father or bishop for a priesthood blessing to give additional insight as he makes these important life decisions. If he has received his endowments, he should reflect on the covenants made in the temple and remember the promises that were made to him. He is part of a chosen generation reserved to live on the earth in these last days. He has an important mission to fulfill, which for some reason includes homosexual challenges. Since the decisions he makes will determine the course his life will take, he should be sure to make choices that will give eternal joy rather than temporary happiness.

Follow the Holy Ghost

Encourage him to be careful how far he trusts his feelings. Emotional feelings can be fleeting and can change from time to time. If he pursues his current whim, he will be tossed to and fro by every emotion. But since the Holy Ghost works through feelings and impressions, he must be sure to follow those from the Holy Ghost—they will always be in line with revealed truth. The Spirit will

never prompt him in a way that is contrary to the teachings of the prophets. The promptings from the Holy Ghost come from deep within and can be distinguished from the surface emotions that may change from time to time. President James E. Faust taught that “by the power and gift of the Holy Ghost, we can know what to do and what not to do to bring happiness and peace to our lives.”¹⁰¹

Don't be deceived by worldly teachings

Hosts of lies today say that homosexuality is a healthy, alternative lifestyle. Even people in the Church are sometimes beguiled by Satan's clever twists of the truth and they begin to think that they know more than the leaders of the Church about the needs of people who struggle with homosexual desires. With a sincere desire to help, these people write letters to Church leaders and pray that God will inspire the Brethren to understand homosexuality and change Church policies to be more favorable toward those who have homosexual desires. The leaders of the Church seriously consider homosexual issues and have a clear understanding of what God would have them do. There will likely never be a revelation on homosexuality that will become a section in the Doctrine and Covenants to answer all our questions. I likewise don't see a section about overcoming alcoholism or other mortal conditions. Revelation on these matters comes individually. The gospel already has the answers we need, and we can receive individual revelation as we need it to understand how to apply gospel principles to our specific problems.

Step Four: Decide and commit

After prayerfully evaluating his options, he needs to make a decision and a firm commitment to follow through, no matter how hard the way. The worst thing he can do is make a half-hearted effort, fail, then become convinced that he cannot overcome homosexuality.

Step Five: Make a clean break

To show his decision to leave his homosexual past behind, your friend should make a clean break from all items and relationships that remind him of it. Although he may want to make changes, a part of him may cling to the past that is familiar and holds fond memories. It is

important that he breaks from these things because they can keep the old feelings alive in his emotions and undo many of his efforts to make changes. He may need to inventory his life to determine what he needs to break from, such as friends that hold him back or places and activities that remind him of the past. As he eliminates these things from his life, he needs to replace them with new, wholesome activities that will allow him to associate with men he would like to be friends with.

For further reading

“Making the Right Decisions,” Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, May 1991, p. 36.

Personal Plan of Action

Homosexual problems wouldn't be so difficult to resolve if there were a step-by-step plan that everyone could follow. However, because the factors that *cause* homosexual problems differ from person to person, there is no magical formula that will *resolve* them for everyone. The concepts discussed in this book can teach basic principles of healing, but your friend will have to develop a personal action plan considering the specific things he needs. It won't be as simple as sitting down in an hour with his day planner because the issues are complex, but his success is too important to leave to chance. This chapter outlines steps in developing a personal plan of action as well as some concepts to consider in such a plan.

Determine readiness

Before your friend begins this journey to resolve his homosexual problems, it is important that he ask himself if his personal desire is strong enough to carry him through because his success will depend on his level of desire and commitment.

Make a self-inventory

Before he begins, he may wish to examine his life to identify his current feelings and actions. This can be an important beginning in developing a strategic plan. It can also be a helpful comparison later to measure the progress he makes.

Develop an action plan

With his initial self-inventory in hand, he can sit down with his therapist and identify the areas where he needs to concentrate, considering both emotional and spiritual aspects. The emotional repairing and maturing may include such things as coming to grips with past emotional trauma, resolving current emotional conflicts, overcoming emotional detachments and dependencies, learning to love appropriately, building healthy relationships, correcting self-

perceptions, and building feelings of masculinity and self-worth. The spiritual development may include growing in ways such as surrendering to God, having a mighty change of heart, overcoming envy and lust, giving Christian service, and developing spiritual wholeness. Personal growth and healing comes as he puts total faith in his Savior who has the power to change his life. There is no condition we could be born into that the Savior cannot repair. There is no condition that could obstruct our temporal and eternal happiness and potential that He cannot correct. And when your friend has done all he can, the Savior will take it from there and do the rest.

Both the emotional and spiritual aspects need to be addressed during the process, or it won't be complete. I talk with men who say "I've tried fasting and prayer and scripture reading. I've tried to be good. But it just doesn't work!" I also talk with men who say "I've been in therapy for years and the feelings just don't go away." Some men develop healthy relationships to meet their emotional needs, but neglect the spiritual needs. If your friend grows emotionally, but not spiritually, he won't have the spiritual help necessary to make it through this difficult transition. If he moves along the spiritual track, but not the emotional one, the temptations won't go away and the intensity of the urges and desires may be so great that he may not be able to resist the temptation. The process of transition is one of both grace and truth. There is truth in the therapeutic process, but it is also a healing process of grace. When the emotional and spiritual aspects are not in balance, people appear to make good progress, but the progress is temporary and they eventually relapse. While they take care of some of the deficits in their lives, their progress is not permanent because it is not whole.

It may also be helpful to think of your friend's efforts in terms of a two-step process of repairing then building.

1. *Reparative*: fixing the mess (such as correcting his self image, bringing completion to past trauma, resolving masculine identity conflicts, and controlling compulsive behavior).
2. *Developmental*: building a better future (such as making life choices, growing emotionally, developing healthy relationships, and following Christ).

Keep a long-term perspective

We make poor choices in life when we change our focus from eternal, long-term goals to the short term and choose the easy way rather than the more difficult but more important. As Stephen Covey explained, “We are more in need of a vision (or destination) and a compass (a set of principles or directions), and less in need of a road map. We often don’t know what the terrain ahead will be like or what we will need to go through it; much will depend on our judgment at the time. But an inner compass will always give us direction.”¹⁰²

Multiple factors

Homosexual problems are caused by many factors coming together at critical times in your friend’s life. It therefore stands to reason that to resolve it he needs to bring together several specific factors at the same time. Those who are successful in resolving homosexual issues have found that attending meetings and therapy groups is not enough. They discover there are numerous things that have to be in place at the same time for such a change to take place. Almost invariably, it requires sincere spiritual growth, individual therapy, and sticking with a program for several years. Those who commit to this level are able to resolve their homosexual issues in significant ways.

Remember that homosexuality is not the real problem. It is a symptom of deeper struggles such as rejection, envy, abuse, identity, distrust, or fear. However, men who have homosexual problems seldom recognize this because (1) the specific issues vary from person to person and (2) the men are often masters at hiding the real issues in their lives. To resolve his homosexual problems, your friend needs to determine what his underlying problems are, and once he resolves them he resolves the homosexual problems. Once he discovers what he has been looking for by relating homosexually, he can find nonsexual ways to fill those needs. Although he can stop homosexual behavior in the short term by exercising willpower, the emotional deficits and unmet social needs will not go away until he legitimately fulfills them.

The remaining chapters in this book briefly discuss topics that most men need to consider. Since many of these components are interdependent, neglecting one area can make progress in another area ineffectual.

Keep balance

A lot of the difficulty I had was the result of imbalances. I had too few close friendships during certain childhood and adolescent years. I had too much preoccupation with sex during some adolescent years (but who doesn't?). I had too little access to a father model during early childhood. I had too little acceptance by my older brother when I looked up to him. For several years, I felt too comfortable spending time with my mother and therefore did not go outside and play with friends.

Not only can the imbalance contribute to the *development* of homosexual problems in the first place, but a continued imbalance can contribute to *failure* as your friend tries to resolve them. For example, he may spend so much time reading and studying about homosexual issues that he does not take time to build relationships. Or he may rely on support groups and not get individual therapy. Or he may get therapy and build relationships, but ignore the spiritual aspects.

Set boundaries

Another reason people fail in their attempts to make changes in their lives is because they fail to set boundaries for themselves. A recovering alcoholic, for example, may need to draw the line at entering a bar. If he rationalizes he can enter the bar and socialize with his drinking buddies but not be tempted to drink, he is fooling himself. Likewise your friend cannot be involved in gay organizations and not be tempted to flirt and be attracted to other men. He needs to establish boundary lines that he commits not to cross. He may also need to set emotional boundaries to avoid such things as emotional dependency. Although he may not always be able to control how he feels, he can choose how to respond to those feelings.

Abuse can also affect the concept of boundaries. All forms of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual) involve a violation of boundaries. Abuse may cause confusion as to what boundaries are and where they can or should exist. To avoid being abused, your friend should define his own boundaries. To avoid being abusive of others, he should respect their boundaries. If your friend has been abused or abusive, he may need professional help to overcome its effects.

Monitor progress

It is common to have recurring doubts as he works on his action plan. Gerard van den Aardweg, a psychologist with many years of successful clinical experience treating homosexuality, observes that “the homosexually inclined, even if they are in principle willing to change, initially have serious doubts whether there are realistic chances of a profound improvement. These are periodically returning doubts, notwithstanding clearly observable progress, and they only die away when the change in feelings has become much more obvious.”¹⁰³ To overcome these doubts, your friend may need to look back at his previous self-assessments from time to time and compare his current conditions with them. This will not only give him encouragement, but can help him make adjustments to his plan as needed.

Journaling

A good way for your friend to be accountable to himself is through introspection and journal writing. Stephen Covey reminds us that “keeping a journal of our thoughts, experiences, insights, and learning promotes mental clarity, exactness, and context.”¹⁰⁴ Journal writing is also a process by which he can work out grief and healing. If he has unresolved issues with his father, writing a letter in his journal to his father can be a way of working things out and bringing closure to painful situations. Journaling can help him analyze his feelings, assess his actions, and stay in control.

Requirements for change

People who are successful in resolving their homosexual problems typically:

- ◆ are dissatisfied with their condition and desire to change it.
- ◆ believe that it is possible to change.
- ◆ develop and follow through on a plan of action that addresses their specific needs.
- ◆ have adequate support during the process from peers, family, Church leaders, and professional counselors who provide information about the change process, encouragement to continue when it is difficult, feedback, insight, validation, love, and friendship.

Use a multifaceted approach

Your friend will be more successful if he uses all the relationships and resources available, such as family, friends, counselors, Church leaders, faith, prayer, group and individual therapy, books, and support groups. He will have to grow in other areas like coming to understand his true self, confirming his masculine identity, healing old wounds, forgiving, reconciling his relationship with his father or others, and learning to control his behavior. And most important, spirituality will need to play a major role. Commitment to and faith in Jesus Christ is the key to applying the healing power of the atonement in his life. If he is ready to do these kinds of things, there is hope. He can find his way out of homosexuality just as I and many of my friends have done.

Make it work!

Amulek taught, “And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions. . . . But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions” (Alma 34:40-41).

In closing the general conference in April 1995, President Gordon B. Hinckley admonished us to “put behind us our weaknesses of the past and go forth with new energy and increased resolution. . . . We have work to do, you and I, so very much of it. Let us roll up our sleeves and get at it, with a new commitment, putting our trust in the Lord.” Such an accomplishment is possible, he said, if “we will be prayerful and faithful. We can do better than we have ever done before.” A few moments later, he added “May we go with determination to try a little harder to be a little better. Please know that we are not without understanding of some of your problems. We are aware that many of you carry very heavy burdens. We plead with the Lord in your behalf. We add our prayers to your prayers that you may find solutions to your problems. We leave a blessing upon you, even an apostolic blessing. We bless you that the Lord may smile with favor upon you, that there may be happiness and peace in your homes and in your lives, that an atmosphere of love and respect and appreciation may be felt among husbands and wives, children and parents. May you

‘look to God and live’ with happiness, with security, with peace, with faith.”¹⁰⁵

Personal Study

One of your friend's biggest challenges in resolving homosexual problems will be to overcome his confusion by getting good, true information. Many men report that this helps them make sense of their feelings and see things in a more enlightened perspective.

As one man commented, "I received the [Elizabeth] Moberly and [Jeff] Konrad books from a gentleman in Evergreen. For two or three days I read them continually until I got through them. And I had an experience reading those books like some people have when they read *The Book of Mormon*, where they just become totally absorbed in it and it rings true and they say, 'This is the true religion!'"¹⁰⁶ Another man said, "[I]t was a tremendous experience to read these books and agree with them and say 'Aha! This is what's been going on!'"¹⁰⁷

A number of good books can help your friend understand his situation. I found it helpful to read books about different psychological theories of homosexuality, as well as those that gave practical suggestions of things I could do. They didn't all fit my personal situation, but in each one I found some elements that gave me a perspective that helped me understand and come to terms with my feelings. It is critical for your friend to increase his understanding of basic Gospel principles. Although he may think he already knows the gospel, gaining a more in-depth understanding of the atonement, faith, repentance, and forgiveness will be at least as beneficial to him as gaining an understanding of the emotional aspects of his same-sex attractions.

It seems that those who read the most have the most success in understanding their feelings and controlling their behavior. The more they study, the more they are exposed to ideas that may help. Good information from books, manuals, audio cassettes, videos, newsletters, and other educational resources can help offset the demoralizing confusion they hear in the media at large. See the section *Selected Readings* for a recommended list of publications.

Beware of books—some even written by LDS authors—that do not

adhere carefully to gospel fundamentals. In a review of one such book, Scott Peterson explains that “rather than adjusting their behavior to accommodate the values of their religion, they adjust their own religious values to accommodate their behavior. What they seek is not explanation, but rationalization.”¹⁰⁸

Support Groups

Most men find support groups to be very helpful. A support group should be a safe and confidential place where your friend can come to know that he is not the only one with homosexual problems. No one will say, “You’re dealing with *what?*” It is a place to find encouragement from other men who are working to resolve the same problems, and that will help reduce his feelings of being alone, different, and isolated. This chapter discusses the purpose of support groups and explains what to look for in choosing one. It then discusses how to support each other in a group and the need for spirituality and safety. Finally, it explains how specialized support groups, such as sports programs, can be helpful.

Joe Dallas writes that the function of a support group is to “provide a safe, godly environment where people can openly discuss their homosexual struggles; learn from the experiences of others who’ve gone through similar struggles; be accountable to a group of Christians who are genuinely concerned; and know they have friends who are regularly praying for them, available to them, and rooting for them.”¹⁰⁹

A support group is about helping others. In the beginning, he may attend to help himself, but he soon discovers that he finds the help he needs when he extends help to others. When he begins to care more about their needs than his own, he finds himself healed in the process.

Support groups emphasize dialogue as a way of learning to openly and clearly deal with issues that are at the root of homosexual attractions. As your friend listens to them, perhaps for the first time he will listen to himself. The typical newcomer sits and listens, and about half way through the discussion realizes he has finally found people who think and feel like he does. When he recognizes that he is safe and can trust the group, he begins to open up and the healing process of sharing begins. He discovers that even when others know all about him, they still accept him. Once the fear of rejection is gone, he finds that he has the courage to relate to men in the group and eventually to men outside the group. Support groups can help by providing:

- ◆ a safe environment where he can face his problems.
- ◆ feedback, insight, and practical ideas from men who have experienced the same things he experiences.
- ◆ a place to begin to build healthy relationships with other men.
- ◆ interpersonal experiences in validation, love, and friendship.
- ◆ direction, vision, goals, and encouragement to continue when it is difficult.
- ◆ accountability for his actions.
- ◆ positive experiences to offset the effects of negative peer pressure.
- ◆ reduction of his sense of isolation.
- ◆ understanding, empathy, and acceptance from other men.
- ◆ encouragement to continue through the lengthy process.

Support groups can also be very helpful to wives, parents, siblings, and friends who may need to work through their own issues. In addition, it can help them understand what a support group is all about so they can lend greater support to the man who is struggling with homosexual issues. When a wife or parent participates in a support group of families, they may have the opportunity to meet the families of other men in their husband's or son's support group. By coming to know them as real people, it can help them increase their level of trust in having their husband or son participate in his group.

A support group alone is not enough

A support group will not solve all your friend's problems; it has no magical "cure" for homosexual problems. Participating in a support group is one of the many things he may need to do. Some men get a false sense of security by participating in a support group and when it doesn't solve all their problems they may feel frustrated and lose hope that change is possible.

A support group in moderation can be valuable for support and understanding, but in excess, it can prolong and heighten the old identity. His support group should never take the place of the Church, his priesthood quorum, or a normal social life; it is only a short-term supplement.

While his relationships with men in the group will be very fulfilling, he also needs to actively pursue relationships with men outside the group at work, in his quorum, and in other male groups. It

is when he experiences the love and acceptance of men who do not have homosexual problems that he really starts to recognize his true worth.

In addition to a support group, many men need individual and group therapy. Sometimes support groups can actually do more harm than good if the person is not also seeing a therapist individually to help him correctly process the things he experiences and feels so they can contribute to his growth. If your friend has addictions, he may also need the help of a twelve-step program such as *Homosexuals Anonymous* or *Sexaholics Anonymous* (see the *Organizations* section of this book).

Choosing a support group

President Boyd K. Packer gives the following counsel and warning: “There are groups of many kinds which seek to fortify those struggling to withdraw from drug addiction or to master other temptations. On the other hand, there are organizations which do just the opposite. They justify immoral conduct and bind the chains of addiction or perversion ever tighter. Do not affiliate with such an organization. If you have already, withdraw from it.”¹¹⁰ Some organizations exist to give support and love, but do not seek to help the person find ways to overcome homosexual behavior. These organizations do more harm than good because they help the person justify his behavior and, as President Packer stated, “bind the chains of addiction or perversion ever tighter.” Some organizations believe they know more about the homosexual condition than the Church leaders and they plead with them to change Church policies to be more sympathetic to those who have homosexual feelings. They use the scriptures in an attempt to justify the expression of homosexual feelings. The Apostle Paul condemned those who seek to justify homosexual behavior saying that they “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator” (see Romans 1:25–32). Beware of the subtle craftiness of such groups.

Before your friend chooses a support group, he may want to get a copy of their written literature and read the group’s mission statement. (If they don’t have one, they likely have not defined their purpose well enough for it to be a healthy environment.) Does the group support the

doctrines of the gospel, the scriptures, and the practices of the Church without reservation or exception? If the group has any reservation or finds any exception, it is on shaky ground. Do they teach that change is possible? Does the group inspire respect for the individual and promote personal growth? Does the group have written policies to protect participants in their vulnerabilities and provide a safe environment? Does the program support total abstinence of sexual behavior outside of marriage? This kind of sobriety can be attained through sharing experience, strength, and hope at group meetings. The group is on dangerous ground if it seeks to justify any homosexual behavior. Does the group function according to the written statements?

LDS support groups

Evergreen International is an umbrella organization that can help you find support groups that follow the criteria discussed above. Evergreen can refer you to a local support group or therapist. In addition to support groups for men and women who struggle with homosexual attraction, there are groups for their spouses, family, and friends. The organization also publishes manuals and newsletters, sells books by mail, and sponsors conferences. It provides education and resources to family and friends, professional counselors, religious leaders, and all others who wish to help individuals who desire to change. You may call or write for a list of publications or information on a support group near you. If there is no support group in your area, Evergreen can tell you how to start one. (See the Organizations section of this book for information on how to contact Evergreen.)

Evergreen began in the summer of 1989 in Salt Lake City, Utah, when a group of eleven men met to organize a support group. Believing that homosexual practices are not in keeping with the gospel of Christ, these men were frustrated with their experience with other organizations. They concluded there must be a solution other than destroying spiritual beliefs or denying sexual longings. They drew on information from Christian ministries in other parts of the country that had been helping men and women resolve their homosexual problems for more than 30 years.¹¹¹ From these small beginnings, Evergreen International has grown into a network of referral and educational services for men and women throughout the world.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Many men who have homosexual attractions have chosen not to disclose such to others outside the group and could be deeply hurt by the release of information about their situation. In some cases, even spouses may not be aware of their husband's participation in the group. Rules of confidentiality ensure privacy for individuals in the group. It is a safeguard of special significance to men who may hesitate to participate in an organization if they have any reason to believe that their homosexual problems could be revealed to others.

Keep the information you have about your friend or other members of his support group strictly confidential. They should decide who should be told, when, and under what circumstances. If you volunteer to help in some way in a support group or conference, respect the organization's policies about confidentiality and anonymity. Although you may not mind that others know you are involved with the organization, it may be disastrous for someone else if others were to know they are involved.

The place of spirituality in group meetings

Because Christ's atonement and the plan of salvation play an important role in the process of recovery, it is critical that your friend draw on gospel principles, refer to the scriptures and the words of Church leaders, and incorporate all these into every aspect of his support group program. It is entirely appropriate in an LDS group to support each other by sharing testimonies, praying for each other, encouraging each other in righteousness, and attending the temple together. "Therefore, strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings" (D&C 108:7). I have heard encouraging stories from groups about spiritual experiences that have had a profound influence on their growth and recovery. If your friend's group is not having similar experiences, he should evaluate the activities and plan for ways to invite the Spirit into all he does.

He should be careful that he does not confuse priesthood responsibility. When your friend needs particular strength or comfort or enters a leadership position in the organization, he may go to his

father or priesthood leader and ask for a priesthood blessing. If he cannot turn to his father or a priesthood leader, friends can help. However, the group should be careful about the exercise of priesthood ordinances within the group. The group is not the Church and should never become a substitute for the priesthood quorum. Group participants can benefit greatly from relationships they develop within their priesthood quorum and should rely more on quorum members, priesthood leaders, home teachers, and fathers. The support group's programs should be temporary and point individuals back to their priesthood quorums and leaders for support and fellowship.

One evening at our support group meeting, two women came by invitation. One was previously married to a man with homosexual problems and wanted to understand him better and know what to do to support him. The other had a brother who died the previous week of AIDS and wanted to find a measure of peace about his death. They were both anxious to learn and understand, and part way through the meeting one of them began to cry because the Spirit was so strong. She said she was overwhelmed by being in a group of LDS men who believed they could overcome their problems and were trying desperately to do so.

The need for safety in the group

Support groups for individuals with homosexual attraction have an inherent risk—the ever-present danger that participants could become involved with each other sexually. This is why it is of primary importance to have controls in place to make the environment safe. Getting the men together in a support group provides opportunities for growth and the development of relationships which is the key to resolving the attractions, but at the same time, the risks need to be carefully monitored and controlled. It is critical to the success of the group to establish and enforce policies of safety and confidentiality. There should be strict rules of no sexual or seductive conduct with other members of the group. Absolutely none. Never.

In addition to the safety rules of the group, it is important that your friend establish personal boundaries. While the group process is helpful, it can also open him to dangers he needs to manage. In the group setting, he will experience emotional intimacy with other men on

levels that perhaps he has not experienced before. Although he does not talk about sexual details, the fact that he discusses sexual problems may put him in a vulnerable state. His discussions may open up old wounds and he may experience anxiety or hurt and he may be tempted to revert to his old patterns of behavior to relieve the pain. Since each person in the group discusses his area of vulnerability, others can wittingly or unwittingly take advantage. Therefore, boundaries must be established for the protection of everyone in the group.

Sexual problems in a group

An incident of sexual activity among participants brings serious personal consequences and weakens the group as a whole. The group can tolerate a motivated participant who is sincerely trying to overcome an addiction, but not one who is not committed to the process. If sexual activities occur between members of the group, the group leaders should intervene quickly by confronting those involved, discussing the occurrence to help them understand what led to the behavior, and setting in place precautions to avoid a recurrence.

Sports programs

In addition to the conventional support groups, your friend may find an experiential group helpful. Experiential groups exist to provide a specific experience, such as sports programs that teach basic skills in basketball, softball, or another sport, and provide opportunities to play the sport. Participants learn how to function on a team and have the chance to work through defensive detachment and face and resolve their fear of the sport. For many men in the group, sports may have been one of the things that separated them from other boys. Participation in a sports program can help your friend:

- ◆ learn the rules of the sport and through practice gain a certain level of skill. These skills can improve his ability to relate to and father his own children.
- ◆ learn teamwork by playing with other men.
- ◆ experience friendly competition in a team sport.
- ◆ develop a healthier body image and increase feelings of self-worth.
- ◆ face and resolve old fears and feelings of rejection and feel accepted as a member of a team of men.

Basketball

I enjoy individual sports such as weight lifting and running, and have even played competitive, nonteam sports like racquetball. But I always feared team sports. The first time I showed up at an experiential group basketball practice, I froze in the hallway when I heard the balls bouncing inside the gym. However, when I finally got the courage to go in, I found the other guys were just as uncoordinated and fearful as I was. I found it was a nonjudgmental environment where I could learn the rules of basketball and enjoy playing the game with other guys. Participating in the sports program really built my self-worth. My lack of skill in sports had been a reason for me to distance myself from other men, but with a little practice I found I was actually a good basketball player, and then had the confidence to play on the ward basketball team.

Softball

The next season was softball, and I had greater fears. Even though I actually enjoyed basketball, I *dreaded* the thoughts of softball because it brought back old feelings of ridicule that I experienced on the ball field in elementary school. I wrote the following essay after my first softball practice in the sports program.

Take Me Out of the Ball Game

“The last time I was on a softball field was in the third grade, when we occasionally played softball for physical exercise. When they chose up teams, I was always the last to be chosen (even after the girls!). I always played outfield, because out there no one expected you to actually catch the ball or to be able to throw it all the way to the infield. In batting lineup, I would say that I had already batted and continually slip to the end of the line.

“Now I am thirty-five years old and I can do anything I want—except play softball. And it still separates me from other men. I don’t care to become very good at softball; I just want to feel comfortable enough to join in an occasional game. So I determined that I would be at the first Saturday practice. After all, with basketball I found that I actually knew most of the rules of the game, and with some

practice I wasn't a bad shot. By the end of the season, I could mix it up with the best of them. Now, why couldn't I do the same with softball? Besides, most of the guys learning softball were the same klutzes I had played basketball with.

"I showed up in the parking lot with my brand new Dale Murphy Rawlings mitt. How was I to know that you're supposed to oil down a new mitt before you use it? I didn't even bring a baseball cap. How can I act like I know what I'm doing without a baseball cap? And besides, where's Buzz? He played little league, so he'll know what to do. I need him! I got nervous and turned back to get something I suddenly 'remembered I had left in the car.' I met Buzz halfway back, and my confidence waxed strong again.

"Buzz and I picked up a softball and threw it back and forth. He showed me how to hold the ball and how to throw. Now that wasn't so hard. I even caught almost every throw. The group then gathered for introductions and a little stretching, then the inevitable decree, 'All those who want to play a game go over there. And everyone else come over here.' Of twenty-five guys, I was the only one to 'come over here.' I didn't intend to play a game that day. I just wanted to practice throwing and batting, and learn some of the rules of the game. The coach gave me a few more pointers and we threw for a minute until he had to coach the game. I found a spot on the bleachers and watched my friends bat and run the bases. And everyone cheered. My mind went back to grade school, and suddenly I was a fat, uncoordinated little boy again. I was up to bat and the pressure was on to perform. Everyone was counting on me. And everyone knew I would fail. Why does it matter if you hit a ball with a stick or if you miss? With a few swings of the bat I would be a hero or a felon. Self-images are created and destroyed so easily. For some reason, softball represented all the negative experiences I had as a child. It reminded me how I felt as a fat, clumsy boy trying to fit in with the crowd. It represented peer pressure and inadequacy. And the tears came freely. Thank heavens for sunglasses. But soon the sunglasses couldn't hide the tears that were streaming down my face and I had to leave. I found a shady spot under a tree about a hundred yards away where I could still see and hear the game. It was safer there. I could see them but they couldn't see me. And no one could see me cry.

“Before long, Buzz found me and I cried on his shoulder. He reminded me how I started basketball without any experience and ended up doing well and how softball could be the same. He reminded me that courage is not the absence of fear, but acting in spite of fear. As I left the field that day, the immature side of me said, ‘Never set foot on this field again. You don’t have to go through this humiliation.’ But the side of me that wants to grow assured me that I had to face my fears head-on. I have something at stake. My four-year-old son plays t-ball on a community team and I am scared to play catch with him. (As I write this, I am overcome with emotion that a thirty-five-year-old father would be scared to play catch with his four-year-old son.) It won’t be easy to show up for practice next Saturday. The fears won’t be gone, and the tears will probably be near the surface again. But it’s something I have to do. And if it does not kill me, it will make me stronger.

“The next Friday, my friend Buzz took me to the batting cages to learn how to bat. He showed me how to hold the bat, how to stand, and how to swing. We were both surprised at how well I did. I missed only a half dozen out of fifty pitches! All it took was a little time and encouragement to give me the confidence I needed to go to the next practice.

“The next Saturday practice was a good experience. Since Buzz had helped me the day before, I went up to bat with confidence. The coach helped me in a kind way without being condescending. In the practice, I hit my five balls with only seven pitches. We then played a short game, and I hit both times I was at bat! After the practice, Andy talked with me about my fears of softball. He had only seen the confident side of me and was glad to see that I had fears and doubts and hesitations like everyone else. He admitted that although he feels comfortable about softball, he is scared to think about playing basketball. Since I feel comfortable with basketball, I promised to help him when basketball season comes. As I think back on what Buzz did to help me with softball, it is surprising what little it took to get me through what I viewed as an unsurmountable fear. All it took from Buzz was a little time and concern for me to feel comfortable to show up at practices and now I can do the same to help Andy.”

Therapy

As helpful as support groups can be, they are no substitute for individual and group therapy because there are issues that can only be dealt with effectively in sessions with a trained therapist. Therapy can help your friend clarify his identity and make life choices that are consistent with his personal values. It is a process of self-understanding, self-acceptance, and growth. For most people, that means difficult, painful compromises. Although one's life becomes more clear, it may not become easier; there are no shortcuts to personal growth. Human emotions are complex and difficult situations are not easily unraveled. This chapter explains different therapeutic approaches and gives information on choosing the right therapist. It then discusses individual and group therapy and explains how each can be beneficial.

Modern therapy for those who struggle with homosexual problems bears little resemblance to the sordid history of treatment for emotional problems. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the medical profession regarded homosexuality as a mental illness and attempted to cure it by drastic measures such as electroshock therapy, hormone injections, castration, hysterectomy, and even lobotomy.¹¹² Today, professionals use more humanistic approaches to help people understand and deal with their feelings. There is no need to fear therapy and certainly no reason to feel inadequate because one sees a therapist. In today's complex world, most people can benefit from therapy for some reason at some time in their life. If the therapist is chosen wisely, and the sessions are managed well, it can be a richly rewarding experience.

Therapeutic methods

Within psychotherapy, there is a broad range of treatment approaches, some of which are helpful and others damaging.

Approaches to avoid

Many mental health professionals practice “gay-affirmative” therapy, which encourages individuals to “come out of the closet” and accept their homosexual orientation, which they say is a natural and healthy sexual variation. This kind of therapy proposes that the reason the person is unhappy with his homosexuality is because of his own self-hate and because of society’s anti-gay prejudices. This approach is not in harmony with gospel principles and should be avoided.

Approaches that are beneficial

Other forms of psychotherapy allow individuals to determine for themselves if homosexual attraction fits within their personal values. If it doesn’t, the therapy helps them learn to love themselves and grow in self-worth through becoming congruent with their personal value system. These forms are referred to as reparative, re-education, or reorientation therapies. They help people “explore the source of their problem, develop nonerotic same-sex relationships that diminish the sexual attraction they feel toward men, become more secure in their gender-identity, and enjoy heterosexual relationships.”¹¹³

Choosing a therapist

Choosing the right therapist is critical because the wrong therapist can do more harm than good. Since reparative, reorientation, and re-education therapies are not as widely practiced as gay-affirmative therapy, it may take some searching to find the right therapist. Your friend should choose a therapist that can understand and support him in his personal values. In this respect, the ideal counselor would be LDS or at least a man who upholds Christian values. He needs to understand and support your friend’s religious motivations to change in the context of the eternal plan of salvation. The therapist needs to understand and be able to teach him the divinely-appointed roles of men and women and he needs to be a good role model of a Christlike man because in many ways he will be a friend and mentor. Dr. Elizabeth Moberly advises that the therapist be emotionally involved in the process, within therapeutic guidelines. Depending on your friend’s particular needs, he may wish to look for a psychoanalyst, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a licensed clinical social worker

(LCSW).

It is advisable that men choose a male therapist for several reasons. Since part of the problem is due to defensive detachment from men, a male therapist is in a better position than a woman to help your friend work through some of the developmental blocks he had with his father or with other men. A male therapist is also in a better position to help him understand other men and guide him into relationships with them. If his therapy experience is successful, the intimate relationship he develops with his therapist will be healing in itself and will encourage him to develop relationships with other men.

Evergreen International can recommend a therapist who fits the descriptions above. (Information on contacting Evergreen International is found in the Organizations section of this book.)

If therapy is not available

If your friend cannot afford therapy or if there is not a good therapist available, he can still benefit by reading carefully-selected self-help books, writing in a journal, and trying to analyze his life. He can still set up a plan of action and follow through on that plan. He can look at his life as though he were watching a video tape and identify what he wants to change, then make specific assignments to himself to develop relationships and do things to build his self-image. He can be accountable to God through prayer, to himself by using his journal, and to a friend in person or by telephone, letters, or e-mail. However, he should be careful not to let e-mail, letters, or even the telephone replace face-to-face contact with other men because this personal interaction is critical.

Individual therapy

A trained therapist can guide your friend through his personal growth process. He is a personal counselor to help him put all the pieces of the puzzle together. The therapist can help him see how to integrate his personal study, spiritual growth, support groups, personal relationships, and behavior modification. He can help him see in an objective way how to keep his life in balance. He can be his mentor and confidant.

Individual therapy is an essential part of the process for most men

who resolve their homosexual problems. Although it will not take care of all your friend's needs, it can give direction to all his activities. If he also participates in a sports program, group therapy, support group, or a community men's group, the therapist can help him see how all these pieces fit together and help him keep them in balance.

As he talks with his therapist, your friend will discover things about himself. Because of shame or guilt, he may have buried some things so deep within him that he doesn't even realize them himself. The therapist is trained to ask the right questions to help him see things in perspective and guide him through the process. Together they can develop action plans to take your friend through each step of the process and he can report back to his therapist on both his successes and failures. The journey won't seem so lonely or so hard if he has a therapist by his side the whole way. Individual counseling can help to:

- ◆ identify and resolve personal issues and underlying factors.
- ◆ identify and clearly define your friend's personal goals.
- ◆ develop a personal action plan then help your friend keep working on the plan.
- ◆ identify and work around the roadblocks.
- ◆ receive encouragement when he gets discouraged.
- ◆ increase his awareness of things he needs to work on.
- ◆ give insight into his feelings and actions.
- ◆ give an outside perspective (help him see black and white when all he sees is gray).
- ◆ identify his personal strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ give a forum to talk things out and get feedback.
- ◆ give someone to be accountable to for his behavior, growth, and personal plan of action.
- ◆ learn to generalize lessons learned to other situations.
- ◆ learn to internalize new information (help his heart to believe).
- ◆ learn how to live congruently with his personal values and belief system.
- ◆ learn to control compulsive behaviors and overcome addictions.

Group therapy

Group therapy can also be helpful, but is of secondary importance to individual therapy. Group therapy has some of the same advantages

as a support group. The difference is that group therapy is always run by a trained therapist who is there to facilitate the discussion in meaningful ways. Since support groups are not guided, it is easy for members of the group to hide or even deny their feelings. But in a therapy group, the therapist can help members confront issues head-on and then be sure the issues are brought to healthy conclusions.

For further reading

Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach
by Joseph Nicolosi.

*Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming
Homosexuality* by Dr. William Consiglio.

Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic by Elizabeth Moberly

Behavior

I often see men try one of two approaches to solve their homosexual problems. Some try to stop the behavior and suppress the desires but don't work on identity issues or other deeper problems. Unfortunately, they find that sooner or later both the desires and the behavior return. My friend Alan tried numerous times to control his behavior by exercising willpower alone. Although he put up a good fight, he always found that the urges were stronger and more persistent than his willpower and he eventually gave in. Other people work on self-identity issues but don't stop the behavior. They find that the continuing behaviors reinforce the feelings and obstruct their efforts to improve how they feel about themselves. The answer to both these situations lies in a balanced approach. A major focus of this book is on discovering the underlying causes and working on resolving those inner conflicts that generate the desires for homosexual actions. But at the same time, they must get their behavior in control so it does not reinforce the feelings they are trying to understand and redirect in appropriate ways. Although controlling their behavior is of utmost importance, it alone will not solve their problems. Long-term change depends on their self-perception and their devotion to God. Behavior management is a prerequisite to behavior change.

This chapter explains that your friend can choose his behavior, how habits and addictions can compromise his power to choose, and how he can be safe by carefully setting personal boundaries on his actions. It warns against justifying homosexual behavior, discusses the concepts of temptation and sin, and warns of the dangers of homosexual behavior. Finally, it gives specific counsel about controlling fantasy, pornography, masturbation, cruising, and homosexual behavior

Changing behavior

Some men get caught between the gospel they know is right and the attractions toward men they know are contrary to the gospel. Although they try to suppress the feelings and live the gospel, they find that the

urges are stronger than their willpower and they submit to fantasy, masturbation, or sexual acts. They quickly find themselves living a double life by trying to be a good member of the Church but secretly engaging in homosexual behavior. Before long, these two lives can drift further apart. The addictive nature of the homosexual behavior can quickly lead them into more frequent and more involved behaviors. To make up for their bad side, they may put even more energy into trying to living the gospel. Since living a double life can leave them frustrated and ridden with guilt, getting their behavior under control is an important first step in their progress.

Others have been able to keep their behavior under control and may only struggle with minor behavioral problems. For them, the journey out of homosexual problems will be easier because they don't have the additional challenges of overcoming habits and addictions.

One of your friend's priority tasks should be to make constructive, positive changes in his habitual ways of behaving and relating to his environment. At first, he may have to take drastic measures to get his behavior under control. If he has not been deeply involved in sexual behaviors, his job may be less difficult. If he has been heavily involved in sexual activities, he may have a more demanding struggle to overcome habits and sexual addictions. But if he is sincerely motivated and makes a significant effort, he can overcome them and control his behavior. The comforting news is that as he resolves deeper issues, the compulsions and desires to act out will diminish or disappear and the struggle to control his behavior will be less demanding. As time passes, homosexual behavior will become less and less appealing, and in some cases, even repulsive.

Behavior is a choice

In an address in a general conference, President Boyd K. Packer spoke about homosexual attractions and gave the following counsel: "You may not be able, simply by choice, to free yourself at once from unworthy feelings. You *can* choose to give up the immoral expression of them."¹¹⁴ Abstinence from homosexual activity is required for healing to take place. Abstinence will help the behavioral patterns wither and die.

Avoiding homosexual behavior

Your friend may be tempted to engage in homosexual activity thinking that if he were to experience it, he could “get it out of his system” and his fantasies could be put to rest. But this false illusion ignores the seductive power of sexual sin. Many people know that homosexual behavior doesn’t satisfy, but are enslaved by it anyway! It is much harder to close a door that has been opened than it is to not open the door in the first place.¹¹⁵ Encourage your friend to be strong and not give in to homosexual behavior no matter how long his transition may take. Leo Hall wrote, “I have refrained from ever becoming sexually involved with another man. I choose not to ‘act out’ and sexualize my SSA feelings, but rather to ‘act on’ my need to love and be loved in Christlike ways.”¹¹⁶

Habits, addictions, and compulsions

Sexual behaviors can be extremely addictive, whether they involve fantasies, solitary activities, or actions with others. Habits and addictions are self-defeating behaviors that trade short-term benefits for long-term ones. Such behaviors are emotional, but not necessarily logical. Being in an addictive cycle is like drinking salt water. Although the salt water cannot fill his thirst, he continues drinking it because after all, it is water and he is thirsty. But the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes.

Some people are more susceptible than others to addictions. Some people are more easily addicted to smoking than others. Some cannot take an occasional drink without becoming alcoholics. These tendencies may restrict the person’s freedom, but not his agency. He may not be free to drink without addiction, but his free agency allows him to choose not to drink at all. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “We all seem to have susceptibilities to one disorder or another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and the power to control our thoughts and our actions. This must be so. God has said that he holds us accountable for what we do and what we think, so our thoughts and actions must be controllable by our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim ‘I was born that way’ does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. We need to learn how to live so that a

weakness that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving the goal that is eternal.”¹¹⁷

Since behaviors become increasingly strengthened through repetition, we should avoid any behavior that is habit-forming or addictive. This is particularly important with sexual behaviors, because the intensity of the sensual pleasure adds to the addictive nature of the action. Joe Dallas wrote, “Compulsive sexual behavior . . . includes lust and poor self-control, of course, but it is much more than that. It is a repetitive, constant form of sexual activity that a person feels *compelled*—not just tempted—to indulge in. Usually this behavior is acted out in secretive, anonymous sexual encounters. . . . Seldom does it include one lover; most often it means brief trysts with several partners, most of whom will never be seen again. Or it may be a solitary addiction to pornography. Regardless, it’s bondage of the worst kind because there’s so much shame and remorse attached to it, making it terribly secretive and usually dangerous.”¹¹⁸

Joe Dallas continued, “To be sexually addicted is to literally rely on sex to stabilize you. It’s a state in which the rush of sexual pleasure, with all its accompanying chemical forces has become to you what a drug has become to an addict. And like a drug, it begins to interfere with all parts of life. Breaking the cycle of sexual addiction is not just a matter of will in this case; it’s a matter of *strategy, consistency, and patience*.”¹¹⁹

If your friend finds himself engulfed in habits and addictions, they can be overcome by the incredible power of the human will, with the support of friends and loved ones, and through the omnipotent power of our Savior. Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, “Your willpower becomes strong when joined with the will of the Lord.”¹²⁰ Such mastery may happen overnight or take a significant amount of time, but it can happen nonetheless. Your friend may need to enlist the help of a twelve-step program, a support group, and a therapist to overcome addictions.

Personal boundaries

Your friend will likely need to set boundaries to get his behavior under control. By setting personal boundaries, he uses his agency to temporarily limit certain individual freedoms to help achieve more

important eternal freedoms. If he knows he is susceptible to certain addictive behaviors, he can decide to limit his access to places or conditions that might make it easy for him to go astray. Since addictions can limit or compromise more important freedoms, it is important to forgo less important, temporary freedoms for more important eternal ones. If he is tempted to go to an adult bookstore on the way home from work, he may have to take a different route that does not pass by the bookstore. He should choose boundaries that keep him well inside a zone of safety. Old habit patterns have to be starved before they shrivel and die.

In addition to the outward boundaries discussed above, it may be helpful to define boundaries in personal and interpersonal areas.

Physical boundaries. It is important to show affection, and through the healing process, hugging and physical touch can be important. However, it is also important to recognize that each person comes from a different background and has his own limits of personal space. What may be an appropriate hug for you may be too intimate for your friend. If he is starved for affection and conditioned to respond sexually, an otherwise appropriate hug may arouse or make him think inappropriate thoughts. On the other hand, his needs for affection may be so great that his hugs may be too intense for you. Therefore, it may be helpful to talk about what is comfortable and appropriate for both of you.

Sexual boundaries. Your friend is responsible to see that others do not use him in sexual ways, and he has the responsibility to respect others. Sexual actions may affect his self-concept and his relationship with others. This is an especially difficult area for people who have been abused sexually, because they often have difficulty differentiating between sexuality and true loving feelings. You or your friend's bishop may need to talk with him at some length about sexual boundaries because many men with homosexual problems are unclear about what is appropriate behavior.

Emotional boundaries. Although your friend may not always be able to control how he feels, understanding his emotions can give him clues to understanding himself. His emotions belong to him and your emotions belong to you. Neither of you has the right to try to "fix" each

other's emotions.

Intellectual boundaries. Each person's thought processes reflect his feelings, opinions, and perspectives, and not necessarily facts. Both you and your friend have a right to sort out what you think, and need to give others the right to think and decide for themselves also.

Spiritual boundaries. Your beliefs belong to you and the beliefs of others belong to them. A violation of spiritual boundaries occurs when you tell someone, "You can't believe that." You cannot force a person to believe something any more than you can force them to think or feel the way you want them to. Likewise, you cannot live on the spiritual beliefs of others; sooner or later you need to determine what you believe for yourself.

Justifying homosexual behavior

Emotional difficulties do not grant any special rights to engage in illicit sexual actions. God's commandments apply universally to everyone and we are on dangerous ground when we seek to justify our behavior, assuming we know more about what is best for us than God does. Some are tempted to believe that they have a unique situation and therefore God's commandments don't apply to them. Some men believe that since they are not attracted to women, and feel they cannot marry and enjoy heterosexual relations, they should be allowed some sexual expression with men. But God has revealed only one law of moral conduct, which is abstinence outside of lawful marriage between a man and a woman, and fidelity within marriage. A 1991 letter from the First Presidency addressed to all members of the Church said, "Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual contact, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior, is sinful."¹²¹ Notwithstanding these clear counsels, some still argue it is not fair that they are prohibited from acting on their homosexual feelings. They apparently don't understand that one purpose of this life is to learn self-control and obedience to God's commandments. Life appears not to be fair to teenagers who are restricted from acting on their sexual impulses, nor to a physically

disabled person who is not able to function sexually, nor to divorced or widowed people who no longer have a lawful outlet for their sexual desires. Speaking in a general conference on the subject of homosexual attractions, President Boyd K. Packer said, “Now, in a spirit of sympathy and love, I speak to you who may be struggling against temptations for which there is no moral expression. Some have resisted temptation but never seem to be free from it. Do not yield! Cultivate the spiritual strength to resist—all of your life, if need be. . . . To keep resisting . . . is an act of genuine unselfishness, a sacrifice you place on the altar of obedience. It will bring enormous spiritual rewards.”¹²²

Some try to justify homosexual behavior by saying that our enlightened modern society now sees it as an acceptable expression between two men who love each other. President Spencer W. Kimball showed the fallacy in this kind of thinking when he explained that “right and wrong, righteousness and sin, are not dependent upon man’s interpretations, conventions and attitudes. Social acceptance does not change the status of an act, making wrong into right. If all the people in the world were to accept homosexuality, as it seems to have been accepted in Sodom and Gomorrah, the practice would still be deep, dark sin.”¹²³ You may wish to read President Boyd K. Packer’s general conference address in which he spoke about those who try to justify a gay lifestyle (see “Covenants,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, pp. 84–86).

Another subtle form of justification is to accept a lower standard for ourselves than the one revealed in scripture and through modern prophets. Alan Medinger counsels us to be on guard against “the attitude that says, ‘God, I am doing the best I can do; this is just the way I am.’ Rather than working towards the gospel standard, we adopt a tolerant, indulgent attitude that declares, ‘If I only go off on a sexual binge once a year, I’m better off than I used to be. Besides, God understands my weakness.’ I have known people who for years have justified their ongoing sin as being reasonable, given their emotional and psychological makeup.”¹²⁴ It is subtly arrogant to assume that our understanding of ourselves exceeds what God has revealed in scripture and through his prophets.

Temptation

*Temptation is not sin.*¹²⁵ One of Satan's traps is to convince your friend that he is sinning when he is merely experiencing temptation. He need not feel guilty or ask forgiveness for temptations or attractions over which he has no control. The temptations themselves are not sinful (see Hebrews 4:15), but his reactions to them may be. When a temptation comes, he can either dismiss it or nurture it. If he dismisses it, it is no sin. But if he nurtures it, it will grow into lust and then behavior.

Temptation is not identity. Just because your friend is tempted by homosexual feelings, it does not mean he is a homosexual. Satan may continue to tempt him with things from his past, although he has left them behind.

Temptation is not a sign of low spirituality. Your friend should not feel that he is falling apart spiritually because he experiences temptation. Sometimes Satan tempts us more when we are growing spiritually. The scriptures are full of accounts of strong people who were continually tempted. Remember, Satan even tempted the Savior!

Temptation is not unique to your friend. Everyone faces temptation. Satan may use slightly different approaches with different people, but the basic temptations, such as envy, lust, and selfishness, are common to everyone.

Sin

Dr. William Consiglio gives a good distinction between temptation and sin: "Feelings, attractions, urges, desires, longings, are all temptations. Acting on any of these mentally or physically is sin."¹²⁶ When your friend is tempted, does he dismiss the temptation or indulge it? Does he starve it or feed it? Elder Orson F. Whitney explained, "Sin is the transgression of divine law, as made known through the conscience or by revelation. A man sins when he violates his conscience, going contrary to light and knowledge—not the light and knowledge that has come to his neighbor, but that which has come to himself. He sins when he does the opposite of what he knows to be right."¹²⁷

Joe Dallas explained, “Christ’s prohibition against lust (Matthew 5:28) certainly applies to the entertaining of sexual fantasies and erotic desires outside of marriage, but not to the unaroused condition of homosexuality. (Or the unaroused condition of heterosexuality, for that matter. A heterosexual male is attracted to women, but he is not always lusting after them. A homosexual male is attracted to men, but he’s not always lusting after them.)”¹²⁸

Although we should abhor sin, we must be careful not to hate ourselves when we sin. Having just spoken in a general conference about those who are attracted to the same gender, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared, “Having said this, I desire now to say with emphasis that our concern for the bitter fruit of sin is coupled with Christlike sympathy for its victims, innocent or culpable. We advocate the example of the Lord, who condemned the sin, yet loved the sinner. We should reach out with kindness and comfort to the afflicted, ministering to their needs and assisting them with their problems. We repeat, however, that the way of safety and the road to happiness lie in abstinence before marriage and fidelity following marriage.”¹²⁹

Setbacks

As he begins to face issues head on, he may experience increased stress as old wounds are opened and dealt with. As a result, he may experience a greater pull toward old behaviors as a way to cope with these increased feelings. Therefore, he needs to be on guard with increased resistance to avoid setbacks. If he does backslide, help him see that he isn’t back at point zero. Don’t minimize the consequences of what happened, but help him realize it is only a temporary setback and encourage him to get back on his feet with new resolve. Encourage him to learn from the mistake, so if he sees the pattern developing again, he will be able to stop it before it develops into homosexual behavior.

Be supportive if he regresses, but be careful you don’t actually set him up for backsliding by expecting that it will happen. Some men are able to stop homosexual behaviors at once and not regress. However, most men struggle and fall and struggle again, just as all of us do in

trying to overcome other sins or problems. Few of us have the strength or significant change of heart all at once to be able to change overnight the behaviors that developed over a lifetime and have been reinforced over years. Although the progress is in a positive direction, there may be some ups and downs along the way. It is a journey—not a quick fix—and the progress is not always linear (A ⇔ B ⇔ C ⇔ D) but may move in an upward spiral from one plane to another.

Homosexual behavior is dangerous

Homosexual behavior is dangerous to your friend spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Cruising behavior may make him vulnerable to physical attack. Sexual behavior may also put his life and health at risk because of diseases that are transmitted through sexual contact. Addictive sexual behavior can be particularly dangerous because the compulsive actions can prevail over a person's better judgement and he may engage in behaviors that are deadly. Men who engage in homosexual behavior account for 80% of America's most serious sexually-transmitted diseases, although they comprise only 5–10% of the population.¹³⁰ Those who contract AIDS die at the median age of thirty-nine; those who don't get AIDS die at the median age of forty-two.¹³¹

HIV/AIDS

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus that attacks the body's immune system and weakens its ability to defend itself against disease. A person infected with the virus is considered Hiv-positive. When HIV weakens the immune system to the point that the body is no longer able to defend itself—indicated in part by a T-cell count of less than 200—a person is said to have AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Such a weakened immune system is no longer able to fight off serious infections, diseases, and some types of cancer. About half of the people infected with HIV develop AIDS within 10 years; some stay healthy for fifteen years or longer.¹³²

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that up to 900,000 Americans—one in 800 women and one in 100 men—are infected with

HIV, and perhaps half are unaware of their infection.¹³³ The Surgeon General said, “Today, most of the people with AIDS are young adults. Although survival times have improved greatly for people who are diagnosed early and receive medical treatment, the disease is usually fatal.”¹³⁴

The spread of HIV and AIDS

Everyone needs to become informed about HIV and AIDS and avoid actions that place themselves or others at risk. HIV is in the blood, semen, or vaginal secretions of an infected person. The two main ways of spreading HIV are having sex and using contaminated needles to inject drugs. In addition, infected women can pass HIV infection to their newborns.

A person can become infected with HIV through a single sexual contact. The risk of infection increases exponentially with each additional sexual contact. Doubling the number of contacts does not merely double the risk, because one can be exposed to HIV not only directly from the sex partner but also indirectly from all his former partners. It is estimated that half of those who are infected don't know it. Others may know they are Hiv-positive but still engage in risky behaviors because of denial or anger, or because they are past caring. Others lie about their HIV-positive status in order to have sex. A survey of HIV-positive men revealed that 11% had lied and said they were HIV-negative in order to have sex.¹³⁵ A person under the influence of compulsive sex doesn't think clearly and may take unusual risks that place his own life and the lives of others in jeopardy.

It is important not to judge people who have become infected. Regardless of the actions that allowed the infection, they deserve suffering or death no more than anyone else. What they need most desperately is our love and concern. When tragedy strikes, we should feel sympathy as fellow sinners and fellow sufferers. And if we start looking for an object lesson in the tragedy, we should apply the lesson to ourselves rather than to them. Let the misfortunes of others alert us to the urgency of our own state of affairs.

HIV testing

If your friend has been involved in even marginally-risky behavior, he should be tested for HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases. If he is married, his wife should also be tested. Early diagnosis can reduce the chance of spreading the disease further and early treatment can slow down the onset of symptoms and HIV-related illnesses, potentially adding years to their lives. For information about testing, contact your county public health office or local chapter of the Red Cross.

Providing support

LDS men who are infected with HIV or have AIDS often have great needs for emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, and financial support. Since most government and private organizations that offer such help have espoused gay-affirmative values, the LDS man may find himself at odds with their goals and find it difficult to get much positive assistance from them. In these cases, it may be especially important to offer him your encouragement, love, support, and acceptance. Lifesaving medications are extremely expensive and may not be covered under insurance plans. If he is ill, you may be able to help him arrange for long-term care.

In 1988, the First Presidency issued a statement on AIDS and the following year a special four-page bulletin on AIDS was sent to Church leaders throughout the world giving information and guidelines.¹³⁶ In these documents, the First Presidency admonishes Church members to become informed about AIDS and to extend Christlike sympathy and compassion to all who are infected or ill with AIDS. They encouraged leaders and members to “reach out with kindness and comfort to the afflicted, ministering to their needs and helping them with their problems.”

For more information

Many of your questions about HIV and AIDS can be answered confidentially over the phone by calling the National AIDS Information Hotline sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control at

800/342–AIDS (Spanish: 800/344–SIDA; hearing impaired: 800/AIDS-TTY).

For advice from a Christian perspective, contact Americans For A Sound AIDS/HIV Policy, P. O. Box 17433, Washington, DC 20041 (telephone: 703/471–7350).

To find a support group for Christians with HIV or AIDS, contact the Christian AIDS Services Alliance, P. O. Box 3612, San Rafael, CA 94912.

Fantasy

Mark Laaser writes that the three building blocks of sexual addiction are fantasy, pornography, and masturbation.¹³⁷ James Allen wrote that a man's mind is like a garden that may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild, but whether cultivated or neglected, it will produce either useful plants or useless weeds. Whatever we allow to enter our minds will always bear fruit. Fantasy is damaging because it will keep your friend separated from reality. When he fantasizes, he builds a self-focused, self-pleasing world of fragments of people and situations which he rearranges to meet his needs. Fantasies are not about real or whole people and complete situations, but about imaginary, faceless people and unrealistic situations.

Jesus explained that sexual fantasy is also a violation of the seventh commandment when he said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). The gospel standard of chastity calls for cleanliness of both thought and action. The way to keep actions appropriate is to keep thoughts clean.

Pornography

Temptation toward pornography is a common struggle, especially for men with homosexual problems. In 1984, Elder David B. Haight warned, "Over the past twenty years a plague of pornography has swept across most countries of the world with increasing momentum and devastating impact. What began a few years ago as a few crude

picture magazines that startled sensitive people has grown to hundreds of publications, each seeking to outdo the others with increasingly shocking content. . . . New technologies that can bless our lives in so many positive ways are also being used to spread pornographic corruption. Video recorders now can bring to homes . . . lurid portrayals of debauchery that contaminate those who view them.”¹³⁸ Since Elder Haight said this in 1984, pornography has grown more widespread and more crude, and newer technologies make it increasingly easier to access. Even young children can easily find all kinds of pornography on the internet.

Pornography is harmful

Some people rationalize that viewing pornography doesn't affect anyone but them. They say it is better to relieve their sexual frustrations looking at pornography and masturbating than finding a sex partner. They feel that being the lesser of two evils, it isn't so bad after all. However, many people can attest to the fact that pornography is addicting. I know of one man who over the course of two years had accumulated 87 videos and more than 700 magazines and spent \$27,000 in the process.¹³⁹

Pornography drives away the Spirit

More important than financial or other reasons, pornography should be avoided because it drives away the Spirit, and your friend desperately needs the Spirit to guide him. The Spirit of the Lord cannot dwell in unholy places (see Alma 34:36).

Pornography feeds fantasies

The images portrayed in pornographic literature and movies constitute a fantasy unfounded in reality. It is a vision of exaggerated masculinity and sex without consequence. The object of the fantasy can be controlled, picked up, put down, and used as the person wants. It allows an individual the illusion of a sexual encounter without actually having to confront another human being.

Pornography feeds sexual fantasies which reinforce the homosexual

feelings your friend is trying to unlearn. These reinforced feelings can work against all the other efforts he makes to resolve homosexuality in his life. Although your friend is not responsible for the desires that made him want to fantasize, he is responsible for allowing thoughts, stories, and images into his mind to fuel the fantasies. They make homosexual behavior appear enticing and can lead him into the addictive cycle of visualizing, then rationalizing, then acting.

Pornography influences behavior

The primary male response to viewing pornography is to masturbate. Elder David B. Haight said, "Pornography is not a victimless crime. . . . Pornography is addictive. (See *Ensign*, March 1984, pp. 32–39.) What may begin as a curious exploration can become a controlling habit. Studies show that those who allow themselves to become drawn to pornography soon begin to crave even coarser content. Continued exposure desensitizes the spirit and can erode the conscience of unwary people. A victim becomes a slave to carnal thoughts and actions. As the thought is father to the deed, exposure can lead to acting out what is nurtured in the mind."¹⁴⁰

Pornography feeds feelings of inferiority

Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel explain that "men who have viewed gay pornography may unconsciously compare their bodies (including genitals) with the 'perfect' standard of statuesque models. Viewing pornography can reinforce feelings of physical and sexual inferiority."¹⁴¹ No normal person can measure up to the hyper-masculine images found in male pornography. These aesthetically perfect men set up an unrealistic standard by which your friend will compare himself, and when he compares their hyper-masculinity to his, he will invariably feel a deficit and may find it more difficult to accept his own body and gender, as well as to accept other men who don't measure up to the unrealistic illusion of the porn idols. Thus, "pornography seems to distort how one views himself and others, potentially decreasing his capacity to relate realistically to other men."¹⁴²

As an individual indulges in pornography, his feelings of inadequacy and envy merge with lust and eroticism and magnify his feelings of sexual attraction toward men. This may be one reason males with homosexual problems tend to feel more guilt after viewing pornography than the average male. In one study, 91% of teens with homosexual attractions felt shame and disgust, compared with only 48% of the heterosexually-oriented teens.¹⁴³

Eliminating pornography

If your friend has become addicted to pornography, it may be difficult for him to overcome it. A friend of mine wrote, “Most days I think I’ve got porn licked for good—then I inevitably get stressed out and have a binge fest. I stupidly use it as a crutch when things get overwhelming. The only motivator that has effectively helped me has been to learn to love myself enough that I now believe I am worth the effort to rise above the trash. Ironically, my wife taught me this lesson. One day she confronted me directly and asked me if I had a problem with pornography. I confessed that I had slowly but surely spiraled out of control into a pornography and masturbation addiction. Then, with great power, she said the magic words: ‘Dear, you are worth far more than the person you become as a pornography addict.’ I finally believed her. I am worth more than the trash. Improving my self-esteem and learning to love and respect myself over the past year has made all the difference.”

The pamphlet *Statements by Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Concerning Pornography* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT, 1988, item number 33171) contains quotes from Church leaders about what we can do as individuals and as a society to curtail the influence of pornography in our lives.

Masturbation

Masturbation is the stimulation of the genitals to arouse sexual excitement and pleasure. Although it occurs with boys and girls and men and women of all ages,¹⁴⁴ it is a particular problem for males who

experience homosexual attraction. It is a form of sexual immorality that Satan uses to divert men and women from the proper, sacred use of procreative powers. Ancient and modern prophets have warned of the evils of masturbation.¹⁴⁵ It does not edify and inspire, but drives the Spirit away. It also holds people back in old thought patterns and unhealthy ways of responding by isolating them from their feelings and the real task of learning to deal honestly with themselves and the world. The practice can become habitual and progressive, leading to other immoral behaviors, and is usually associated with pornography and sexual fantasies. Dr. Consiglio states that it can become an addictive habit “because it combines physical pleasure with homosexual imagery. As a result, it becomes a substitute and symbolic sexual experience. . . .”¹⁴⁶

On the subject of masturbation, President Spencer W. Kimball wrote, “While we should not regard this weakness as the heinous sin which some other sexual practices are, it is of itself bad enough to require sincere repentance.”¹⁴⁷ The book *Resolving Homosexual Problems: A Guide for LDS Men* gives suggestions to your friend on how to overcome masturbation.

Cruising

Cruising refers to going out to find sexual excitement. It may include standing around at a shopping mall looking at attractive men, going to a bookstore to find pornographic literature, or actually looking for a sex partner. When people meet at known cruising places, they know why they are there and protocol is reduced to a minimum—a sexual encounter can begin and end in a matter of minutes.

Homosexual behavior

Casual sex

For many men, the majority of their sexual encounters are with strangers or casual acquaintances. In 1978, Bell and Weinberg conducted a study of 685 homosexual men that revealed that 83% had more than 50 sex partners in their lifetime, 73% had more than 100, 58% had more than 250, 41% had more than 500, and 26% had more

than 1,000.¹⁴⁸ Among white males, 70% said that the majority of their sexual contacts were one-time encounters.¹⁴⁹ Since these men feel an urgent desire for sexual contact, they find themselves connecting with another man for an evening or even a few minutes of pleasure. In this desperate attempt to satisfy these sexual tensions, some may have hundreds of sexual partners by going to bars and baths and city parks and public restrooms. The encounters may involve simply watching each other masturbate or mutual touching, or it may include more involved sexual acts. Anonymous sex is efficient; it may take only minutes or seconds from first meeting to engaging in intimate sex. But it is sex without feelings.

This paradox of having intimate actions with someone one doesn't even know is the Adversary's false substitute for true, fulfilling relationships. This counterfeit intimacy is one-dimensional, substituting physical and romantic intimacy for the true intimacy your friend can have in a relationship with a wife that includes deep emotional ties, acceptance, and love. In fact, the substitute intimacy decreases the possibility of true intimacy because it introduces guilt, plays on his feelings of inferiority, and creates anxiety.

Although casual sex can bring physical pleasure and temporary satisfaction, afterwards, your friend may be left with even deeper feelings of loneliness, rejection, and frustration. Rather than satisfying his need for the love of a friend, casual sex only intensifies the needs, leading to an addictive spiral that feeds itself. The sexual experience generates more feelings that evoke even more acting out. People addicted to casual sex often have low feelings of self-worth. After each sexual encounter, they feel used and of less value. And as the years pass, and youth and good looks fade, it becomes increasingly difficult to make sexual connections with desirable men.

Long-term relationships

Some men find another man with whom they have a long-term relationship and do not engage in casual or anonymous sex. The ideal dream of most men who are attracted to other men is to find "Mr. Right" and settle down with him in a romantic, committed relationship.

However, the reality is that such relationships are not common. According to a national survey by the gay magazine *The Advocate*, only 33% of the respondents currently live with a partner,¹⁵⁰ 25% are in a relationship that has lasted a year or longer, and only 9% are in a relationship that has lasted more than ten years.¹⁵¹ Homosexual relationships tend to be unstable and unfulfilling for all the reasons that led the person to develop homosexual desires in the first place, such as psychological deficits, defensive detachment, dependency needs, and the inability to see the real emotional needs. When they realize their partner cannot fill their emotional needs, they continue their desperate search through promiscuity. Fidelity is difficult to achieve in even committed relationships. The *Advocate* survey revealed that only 52% of the gay couples were monogamous as far as they know in their current or previous relationship.¹⁵² In a 1984 study of 156 male couples, only seven had been able to maintain sexual fidelity, none of which had been together more than five years.¹⁵³

Make it work!

Your friend can keep his behavior in line with gospel standards. The Apostle Paul promised, “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). This scripture explains that there is no challenge beyond our ability to handle, and also that as we turn to God, He will provide a way for us to get through the trial.

The Lord said, “And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things” (D&C 88:67). Every time we do the things that are right, the light inside us increases and the darkness decreases. This light gives us the right to call upon the powers of heaven when we need help.¹⁵⁴

For further reading

Willpower is Not Enough: Why We Don't Succeed at Change, A. Dean Byrd and Mark D. Chamberlain.

Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality by Dr. William Consiglio, especially pages 88–93.

Eliminate Your SDBs: Self-Defeating Behaviors by Johnathan M. Chamberlain.

Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction, by Patrick Carnes. Examines the tangled web of love, addictive sex, hate, and fear.

Don't Call It Love: Recovery from Sexual Addiction, by Patrick Carnes. Helpful information for people with sexual addictions. The boundary worksheet on page 250 and the abstinence worksheet on pages 246–247 are most helpful.

Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps: A Guidebook for All People in the Process of Recovery by Patrick Carnes

Regaining Self-control: Conquering Obsessive-compulsive Behavior and Other Habits you Want to Break, by Archibald John Bennee, MD.

Putting on the Armor of God: How to Win Your Battles With Satan, by Steven Cramer.

Conquering Your Own Goliaths by Steven Cramer.

Self-Perception

We are greatly influenced by our perception of our self and the world around us. Since these perceptions govern how we feel about ourselves and, ultimately, how we act, it is critical that we see ourselves for who we really are. When we better understand ourselves and expand our self-image, we expand the possibilities. This chapter discusses the concept of paradigms and defines self-image and self-worth.

Paradigms

A paradigm is simply the way we see the world. These perceptions are important because they are the basis of our attitudes, behaviors, and relationships. If we see the world in a distorted way, we may develop unrealistic expectations, behave in ways inconsistent with happiness, and have relationships that are unfulfilling. The good news is that paradigms can be changed. Albert Einstein observed, “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”¹⁵⁵ Stephen Covey says that trying to “change outward attitudes and behaviors does very little good in the long run if we fail to examine the basic paradigms from which those attitudes and behaviors flow.”¹⁵⁶

The fact that your friend is attracted to men may indicate that something happened during his developmental years to skew his thinking. His attractions are caused, in part, by his perception of the world and his instinctive efforts to become a part of something he knows he needs. Homosexuality is the story he tells himself to explain what he doesn’t understand. His task, then, is to discover what he doesn’t understand and adjust his perceptions to match reality.

Knowing that he is attracted to men, he may have labeled himself a “homosexual” and with that label, taken upon himself the extra baggage of society’s definition of a homosexual. If so, he has likely

taken on much more of a burden than he deserves. If he can find a way to divest himself of these extraneous perceptions, he may find that his key issues are not as overwhelming as he thought. It is counterproductive to use terms such as “homosexual” or “gay” to describe himself. Refer to his “homosexual problems” rather than referring to him as a “homosexual,” a “recovering homosexual,” or even a “former homosexual.”

Self-image and self-worth

Homosexual problems have little to do with sexuality, but a lot to do with self-image (how he thinks about himself) and self-worth (how he feels about himself). Many men who struggle with homosexual attractions have good self-images; they have good jobs and get along well in life. But they have low feelings of self-worth; their gut-level feelings tell them they are not worth much. Whether he believes he can change his self image or not, he is right. His self image establishes his personal beliefs about what he can and cannot do.

Your friend may tie his feelings of self-worth to what he does. A friend of mine felt he was only deserving of love when he pleased his parents. He spent a good part of his life trying to live up to their expectations, and when he didn't, he felt he was worthless. It may take time to build and maintain feelings that he is inherently good and a lot of that comes from understanding his divine potential as a son of God. President James E. Faust said, “As we mature spiritually under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, our sense of personal worth, of belonging, and of identity increases.”¹⁵⁷

For further reading

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey.
The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

Masculinity

Many men who have homosexual problems feel inadequate in their masculinity. Having diminished feelings of masculinity does not mean they see themselves as feminine or wish they were a woman. There is a considerable difference between feeling inadequate as a man and feeling feminine. How they feel about themselves is crucial because these inner feelings of being incomplete or inadequate as a man can be a breeding ground for a number of personal problems, including homosexual ones. Not all males who have such conflicts have homosexual problems, but those who have homosexual problems commonly experience feelings of inadequacy in their masculinity.

This chapter presents the concepts of gender identity and gender role, then addresses some of the conflicts men experience in the world today. It shows how rites of passage can help a young man move into manhood. The chapter then suggests that your friend define what is masculine for him. It discusses masculine and feminine characteristics and gives suggestions on how to improve his feelings of masculinity.

The developmental process

In *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, the First Presidency declared, “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 premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”¹⁵⁸

Development of gender identity

A child’s identity as masculine or feminine is acquired in the early stages of life, usually by age three, and it is during this time that the foundation of sexual health is laid or sexual distress begins. Loving, consistent family relationships can help children accept themselves and

their gender identity.

Development of gender role

After a boy identifies his gender, he then has the task of learning his gender role. It is usually from ages four to eleven that he comes to understand himself as a male and learns how to relate socially with others. The boy develops a healthy masculine gender role most effectively when he can use his father or another significant male in his life as a role model. Alan Medinger wrote, “Modeling is an essential part of this process. In a culture where the father’s role is clearly defined, it is not difficult for the boy to seek to form himself with a very clear perception of what he is to become. If the father is uncertain and vacillating in his role, the model becomes blurred, the child confused.”¹⁵⁹

If there is no father in the home, the mother should make sure that an older brother, uncle, grandfather, or some other male spends time with her son. Even if the mother has been hurt by male relationships, it is important that she reflects a positive image of masculinity. If not, she may sabotage her son’s development of masculine qualities. Joseph Nicolosi explained, “The mother’s attitude toward father—and men in general—is very significant. If she undermines his role in the family, this diminishes his status as a desirable model. If the mother does not reflect him as a model to strive for, she fails to demonstrate that there is esteem related to being masculine.”¹⁶⁰

The boy can admire his father and pattern his life after him. The father can reinforce and affirm the boy’s masculine behaviors. Through many interactions, the boy learns from his father how to do masculine things. The father also teaches the boy about femininity by demonstrating how men should treat women. It is important that the boy attaches and identifies with his father and that he doesn’t perceive him to be absent or emotionally disinterested. He needs to feel that his father is actively and emotionally interested in his socialization. If the boy feels affirmed in these masculine qualities and roles, he accepts the masculine. If he feels rejected, he may develop a confused identity and detach himself from the masculine.

In earlier times, boys worked daily by the side of their fathers in the fields or the blacksmith shop. They had close relationships and boys learned from their fathers what it meant to be a man. The industrial revolution took fathers out of the home and put them in factories and later the information revolution put them in offices doing work that boys don't understand or relate to. Today, fathers spend little meaningful time with their sons and therefore boys don't have as many opportunities to learn concepts of masculinity from their fathers. It is important that fathers spend as much time as possible with their sons and talk with them regularly about love, commitment, and respect for the sacredness of their bodies. Fathers should teach them about the physical and emotional differences between boys and girls. If fathers accept their sons unconditionally as unique persons, the sons will feel good about themselves and their sense of masculinity and feelings of self-worth can grow. Abuse during this critical time of development can cause sexual confusion and gender role problems.

Sexual development

Adolescence can be a very confusing time. Just as boys are trying to learn who they are and how they fit in with the world, their bodies begin the profound physical and emotional changes of puberty. Although they are physically becoming adults, they may lack the experience and maturity to deal effectively with the social, emotional, and physical changes taking place. As they enter adolescence, they have a natural curiosity for their bodies, and it is common for them to experiment with these new sexual feelings. Although they may have transitory sexual attractions toward other boys as they begin to experience and explore their sexual feelings, most boys continue to develop toward normal heterosexual feelings. As Gerard van den Aardweg explains, such feelings are “usually superficial and tend to vanish quickly as soon as the physical attractions of the opposite sex catch the attention.”¹⁶¹ If you are concerned about your son, you may wish to seek the help of a competent therapist. (See the Therapy chapter for guidelines on selecting a therapist, since a gay-affirmative therapist could reinforce these feelings and add to your son's

confusion.)

If adolescents see healthy relationships between their mothers and fathers, they are more likely to develop healthy attitudes about sex. Parents can help their sons through this confusing time by preparing them for the physical changes that will come with puberty and teaching them they can and must control their sexual desires. The Church's publication *A Parent's Guide* (item number 31125) contains many helpful suggestions. Parents usually err on the side of not teaching their children enough about sex. In addition to talking about appropriate behavior with the opposite sex, parents should discuss what is appropriate with the same sex. A friend of mine grew up with a distorted view of sexuality partly because of what happened in his scout troop. Although the scouts were from active LDS families, they routinely engaged in mutual masturbation and oral sex. Not knowing otherwise, my friend assumed this was acceptable behavior and felt affirmed by the physical closeness with other boys. When he finally learned these practices were wrong, he stopped, but by then had developed distorted views about sex. We often separate boys and girls, and teach about appropriate behavior between boys and girls on the assumption that young people are only sexually attracted to the opposite sex. Therefore, those who are attracted to their own sex get little direction. But since adolescence is a confusing time of discovery for all youth, discussions of appropriate behavior among people of the same sex can be helpful as well.

When I viewed pornography as an adolescent, I discovered things before I was ready to understand them. Although I was aroused by naked female bodies, I had been taught to respect and honor women, and therefore felt guilty looking at *Playboy*. But when I discovered *Playgirl*, it somehow didn't seem as bad. After all, it was common to see naked boys in locker rooms, so what was so bad about looking at naked men in magazines? Since I found their bodies at least as interesting, they became the focus of my attention and reinforced the homosexual feelings I already had.

The masculine conflict

It is difficult to be a man in the world today. In his book *The Hazards of Being Male*, Herb Goldberg explains that even from childhood, males are in constant conflict. He wrote, “[T]he elementary school setting puts the young boy into more than his share of painful binds. While there is great peer pressure to act like a boy, the teacher’s coveted classroom values are traditionally ‘feminine’ ones. The emphasis is on politeness, neatness, docility, and cleanliness, with not much approved room being given for the boy to flex his muscles. Teacher’s greatest efforts often go into keeping the boys quiet and in their seats.”¹⁶² Dr. Goldberg further explains that “the young boy in our culture is placed into countless such dilemmas. He is told he must become a boy but he has to do so with very limited male model availability. He is taught that ‘real boys’ are active and strong but then gets into trouble in school for acting like a ‘real boy.’ He is in constant conflict between his own restlessness and the desire to be active and his teacher’s demand that he be quiet, submissive, and passive.”¹⁶³

Suppressing feelings

Young boys are taught to suppress their feelings. Dr. Goldberg continued, “From early boyhood on, his emotions are suppressed by others and therefore repressed by himself. In countless ways he is constantly being conditioned not to express his feelings and needs openly. Though he too has needs for dependency, he learns that it is unmasculine to act in a dependent way. It is also unmasculine to be frightened (‘scared’), to want to be held, stroked, and kissed, to cry, etc. While all of these expressions of self are acceptable in a girl they are incompatible with the boy’s sought after image of being tough and in control.”¹⁶⁴ Parents can help their son by teaching him to express and be honest about his emotions. The son needs to hear that his parents appreciate his personality traits in general and especially his masculine traits.

Performance

Boys are taught from a very early age that they must perform.

While it is okay for women to focus on relationships and be open emotionally, men learn to be more closed and competitive. As boys, they must run faster and jump higher. As teenagers, they must have the best cars and date the prettiest girls. As adults, they must have the highest-paying jobs and the most expensive houses. As a result, men learn to measure their success not in terms of happiness or fulfillment, but in terms of performance. They define themselves in external rather than internal terms. This performance-oriented view of masculinity is so focused on goals that close friendships become difficult. While such a focus may enable a man to build a career, it inevitably sets up emotional roadblocks to a fulfilling personal life.

Accepting help

Men are typically adept at denying their problems. They learn to be self-sufficient and feel inadequate if they ask for help. Therefore, they typically wait until their lives have fallen apart before they seek help. When they do seek help, they want quick solutions to complex problems. The good news is that there is a movement in America today for men to realize that they should not judge themselves solely by performance standards, that they can be more self-fulfilled, that it is acceptable to show emotions, and that it is okay to reach out to others for help. Men are reading books like *Fire in the Belly* by Sam Keen and *Iron John* by Robert Bly and going to self-discovery weekend retreats to try to understand their feelings and bond with other men.

Rites of passage

A rite of passage is an event that helps young people make transitions in their life. Mormon culture has many rituals of passage, such as the blessing of children, baptism, priesthood ordinations, missions, and temple marriage. Anciently, Greek boys took an oath of allegiance to the city; today, LDS boys take the oath and covenant of the priesthood. In ancient cultures, men were given swords and shields to defend themselves; temple rites today give the garment of the priesthood as a defense. Today, people are beginning to recognize the importance of these rites of passage and are giving them increased

emphasis. A number of Christian and Jewish organizations in the United States are incorporating new rites of passage to help young people make the transition from youth to adulthood. These rites include wilderness survival programs, reconstructed African rituals in churches, revitalized confirmations in Protestant churches, bar and bat mitzvahs in synagogues, and newly created rituals using mythology, art, music, and games in various settings.¹⁶⁵ For more information on rites of passage, you may refer to chapter six of *The Wonder of Boys* by Michael Gurian.

As a boy passes through these stages of life, the father should help his son recognize the attendant responsibilities and roles. A central function of fathering is to help the son identify and assimilate his roles in life, such as the role of a son, a boy, a priesthood holder, a man, and a father. If a boy did not experience these rites of passage, or if his father or another male didn't make them significant for him, he may have missed important developmental experiences. Fathers should be sure to take the time to make these events spiritually and emotionally meaningful for both himself and his son. They should take time before the event to talk about what will happen and to express what it means to them. If the son is receiving the priesthood, the father should express what the priesthood means to him, what it means to be able to ordain his son, and how he feels about his son. These short talks both before and after the event can be powerful opportunities to connect emotionally and build relationships. As the son goes through other rites of passage, such as school graduations or obtaining a driver's license, the father can help him recognize the attendant responsibilities and roles. These first experiences of dating or kissing can be emotionally traumatic for any boy and especially one who is emotionally nervous or ambivalent about his sexual feelings in general.

Understanding masculinity

What does it mean to be masculine? Society dictates much of what we deem masculine. Our culture says that a man should be tough and not cry. Your friend's concept of a "manly man" may be of a man who builds sheds, fixes cars, drives trucks, drinks beer, watches sports by

the hour, and ignores the feelings of others. If he does not like that stereotype, he may subconsciously react to it. He gains his concept of manliness from how he interprets the world around him.

Masculine virtues

Your friend may need to explore other concepts of masculinity. Rather than seeking to be a “manly man,” he may want to emulate a “godly man” who is sensitive, humble, and patient.

It is important to define what is masculine to him. Men are often attracted to other men who appear to have the masculine traits they desire; they somehow feel they can make up for the deficiency through sexual contact with the “ideal man.” In the book *A Place in the Kingdom: Spiritual Insights from Latter-day Saints about Same-Sex Attraction*, a man writes about the envy he felt toward high school athletes. “I wanted to consume the jocks’ talents and personalities. I coveted their physical attributes, which I presumed were the source of their self-esteem and outward popularity. Fixating on their physical abilities quickly led to sexual fantasies.”¹⁶⁶

Masculine/feminine qualities

It is necessary for everyone to have both masculine and feminine characteristics. A man has mostly male qualities and a woman has mostly female qualities. But a woman needs some masculine characteristics to give balance to her feminine side and a man needs some feminine characteristics to smooth out the rough edges of his masculinity. Rambo needs a little culture, emotion, and sensitivity. It is important to develop both because being out of balance with either can contribute to personal problems. The problem with many men who experience homosexual attraction is *not* that they have too much of the female qualities, but that their male qualities are underdeveloped. If men see masculinity as self-centered and cruel, they may suppress their masculine side and develop only their feminine side (perhaps emulating the good qualities they see in their mother). It was helpful for me to learn more about masculine and feminine characteristics to better develop both within me. I found two books by Robert A.

Johnson helpful: *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology* and *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*. The book *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus* by John Gray also helped me understand the physical and emotional differences between men and women. It helped me understand that my wife perceives things differently than I do and that she will have different emotional expressions of her needs.

Improving feelings of masculinity

Many men come to realize that what they experience as a homosexual attraction is really an attraction for qualities of masculinity they feel lacking. Your friend may wish to work on improving his feelings of masculinity by doing such thing as:

Defining and incorporating good masculine qualities. After defining what is appropriately masculine for him, he can work to incorporate the things he feels are missing.

Risking by extending himself. If he is unhappy with his current situation, he can stretch himself and do things he has not done before.

Interacting with other men. He can find ways to join groups of men at work or in the community, including the ward sports teams or a group that enjoys a certain type of recreation. He can make an effort to join in conversations with other men.

Keeping physically fit. Your friend's weight, nutrition, and exercise can all contribute to his self-image. Regular exercise can help reduce anxiety, tension, mental fatigue, and depression. If he is out of shape, he won't feel much like participating on the ward basketball team or doing other things that would make him feel like he fits in with other men. When I am strong and physically fit, I feel in control of my life. I enjoy working out at the gym because I am doing something masculine and it gives me the chance to associate with other men in a masculine environment. However, the gym can be a two-edged sword, offering both hope and fear. As Joseph Nicolosi explained, "It is one of the few all-male environments that provides both temptation and the healing sense of contact with masculinity."¹⁶⁷ If he goes to the gym for the scenery and not the physical rigors of a legitimate workout, he shouldn't be there. To avoid any possibility of temptations, I find it

helpful to go with several friends and that makes it even more enjoyable with their company.

Sports

Society focuses on winners. Winners get the lion's share of attention and few people even remember who else was in the running. In this competitive environment, a boy who is ill-coordinated or weak tends to be labeled a loser and his self-confidence is severely put to the test. Although there can be healthy competition, an emphasis on winning at all costs may be the single greatest reason why some young people get turned off to sports and physical fitness. Years later, no one may remember who won or lost the game, but he will always remember if he was left out. If a boy has negative experiences with physical activities or sports, it may result in a lifetime aversion to sports, both as a participant and a fan.

Psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg said, "studies reveal that most of the men with [homosexual attractions] had an outspoken childhood aversion for soccer or other group games. Such games are more or less the embodiment of boyish activity in our culture; they require enjoying competition with other boys and some fighting spirit and indicate adjustment to the peer group."¹⁶⁸ Jeff Konrad wrote, "I wanted to overcome certain inhibitions and rid myself of the crippling envy I'd felt. . . . I also wanted to get in shape, so I joined a health club. And hating my lifelong feelings of being awkward and incompetent at sports while other guys seemed to have been born on the playing field, I learned how to play softball and then volleyball by taking morning classes at Orange Coast. Anything that I'd allowed to restrain me in the past I was now determined to overcome. Every root I could find to my negative self-image and homosexual behavior was regarded as a challenge."¹⁶⁹

My father was not home much as I grew up, and I was never encouraged to participate in sports. I was never on a little league team nor do I recall ever playing backyard football with neighborhood friends. The closest I ever got to team sports was playing Red Rover. In college, it seemed that all that my roommates cared about was

sports. So on Saturdays while they vegetated on the couch watching one game after another, I went to work or the library. The more they cared about sports, the less I cared, and the gulf between us grew wider. When they dragged me to a college football game, I found myself cheering at the wrong times, so I soon replaced “yea” and “boo” to “oh-h-h-h” which they could interpret as either good or bad, depending on how the play turned out.

Sports play an important role in masculinity because men in much of the world spend a great deal of time watching and playing sports. If your friend is not involved in sports at least to some degree, he will be left out of much of male life in society and feel more separated from other men. If he has never developed a skill at a sport, it is not too late to learn. There are sports groups that teach adults the basic rules of the game and provide opportunity to develop basic skills. (See the chapter Support Groups for more information on sports programs.)

For further reading

Desires in Conflict by Joe Dallas, especially pages 99–113 and 157–175.

You Don't Have to be Gay by J. A. Konrad, especially pages 25–44, 187–214, 236, 245–248, and 265–267.

Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic by Elizabeth Moberly, especially pages 1–16.

Homosexuality and Hope by Gerrard van den Aardweg, especially pages 17–24.

The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege by Herb Goldberg.

Return from Tomorrow by George G. Ritchie, especially pages 48–49.

Learning to be a Man by Kenneth G. Smith.

Manhood in the Making by David G. Gilmore, especially the summary at the end of the book.

Emotions

Emotions are probably the most maligned and misunderstood part of our lives. We all have emotions, but few of us know what to do about them. Although your friend may know he must overcome homosexual behavior and change his perception of himself, what does he do with his emotions? A friend of mine often said to me, “I know the truth in my head, but have fears in my heart.” Although your friend understands things intellectually, he needs to accept them emotionally. Since life-changing decisions are painful, it may not be enough to decide to change; he also has to accept it emotionally and endure through the pain that will inevitably come as his emotional child grows to an adult.

Most of us are adept at repressing issues we don’t want to deal with. We may distract ourselves by keeping busy or we develop escapes to avoid dealing with our negative emotions. But sooner or later, we must confront them and get to the root of what makes us feel unhappy or anxious.

Lori Rentzel writes about two extremes in the way we mishandle our feelings. One extreme is to be ruled by our emotions, allowing them to dictate our actions. The opposite is to live as though our feelings don’t exist. Since neither of these is a good option, what are we to do? “First, we can begin to take a more balanced view. Our emotions are not meant to lead us around by the nose. Neither are they to be squelched and stifled. God created our emotions as well as our minds and physical bodies.”¹⁷⁰ Our emotional nature can become whole when we accept and understand our feelings, and deal with them in a healthy way.

Sharing feelings with others

Lori Rentzel wrote, “Emotional honesty begins with ourselves, then with God and finally with other people. Opening ourselves up to others

can be incredibly frightening at first. We're afraid of being rejected for our so-called negative feelings of anger, jealousy or lust, or even for positive feelings of tenderness or kindness."¹⁷¹

After your friend admits his feelings to himself, the next step is to admit them to God in prayer and to other people. Opening up to other people is one of the benefits of a support group. It can be frightening at first because he may fear being rejected for his feelings, whether they are negative (such as anger, jealousy or lust) or positive (such as tenderness or kindness). Lori reminds us that "feelings which seemed so dark and controlling when we kept them hidden start to lose their power when we bring them out into the light."¹⁷² Listening to the Holy Ghost, your friend can determine who he should share his feelings with, how much to share, and when to share them. Sharing feelings can help him develop closer relationships.

Opening up emotionally

Most men who struggle with homosexual desires have learned to be closed emotionally. This is an understandable defensive reaction to pain. When he has been hurt, he learned to close himself off to guard against further pain. He found that if he didn't open up to anyone, he was not vulnerable. However, the sad reality is that if he doesn't open up emotionally, he also misses out on a world of emotional joy.

Once he starts to open up, it may be an emotional roller coaster as he learns to deal with his emotions. He may become overly sensitive to personal interactions and take offense where none is intended. Your feedback can help him see things objectively. At times, he may wonder if his efforts to open up are worth it. Life with a hard outer shell prevented emotional pain and now when he opens his heart, he is vulnerable and experiences hurt. If it hurts too much, he may want to go back to his old safe, but unfulfilling, ways.

When he is desperately needy, his feelings may be intense and urgent. He needs to be patient and recognize that all his needs cannot be met immediately. The old sexual "fix" may have seemed to satisfy the need right away, but the long-term "fix" of healthy relationships

will take longer to develop, but ultimately will be much more satisfying.

Working out past trauma

A hurt experienced early in his life may still be unresolved, and the emotional memory may need to be healed. As a child, he may have defensively detached from his father, which is essentially an unresolved “mourning” that still needs to be worked out. Whether or not his father was at fault, he experienced resentment toward him, and so forgiveness is important. There may be other feelings that need to be worked out, such as a sense of grieving at the apparent hurtfulness of his parents or a sense of inferiority or loneliness. If there has been an abusive situation, he will likely need to work out the effects of the abuse with his therapist.

Making up for missed emotional growth

Making up for missed emotional growth can be both fulfilling and frustrating. When I finally identified some of my emotional deficits, I realized I was chronologically an adult but emotionally still a teenager. As I began to fulfill these emotional deficits, I discovered it was difficult to fully experience adolescent things when I was in my thirties. I also found that time was compressed. I was growing up emotionally perhaps a year every one or two months. I was anxious to maintain communication with my friends, similar to how teenagers communicate with their best friends daily. When I had new feelings or experiences, I felt an urgency to process them with my therapist or a friend, and when I had to wait hours it seemed like weeks. Teenagers growing up emotionally at a normal rate often find it difficult to adjust to their changing emotional state, but since I was changing even faster, it led to quite an emotional roller coaster ride. I went through many new experiences and had to correct my interpretation of some things I had learned from a distorted viewpoint in my childhood and teen years.

If your friend is going through similar experiences, encourage him to keep trying. It may also take patience on your part to deal with his emotional roller coaster ride. At times it may seem more than he can

take emotionally, but remind him that it is worth it. When he has made up all the deficits, he will be grateful for these experiences—and probably amazed that he made it through alive!

For further reading

Strong at the Broken Places by Linda T. Sanford.

A Door of Hope: Recognizing and Resolving the Pains of Your Past by
Jan Frank.

Relationships

Homosexual problems stem from relationship deficits and one of the keys to resolving the problems is to repair existing relationships and build new, healthy ones. Men who make the most progress in resolving their problems are those who build quality male relationships. The first part of this chapter gives suggestions on how to develop relationships, and the later considers key relationships in your friend's life, such as his relationship with his Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, his father, mother, wife, and other men

Developing appropriate relationships

In their book *Coming Out of Homosexuality*, Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel identify qualities of appropriate relationships.¹⁷³ They say that healthy friendships are free and generous; built over time; not self-serving; directed outward, not inward; not mentally or emotionally preoccupying; and built on strength rather than weakness.

Part of the attraction your friend feels to men may be a healthy drive to become like other men. Once he recognizes the reasons behind his attraction and interprets them correctly, he can use this drive to his advantage. He can channel the energy into bonding and healing by developing strong, appropriate relationships with other men. As healthy friendships develop, inappropriate sexual attractions diminish. When he learns that his peers do love and accept him, the intensity of his need for same-sex closeness will diminish. It will not go away because he will always need the love and brotherhood of other men, but when his needs are being met legitimately, homosexual behavior will hold less appeal—and that is a sign of real change.

Allowing himself to be loved

Your friend may have created his own isolation because he has convinced himself he is unlovable and others won't enjoy relating with

him. It may be that he subconsciously avoids situations where other men could reject him. If he has experienced love or intimacy that turned into pain, his defense may be a way of avoiding true love and intimacy so he doesn't get hurt again. In response to a relationship that didn't work out, he may have begun to believe that he is not worthy of their emotional attention. Since faulty perceptions develop from faulty interactions, he needs to have good experiences to challenge the bad ones and change his beliefs. He can have loving, healthy relationships that are rewarding.

To meet his important emotional needs, your friend must be willing to build and nurture healthy relationships based on love, honesty, and appropriate intimacy. Rather than running from the relationships he needs most, he needs to allow himself to be loved. As Alan Medinger, a pioneer in the Christian "ex-gay" movement, explained, "[T]o allow ourselves to be loved, is to open all of the doors to pain that were so carefully sealed shut."¹⁷⁴ Taking the chance to be loved means that he also opens himself to the risk of hurt. It may be frightening. "Love is never safe, nor is dealing with our true inner selves."¹⁷⁵ It takes courage. In his book *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck says that "courage is not the absence of fear; it is the making of action in spite of fear, the moving out against the resistance engendered by fear into the unknown and into the future."¹⁷⁶ Reaching out and growing in any dimension will bring pain as well as joy. A full life will be full of pain, but the only alternative is not to live life fully, and it is regretful to miss out on loving relationships because they can be very rewarding. Your friend will find that when he has the courage to extend himself a little, people will get to know him and will be interested in him.

Dependent relationships

A common misconception is that dependency is love. Different from love, dependency is requiring another individual for survival. Dependency is beyond the normal need for friendship and intimacy. If your friend is dependent on another person, he needs constant reassurance from him, consistent displays of affection, and large quantities of his time.¹⁷⁷ In his book *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott

Peck explains that people in dependent relationships “are so busy seeking to be loved that they have no energy left to love.” He explains that “they tolerate loneliness very poorly. Because of their lack of wholeness they have no real sense of identity, and they define themselves solely by their relationships.”¹⁷⁸ Two people really love each other “only when they are quite capable of living without each other but *choose* to live with each other.”¹⁷⁹ Your friend may need the help of his therapist to overcome relational dependency.

Codependent relationships.

In her book *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself*, Melody Beattie describes a codependent person as “one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior.”¹⁸⁰ If your friend is obsessed with controlling another person’s behavior, or if someone else is obsessed with controlling his behavior, he is in a codependent relationship. I have a friend who has a very controlling mother who isn’t happy unless she is involved in every aspect of his life. In order to grow beyond some of his identity problems, he had to confront his mother about her controlling influence. He had to cut the apron strings and help his mother see how her control affected him negatively. This was a difficult process, but very rewarding for him. If you are a controlling mother, you and your son may need to work with a therapist to work through your emotional dependencies.

Obsessive friendships

When your friend is needy, it is easy to become obsessive in his friendships. Obsessive relationships are marked by jealousy, possessiveness, and exclusiveness. If your friend is preoccupied with a friend and cannot make plans that don’t include him, he may need to release his “death grip” on his friend before he loses him as a friend. He needs to learn to keep his friendships within the bounds of moderation.

I used to look for one perfect friend who could meet all my needs.

For some reason I thought it had to be an all-or-nothing arrangement and I became jealous if my best friend had friendships with other men. I later learned that I shouldn't expect to get all my needs met by just one man. I need to build friendships with several men to get all my needs met. When I put all my emotional eggs in one basket, I set myself up for devastating hurt when that person doesn't live up to my high expectations. It is better to look to several people for love and affirmation. Each can give me what he is capable of giving, and I can give to them what I am capable of giving as well.

If your friend tries too hard to relate to another person, he may also find that his sense of identity becomes lost. It is common for men desperate for relationships to overlook the differences and see only the similarities. When I was most desperate in my relationships, I found I would even modify my tastes to match those of the person with whom I was trying to bond. When one of my friends didn't like raisin cookies, I stopped eating them and actually began to detest them. It wasn't until years later that I realized I really *did* like raisin cookies and started eating them again. If your friend is entangled in a dependent, controlling, or obsessive relationship, he may need the help of a therapist to understand and unravel the situation.

To understand more about the issues of dependency, co-dependency, and obsessiveness, read the booklet *Emotional Dependency: A Threat to Close Friendships*, by Lori Thorkelson Rentzel (available through Regeneration Books; see the Organizations section in this book).

Appropriate intimacy

Intimacy involves closeness in relationships and sharing of a person's true self. For hearts to bond, affections must be shared. In building healthy relationships, it is important that your friend understand correct principles of both physical and emotional intimacy.

Physical intimacy

All men have basic emotional needs for affirmation, affection, attention, and approval. If these needs were not met as your friend grew

up, deficits were created, and as he instinctively searched for ways to meet these emotional needs, at some point they became sexualized. The solution now is for him to back out of the sexual feelings, but not to the point of emotional indifference. He needs to find ways to appropriately express his affections.

This can be tricky because male affection is limited in contemporary American culture. While women friends may hug each other upon greeting, men usually shake hands. Two women may even hold hands at particularly emotional times, while it is generally considered taboo for two men to do the same. For some men, this arms-length intimacy is sufficient for their needs, while others wish they could express more affection but are held back by cultural norms. It is interesting to note that when men's defenses are down (such as when they are drunk) or when they are particularly excited (such as at the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl), they tend to be all over each other, hugging and touching. Cultural norms guide a lot of what we do.

Traveling in different countries, it is easy to note different cultural norms that guide the physical expression of intimacy. In some cultures, men show more affection with each other by greeting each other with a kiss or by holding hands. These customs allow men to more easily meet their needs for physical affection and affirmation from other men. In some countries, males spend a great deal of time together in buddy activities. For them, it is not a social taboo to touch another man, to hold hands in particularly emotional moments, or to walk down the street with an arm around the other's shoulder. This level of male companionship can be very healthy if handled appropriately. It may be helpful for your friend to distinguish between cultural norms and gospel standards of chastity that are the same across all cultures.

When I began to really watch the men around my office, I was surprised to realize I was the least physical man in the office. I began to notice that men touched each other and I tried to follow their lead.

Emotional intimacy

Your friend can be emotionally intimate by disclosing and sharing his true self. Because of shame over his attractions, he may have

learned to hide his true self from others, and maybe even from himself. But once he comes to understand and appreciate who he really is, he owes it to himself to share that person with others. When he does, they are in a position to support each other. Life and love are meaningless if they are not shared and men who find a way to open up with each other are more emotionally healthy.

If children are raised in homes where they can be themselves, they learn to express their true feelings without fear of humiliation and ridicule. However, if they are raised in families where feelings are not shared, they learn to suppress those feelings, and when they don't express them—even to themselves—they don't understand them. If they don't understand their feelings of attraction toward other men, they may come to believe they are gay. Particularly in religious families, it is important that children feel they can express their feelings. We should do a better job as LDS parents in teaching our children about feelings and the influence of the Spirit. Youth often are confused about how they feel and often don't know how to listen for the Spirit. We usually discourage youth from talking about their feelings and give them the impression they should suppress them in favor of the norm. Youth then learn to pretend they have the "right" feelings rather than the feelings they actually have. This kind of suppression is unhealthy because sooner or later their true feelings will surface and they will have to deal with them. Better to teach your children to express their feelings—whatever they are—so they can deal with them. If they are angry, they should express it. They don't have to go into a rage, but they should state they are angry and work through the anger. If young men have feelings of attraction toward another person, they should have someone they can talk to about those feelings. Talking about such feelings can help young men understand them for what they are. All too often, young men don't feel they can talk to their parents or bishops about these feelings. If the only voice they hear is that of the world's definitions of homosexuality, they will come to interpret their feelings incorrectly and gain a distorted sense of what the feelings mean and what they can do about them.

My friend Todd describes what it felt like when he began opening

up to friends: “For the first time in my life, I no longer felt like I was unacceptable because I started to find out that people could know everything about me and still want to be my friend. In fact, through the sharing of deep emotions, I gained some of my closest friends and I continue to seek such relationships. It seems that the value and impact of the friendship are directly proportional to the emotional investment I make. The more I share and trust, the more sharing and trusting I receive—and I think there is more value in that simple truth than most of the things I learned in college or since.”

How to meet his needs for intimacy

All your friend’s needs for intimacy will not be met perfectly all the time; there will be some disappointment. Encourage him to continue trying to build relationships because disappointment does not mean rejection. He may also need to learn to appreciate it when other men give him their time, even though he may wish they would give him more attention or verbal signs of affection. Most men bond by *doing* things rather than *talking* about things. If men are spending time with your friend doing things, he may need to recognize they are saying that he is worth spending time with. To better understand how men express themselves, you may read the book *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus* by John Gray.

Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ

Your friend can benefit greatly by developing a more meaningful relationship with his Heavenly Father and his Savior Jesus Christ. He needs to feel that even though his Heavenly Father already knows his darkest secrets, He still loves him. Jesus cares so much about his pain that He gave his very life to take care of the consequences of his sins. Your friend may not have felt the healing warmth of God’s love for him. He may feel betrayed by nature for having homosexual feelings and may need to learn the reasons for adversity in life and come to love his Heavenly Father. Your friend’s long-term goal should be not just to get over his homosexual problems, but to become like his Father in Heaven. The first step in that process is to come to know Him and His

attributes of faithfulness and unconditional love.

Fathers

It is common for men who experience homosexual attractions to have poor relationships with their fathers. Even if a father and son get along, it may be that they don't really know each other very well or particularly enjoy spending time with each other. It is important that a boy have a healthy emotional relationship with his father. Even if the son is now an adult, those boyhood needs may still exist and an improved relationship with his father may help fill some of those needs. Even if he has since found ways to meet those needs through another male, he may want to work out things with his father to bring closure to certain unresolved issues. If the father and son have developed a defensive detachment from each other, they may need to understand these defensive mechanisms before they can build a better relationship. (To understand more about defensive detachment, read *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* by Elizabeth R. Moberly.) Reconciling the relationship between a father and son may require some forgiveness from both sides and acceptance of each other for who they are. Just as the father expects his son to respect and honor him, the father also needs to respect his son and recognize his worth. The father should have compassion on his son for the pain he is experiencing.

Fathers are responsible for more than just the physical needs of their sons. More important than feeding and clothing them, fathers have a responsibility to nurture their emotional development and teach them values and morals. The sons' emotional development is critical during the ages of five to fifteen. But many fathers are emotionally absent during these critical years. If they are not away physically, they may be so busy earning a living and fulfilling Church callings that they either don't have the time to devote to their sons, dare not take the risk, or are so drained by other responsibilities that they have no emotional energy left. Elder Mark E. Petersen gave good counsel for fathers when he said, "Would each father be willing to spend one hour a day with his son if he knew that the boy's very salvation depended upon it? Oh, I know there are many of you who will say you do not have time. I know

that some of you will say that business is too demanding and you cannot spare the time from your job and your other exacting assignments, but I would like to tell you that there is not a job in the world as important to you as your son. If you are so busy that you cannot be a companion to your son so that you can help to save his soul, you are too busy, and you need to readjust. If you will be a companion to him, and if you will keep the standards of the Church, and in that companionship teach those standards to your son, as that boy watches you observe those high principles, he will have respect both for you and those principles and will be converted to them, and thereby you will place him on the high road to salvation.”¹⁸¹

When fathers spend excessive amounts of time at work or in Church callings, there is less time and emotional energy available for their wives and children. If fathers don't spend quality time with their sons, the sons may develop a number of problems, one of which may be homosexual attractions. A father should remember that his family always comes before his employment and Church responsibilities.

Mothers

Because a boy's relationship with his father is especially critical in developing a masculine identity and in internalizing his role as a man, it is the one emphasized in this book because deficits in these areas can contribute to homosexual problems. Of course it is also important for mothers to have a good relationship with their sons and many of the suggestions listed above for fathers also apply to mothers. If there are rough spots in the mother-son relationship, both should work to resolve them. If the mother is controlling, she may need to learn to cut the apron strings and let her son mature on his own. They can then develop an adult-to-adult relationship of mutual respect. If she tends to rescue her son from his problems, she may need to learn to back off and let him learn to bear the consequences of his actions. There may also be relationship issues to work out in the triangle between the mother, her son, and the father.

Parents

If as a father or mother, you have a weak relationship with your son, you should work diligently but gradually to build it. The following suggestions may help:

Tell your son that you love him. Say the words, “I love you, son.” Don’t assume that he already knows it or that he doesn’t need to hear it. Even if he thinks you love him, he needs reassurance.

Tell your son that he is important to you and that you consider him to be valuable. Don’t attach value to him only when he performs well; he should not have to earn your love. Tell him he is valuable even when he doesn’t perform well.

Be your son’s mentor. Fathers must especially work to develop a close relationship with their son. Generations ago, when fathers and sons worked side by side in the same industry, the sons were nurtured by their fathers and they emulated the role model they saw in their fathers. In modern society, fathers go off to a job and have much less contact with their sons. As a result, your son may feel distant from you and not understand you. Although he may feel you love him because he sees you go to great lengths to provide for him, he may not know if you like him. But since your son gains his understanding of the world through you, it is critical that he knows, trusts, and understands you. Talk with your son about your relationship, his future, eternity, and his role as a priesthood holder and future head of an eternal family. This eternal perspective can help him make the right decisions throughout his life.

Tell your son you are fully committed to him, and mean it. Your responsibility as his mother, father, or priesthood leader means that you make him a priority before your social life, employment, and even before your Church calling.

Touch your son. Fathers may have more difficulty showing affection than mothers. Put your arm around him, slug him on the shoulder, mess up his hair, and tuck him in to bed—even when he is a teenager. He needs physical reassurance that both his father and his mother love him. Father, if you don’t hold your son, he will find some other man who will. Most men with homosexual attractions go out

initially looking for physical touch—a demonstration of another man’s love and acceptance—and eventually enter sexual relationships attempting to find it.

Accept your son as he is. If your son is not the person you hoped he would be, then get to know him and appreciate him for the person he is. Don’t be overly concerned if your son has effeminate characteristics. As he works through his attractions, most of the effeminate mannerisms will take care of themselves. And as you learn to accept him as he is, the mannerisms that don’t go away will matter to you less.

Make his interests your interests, even if you don’t think they are manly. If he is interested in art or music, learn about it and not only will you get closer to your son, but chances are you’ll learn to appreciate art and music as well.

Love your spouse. The greatest lesson you can teach your son is to have a good relationship with your husband or wife. Fathers should show their son by example what a husband should be.

Take care of your own needs. Fathers need to feel comfortable in their own masculinity and role as a man and father to be able to pass it on to their son. As a father, you may have relationship needs yourself that require some attention and you may need to extend yourself with men in your priesthood quorum, at work, or in some other group of men. As you learn to open up with other men and explore spiritual and emotional issues, you will be more available and helpful to your son. If you feel inadequate in some area, admit this to your son. Admitting a weakness may be the very thing he needs to hear to realize that you are human and that he needs to work with you to make the relationship work.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. If you don’t know how to resolve a problem, seek the help of a counselor at LDS Family Services or some other counselor you trust. There is no reason to be embarrassed or consider yourself a failure because you seek the help of a counselor. In the hectic, mixed-up world we live in, practically everyone should seek the help of a counselor for something at some time in their lives.

Additional suggestions for building a father-son relationship can be

found in chapter five of *The Wonder of Boys* by Michael Gurian.

Discipline

Discipline is often a source of misunderstanding and damage in relationships between parents and their son. Chapter six of *The Wonder of Boys* by Michael Gurian discusses good strategies for discipline that can build the bond between a parent and son rather than tear it down. The goal is to help your son build his own self-discipline. A clear discipline structure can build character and feelings of self-worth.

Sex education

Most boys in America get little useful information from their parents—and especially their fathers—about sex. Especially in religious families, fathers are hesitant to talk about sex at all, and if they do, it is usually information about how to control their bodies. Seldom are boys taught about the emotional issues of loving and caring or about the natural, sacred purpose of their bodies and sexuality. If you only teach your son about the negative aspects of how sexual feelings can lead to sexual sin, unwanted pregnancy, and sexually-transmitted diseases, your son may come to fear sex and not see its positive, sacred purposes. It is important to teach your son how love, sex, and commitment are integrated. Although sex education in the schools may teach the biological functions, parents need to teach the emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of sex. The media can be very powerful in shaping sexual values. A recent study showed that a teenager in America watches 14,000 sexual encounters a year on television.¹⁸² These images on television may make sense to adults who can put them in their proper perspective, but they may teach adolescents a distorted view of sex. It is critical that your son has a trusted relationship with you as his father or mother so you can help correct misunderstandings of sexuality he gets from outside influences.

When your son goes on his first date or has his first kiss, be available emotionally to talk with him about these experiences. These first experiences can be emotionally traumatic for any boy and especially for one who is emotionally nervous or ambivalent about his

sexual feelings in the first place.

Wives

Spouses of men who struggle with homosexual problems often believe they carry some of the responsibility for their husband's problems. They may feel that if they had been more feminine or desirable to their husbands, they wouldn't have homosexual problems. But the truth is that their husbands' problems are not a result of anything the wives did or did not do. Their male emotional needs can only be provided by other men.

It may be difficult for wives to watch their husbands struggle with problems that even the husbands may not fully understand and may not have a clear vision of how to resolve. Although wives can give a great deal of support and encouragement, they are not directly involved in the solutions to the problems. In fact, wives may feel somewhat helpless as they send husbands off to therapy sessions, support groups, and interviews with the bishop. It takes large amounts of time and energy for the husbands to attend meetings, read books, pray, and work on relationships with other men. Although at times these obligations may seem overwhelming for both the husbands and the wives, the wives need to encourage their husbands to keep working and to keep their life in balance. As husbands work on new male relationships, for example, they still need to give priority to the relationships with their wives and families.

Marriage is not a solution to homosexual problems

If your friend is not yet married, he may wonder if he will ever marry. Although marriage is an important goal, he should not make it his immediate, short-term goal. Speaking in a general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled, "Marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices, which first should clearly be overcome with a firm and fixed determination never to slip to such practices again."¹⁸³ Getting married will *not* solve his current homosexual problems, and in many cases may only intensify them. He should work first on

resolving his immediate problems and on developing a secure sense of self and male identity.

Even if marriage does not seem like an option to him now, he should keep an open mind about it. I personally know several men who thought they would never marry in this life. Over the years, however, they resolved their homosexual problems, found themselves more attracted to women, and the day came that they married and are now happily raising families. Brad wrote, “As my self-confidence increases, and my relationship with my father and other men improves, SSA continues to diminish in strength. I now find myself less and less attracted to men, they, now being the familiar. A curious interest in women is developing. It is a new phenomenon in my life, strange and interesting to experience, as I continue to step forward with faith as my guide. Women are now the unfamiliar and attraction occurs to that with which we are unfamiliar.”¹⁸⁴

Other men

Every man has legitimate emotional and social needs that should be met through loving, validating relationships with other men. Elizabeth Moberly wrote, “Homosexuality is the kind of problem that needs to be solved through relationships. The solution to same-sex deficits is to be sought through the medium of one or more non-sexual relationships with members of the same sex. . . . It is the provision of good same-sex relationships that helps to meet unmet same-sex needs, heal defects in the relational capacity, and in this way, forward the healing process.”¹⁸⁵ Relationships or social contacts with women are not the solution to your friend’s problems, since contact with women does nothing to fulfill same-gender needs. Healthy relationships with women, however, may support his sexual identity and encourage appreciation of the opposite sex.

In his book *Desires in Conflict*, Joe Dallas wrote, “Relationships are your most valuable resources. You’ve got to know that you are significant to somebody else, appreciated for your gifts and uniqueness. And you’ve got to know that you have people to lean on, people interested in your life and rooting for you as you grow.”¹⁸⁶ An

important benefit of friendships is the effect they have on self-perceptions. They can help correct false concepts your friend may have grown up with.

A good way for your friend to ease into relationships with other men is to get involved with groups. The first and easiest group may be his support or therapy group. As he builds relationships with these men, he will gain confidence in his ability to develop and sustain relationships and will then be ready to branch out to other groups of men who do not struggle with homosexual attraction. The most important group to be involved with is his priesthood quorum, which is God's established plan for brotherhood and bonding. No other group, including his support group, should take priority over the quorum.

Developing relationships with men in groups can help him have the courage to develop individual relationships. To be in a trusting, intimate relationship with a man who does not experience homosexual attractions is perhaps the most healing thing your friend can do.

I used to divide the entire male world into two categories: those who had homosexual attractions and those who did not. Whenever I met someone, I used to try to figure out which category he fit in. Somehow I thought I needed to know so I could know if I could trust him and relate with him. Now it is not important to me to know because I can build relationships with all men.

For further reading

The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth by M. Scott Peck.

Dealing With the Dad of Your Past by Maureen Rank.

If the Gospel Is True, Why Do I Hurt So Much?: Help for Dysfunctional Latter-day Saint Families by Carroll Hofeling Morris.

When Victims Marry by Don and Jan Frank.

Parents in Pain by John White.

Where Does a Mother Go to Resign? by Barbara Johnson.

Fresh Elastic for Stretched Out Moms by Barbara Johnson.

Spirituality

Of the hundreds of men I have met in support groups, I have been impressed that many of them are deeply spiritual men. Satan also recognizes this spiritual sensitivity and tries to use it against them. Tragically, their emotional needs are misdirected to homosexual feelings which divert them from developing higher levels of spirituality. They sometimes fall away from the Church all together and thus Satan has robbed the priesthood from the elect. Because the armies of hell are waging their final battle, we must be strong, have faith, and draw on the powers of heaven.

This chapter addresses the importance of spirituality in your friend's efforts to resolve his homosexual problems. It treats basic gospel principles such as faith, the atonement, repentance, and forgiveness. The chapter then addresses the influences of the Holy Ghost and Satan and discusses other gospel subjects that relate to your friend's ability to succeed in resolving his struggles. As you read, also note how each area can help you in your personal struggle as you are affected by your friend's issues.

The need for spirituality

Spirituality plays a major role in your friend's ability to resolve his homosexual problems. Frank Worthen, a pioneer in Christian groups that minister to people with homosexual attractions, said "Our deliverance from homosexuality comes from a Person, rather than a method."¹⁸⁷ Commitment to and faith in Jesus Christ is the key to applying the healing power of the atonement in his life. Facing homosexual problems will force him to answer one of the most basic questions of life: Where does the power come from to deliver us from human sin and confusion?

Faith in Jesus Christ

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Articles of Faith 1:4). King Benjamin declared, “Salvation cometh to none . . . except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 3:12). Does your friend believe that Christ can save him? If Christ is powerful to save him, can He change him? With faith, Christ can heal him not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Christ has the power not only to change him personally but also to heal the wounds of sin. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “It matters not what is our lack or our weakness or our insufficiency. His gifts and powers are sufficient to overcome them all.”¹⁸⁸ The Lord has promised, “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 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, emphasis added). This is an amazing promise! The very source of our troubles can be changed into a strength and source of power. The Lord says that His grace is sufficient for *all* men, even those who have homosexual problems. (For an excellent discussion on how healing comes through Jesus Christ, read Elder Richard G. Scott’s conference address “To Be Healed,” *Ensign*, May 1994, pp. 7–9.)

Equally yoked together

Christ wants to help us. He pleads with us, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). He offers us a yoke, not to encumber us, but to help us. When we are in the yoke with Christ, it means that Christ is pulling right along with us. And, in fact, when we don’t have the strength to pull our share, He will make up the difference. What a comforting assurance! All we have to do is our very best. If we try with all our strength, then Christ will make up the difference. (To better understand this beautiful concept, I strongly recommend you read the

book *Believing Christ* by Stephen E. Robinson.)

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma taught, “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. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me” (Alma 7:11-13).

The atonement

The Bible Dictionary explains the atonement: “The word describes the setting ‘at one’ of those who have been estranged, and denotes the reconciliation of man to God. Sin is the cause of the estrangement, and therefore the purpose of atonement is to correct or overcome the consequences of sin.”¹⁸⁹ Jesus Christ “came into the world . . . to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved” (D&C 76:41-42). In the book *Gospel Principles* we read, “The great sacrifice he made to pay for our sins and overcome death is called the *Atonement*. It is the most important event that has ever occurred in the history of mankind.”¹⁹⁰ Because of the atonement, all mankind will be resurrected. The atonement also makes it possible for us to repent of our sins and be forgiven. Christ made this sacrifice for us freely because He loves us. In addition to the sins we commit, the atonement can also compensate for things that are committed against us—the wounds we suffer as a result of another’s sins or misdeeds. Thus the atonement has the power not only to heal us of the sins we commit against others but also of the impact of sins committed against us. It can heal all inadequacy and mortal sorrow

regardless of its cause. There is no problem for which the atonement is not sufficient.

One of the greatest healing experiences for me was to gain a greater understanding of the atonement and a deeper appreciation for it. For me, that began by reading two small books by Stephen E. Robinson: *Believing Christ* and *Following Christ*. Such a small investment in time produced a tremendous dividend toward my eternal future. It is critical to understand the atonement and our role in it. You may also wish to read the article “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ” by Bruce C. Hafen (*Ensign*, April 1990, pp. 7–13).

Repentance

Faith in Christ naturally leads to repentance. The Bible Dictionary gives the following definition of 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. Since we are born into conditions of mortality, repentance comes to mean a turning of the heart and will to God, and a renunciation of sin to which we are naturally inclined. Without this there can be no progress in the things of the soul’s salvation, for all accountable persons are stained by sin, and must be cleansed in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Repentance is not optional for salvation; it is a commandment of God.”¹⁹¹

President Ezra Taft Benson taught that “repentance means more than simply a reformation of behavior. Many men and women in the world demonstrate great willpower and self-discipline in overcoming bad habits and the weaknesses of the flesh. Yet at the same time they give no thought to the Master, sometimes even openly rejecting Him. Such changes of behavior, even if in a positive direction, do not constitute true repentance. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which sincere and meaningful repentance must be built. If we truly seek to put away sin, we must first look to Him who is the Author of our salvation.”¹⁹²

What does your friend need to repent of?

Joe Dallas wrote, “You never asked for homosexual attractions. You never decided to incorporate them into your sexual makeup. Given the choice, you might have picked any number of problems before choosing this one. As for the conflicts creating your homosexuality, we know you didn’t choose those, either. . . . [Y]ou didn’t choose to respond to early events in a given way, and you certainly didn’t have anything to say about those responses when they became sexual. You are, in many ways, a victim of circumstance. As far as the development of your attractions to the same sex is concerned, you’re blameless. God does not and will not hold that against you. It is not a sin to be homosexually inclined. It’s what you *do* with those inclinations that condemns or commends you.”¹⁹³

Forgiveness

“Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42). To me, this is one of the sweetest verses of scripture. It inspires hope and tells of the love our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have for us. President Harold B. Lee explained how to know when you are forgiven. “If the time comes when you have done all that you can to repent of your sins, . . . then you will want that confirming answer as to whether or not the Lord has accepted of you. In your soul-searching, if you seek for and you find that peace of conscience, by that token you may know that the Lord has accepted of your repentance.”¹⁹⁴

An important aspect of forgiveness is to forgive others who may have done injustices to you. Regardless of the reality or the seriousness of the injustice, you need to forgive because withholding forgiveness can be a great hindrance to your personal healing. The Lord explained, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). And he gave this warning, “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15). An unforgiving heart is a serious problem. “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin” (D&C

64:9).

Roderick Linton wrote, “To have a forgiving heart is to see the world in a different light. It is to forsake the tendency to judge, condemn, exclude, or hate any human soul. A forgiving heart seeks to love and to be patient with imperfection. The forgiving heart understands that we are all in need of the atonement of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹⁵ Wives and parents, if your husband or son has committed serious sins, find it in your hearts to forgive him. President Joseph F. Smith taught, “It is extremely hurtful for any [person] holding the gift of the Holy Ghost to harbor a spirit of envy, or malice, or retaliations, or intolerance toward or against his fellow man. We ought to say in our hearts, ‘Let God judge between me and thee, but as for me, I will forgive.’ I want to say to you that Latter-day Saints who harbor a feeling of unforgiveness in their souls are more censurable than the one who has sinned against them.”¹⁹⁶ Although this may be very difficult to do, it is best for you and for him. Forgiving others frees us from anger and disappointment. It also opens the way for God to forgive us.

Forgiveness and trust

If you forgive your friend of wrongdoing, it does not mean you have to trust him again immediately. Trust is like a bank account that is built up over years of trustworthy experiences. When questionable experiences happen, you can rely on the high balance in the account. But when that trust is broken, the balance may drop—in some cases all the way to zero. Forgiveness means that you don’t close the account, but allow him to build the account balance back up by showing time and time again that he is worthy of your trust. To do that, he may need to offer generous explanation as to his actions and whereabouts as he works to reestablish higher levels of trust. Trusting and forgiving are not the same thing. It is always appropriate to forgive, but may not be appropriate to trust again right away.

Confession

Although God already knows our sins, we need to own up to them and admit that we have problems. Admitting problems and accepting

responsibility for them is the first step in solving them. “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43). “. . . I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness” (D&C 64:7). Sexual sins, in particular, thrive in the darkness of secrecy and denial. The first step to freedom for your friend is to bring the sins to light. Confession shows humility toward the Lord. It shows he knows his actions were wrong and is willing to do all he can to make up for them.

Confession is a necessary step in the process of repentance. All sins should be confessed to the Lord, and serious sins should be confessed to the bishop or branch president. President Spencer W. Kimball explained, “The confession of [one’s] major sins to a proper Church authority is one of those requirements made by the Lord. These sins include adultery, fornication, other sexual transgressions, and other sins of comparable seriousness. This procedure of confession assures proper controls and protection for the Church and its people and sets the feet of the transgressor on the path of true repentance. Many offenders in their shame and pride have satisfied their consciences, temporarily at least, with a few silent prayers to the Lord and rationalized that this was sufficient confession of their sins. ‘But I have confessed my sin to my Heavenly Father,’ they will insist, ‘and that is all that is necessary.’ This is not true where a major sin is involved. Then two sets of forgiveness are required to bring peace to the transgressor—one from the proper authorities of the Lord’s Church, and one from the Lord himself.”¹⁹⁷

There are few sins that carry more guilt and shame than sexual sin, and no sexual action carries more shame than homosexual actions. Barney Swihart wrote, “When someone is struggling with sexual sin, they are dealing with something that touches the very core of how they feel about themselves.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, it is no wonder that so many people who struggle with sexual sin chose to avoid confession and carry their painful burden alone. This may lead the person to live in two worlds, one as an active member of the Church, and the other struggling in secret with the guilt and shame of his double life. Sexual sin entrenches itself in this kind of isolation.

Satan's influence

Satan is anxious to deceive even the most elect. The fullness of times also means that the fullness of evil is on the earth. Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote, “[Satan] seeks to undermine the principle of individual accountability, to persuade us to misuse our sacred powers of procreation, to discourage marriage and childbearing by worthy men and women, and to confuse what it means to be male or female.”¹⁹⁹ Elder Russell M. Nelson warned, “[W]e need to remember that the adversary sponsors a cunning plan of his own. It invariably attacks God’s first commandment for husband and wife to beget children. It tempts with tactics that include infidelity, unchastity, and other abuses of procreative power. Satan’s band would trumpet choice but mute accountability. Nevertheless, his capacity has long been limited, ‘for he knew not the mind of God’ (Moses 4:6).”²⁰⁰

Take comfort in the fact that Satan cannot force us to do evil. We are free to choose Satan’s way of captivity and death or to choose God’s way of liberty and eternal life (see 2 Nephi 2:27). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Satan has “power over us only as we permit him.”²⁰¹ James E. Faust explained, “Certainly he can tempt and he can deceive, but he has no authority over us which we do not give him.”²⁰² We must be careful not to befriend Satan or his lies, but steer a course that is comfortably within the safety zone so he cannot deceive or break up the extended family.

The Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost can help your friend understand things he could not otherwise understand. He should draw on the Holy Ghost for insight in resolving his problems and guidance through every step of the way. President James E. Faust taught, “By the power and gift of the Holy Ghost, we can know what to do and what not to do to bring happiness and peace to our lives.”²⁰³ The Holy Ghost can be his constant companion (see D&C 121:46).

He may have a battle raging within him. A part of him may want to respond sexually to the homosexual feelings within, but something

else within reminds him of the moral principles he has always believed and points him back to the gospel. They both may feel right, but they are at odds with each another. This battle is one of Satan's most clever tricks. He wants your friend to lose hope because he knows that disbelief will trap him in his homosexual problems. Writing about homosexuality in *A Letter to a Friend*, President Spencer W. Kimball explained, "There are two forces working with every individual—one is the spirit of evil, the powers of darkness with a desire to enslave and destroy. . . . The other influence is the Spirit of the Lord striving to lift and inspire and build and save. If one lives all of the commandments of the Lord, then he has the power to withstand the temptations of the devil. If he yields to the evil one, then he gets weaker and weaker until he is unable to cope with the strength of the powers that afflict him."²⁰⁴ He further explained, "Now let us assure you that you are not permanently trapped in this unholy practice if you will exert yourself. Though it is like an octopus with numerous tentacles to drag you to your tragedy, the sin is curable and you may totally recover from its tentacles."²⁰⁵

When this battle rages, your friend must listen carefully to distinguish Satan's influences from the Light of Christ. Although the whisperings of Satan may feel natural, they will steer him away from the gospel, from truth, and from peace. They may give him momentary gratification but no lasting joy or peace. President Spender W. Kimball said, "No one . . . was ever sublimely happy unless he was righteous. There are temporary satisfactions and camouflaged situations for the moment, but permanent, total happiness can come only through cleanliness and worthiness."²⁰⁶ Satan's biggest lie is that your friend is born a homosexual and cannot change and thus he tries to lead him "carefully away down to hell" (see 2 Nephi 28:21). On the other hand, the whisperings of the Holy Ghost will uplift and inspire hope. They will always support gospel truths and will lead him to eternal joy. The art of listening takes concentration and effort, but is worth it because when he listens to the Holy Ghost he can learn things that are vital to his salvation.

Your friend may not know how to listen to the Holy Spirit. If he

has not had the model of a parent who has agreed to listen to him, discuss his feelings, and respond to them, then he may not believe that God will do the same.

There is always hope

Moroni tells us that despair comes because of iniquity (see Moroni 10:22) and the greater the iniquity, the greater the sense of despair and hopelessness. One of Satan's tactics is to persuade a person who has transgressed that there is no hope of forgiveness. But there is always hope because of the gospel of Jesus Christ "which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course . . . [to] the kingdom of heaven" (Helaman 3:29-30). We are saved by hope and the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope (see Romans 8:24 and 1 Timothy 1:1).

Hope is a great incentive to repentance. If your friend has made wrong choices and finds himself in a vicious habit, because of the atonement there is a way out. Elder Russell M. Nelson said, "Each one who resolves to climb that steep road to recovery must gird up for the fight of a lifetime. But a lifetime is a prize well worth the price. This challenge uniquely involves the will, and the will can prevail. Healing doesn't come after the first attempt to change. The road to recovery must be followed firmly, bearing in mind that it often takes as long to recover as it did to get to the place you want to recover from. But correct choices can cure if they are made consistently and persistently."²⁰⁷

God considers us individually

In his book *Following Christ*, Stephen Robinson explained, "We forget that God, in his perfect judgment, adjusts credit and blame to allow for the circumstances of the individual in question. The gospel is not a 'one-size-fits-all' arrangement in that regard. God puts us all in different circumstances in this life and judges us accordingly. In the Parable of the Talents, it didn't matter that one servant had been given five talents and the other only two. What mattered most was what both

servants did with what God gave them. The Master said to *each* of them, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’ (Matthew 25:21).”²⁰⁸

Brother Robinson also teaches a parable of the divers.²⁰⁹ In this story, a particular diver won even though other divers had better form. Although outwardly it appeared that the other divers did better, he won because he performed a dive of greater difficulty. Because of the difficulties your friend experiences, he may feel—like the diver—that his scores are less than perfect, but God will bless him for the difficulty he has to go through. He will be blessed for making righteous responses to difficult situations. I recommend that you read the entire parable in the book *Following Christ* to understand this important concept. It helped me gain the insight I needed to stop judging others—and myself—by my limited perspective.

Elder H. Burke Peterson stated, “Each one of us came to this earth with our own unique and different package filled with enough positive strengths to overcome the personal challenges that are also a part of our makeup. We must never forget that the number of gifts as well as the challenges we each have does not categorize us as being better or worse than another. How we *handle* our package is what makes the difference.”²¹⁰ He further explained, “A person more gifted than another is not necessarily a better person than another; and, conversely, an individual who has received fewer endowments from the Lord is not less qualified for godhood than another. Remember, the Lord gave the very same commendation to the servant who magnified two talents as to the servant who increased five talents.”²¹¹

Plan of Salvation

Elder M. Russell Ballard explained, “By focusing on and living the principles of Heavenly Father’s plan for our eternal happiness, we can separate ourselves from the wickedness of the world. If we are anchored to the correct understanding of who we are, why we are here on this earth, and where we can go after this mortal life, Satan cannot threaten our happiness through any form of temptation. If we are determined to live by Heavenly Father’s plan, we will use our God-given moral agency to make decisions based on revealed truth, not

on the opinions of others or on the current thinking of the world.”²¹²

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “To the faithful, spirituality is a lens through which we view life and a gauge by which we evaluate it.” He reminded us, “To be spiritually minded is to view and evaluate our experiences in terms of the enlarged perspective of eternity.”²¹³

Enduring to the end

Stephen Robinson explained, “Enduring faithfully to the end does not just mean ‘coping’ successfully with our problems or suffering affliction with stamina, although some have been called upon to do these things in order to endure. Certainly it has little to do with overcoming personal obstacles or achieving personal goals. Rather it means *staying put* in the kingdom by holding on to Christ and to his church without altering our commitment—no matter what. Neither ‘enduring’ nor ‘being faithful’ means being perfect or living from our baptism until our death without sinning. . . .”²¹⁴

Enduring does not always mean *overcoming*. Many people do not overcome physical or other disabilities in this life. God does not always answer our fervent prayers by taking away the challenge. God may not take away your friend’s homosexual desires, but He will stand by him as he overcomes the desires of the flesh by learning to control the homosexual actions.

Service

A good way for your friend to overcome his problems is to help someone else overcome theirs. The best cure for self-absorption is to serve others. In fact, it is through serving others that we learn how to love—a key element in our healing. When we reach out to help someone else, our own problems don’t seem so great. When we volunteer to help other people, we feel better emotionally and physically. Helping others causes us to focus outside ourselves. Elder Richard G. Scott taught, “The power of your worthy example is increased as you help others caught in the web of transgression and guide them into a harbor of safety.”²¹⁵

My friend explained the benefit of serving as the leader of a support

group in the Evergreen organization. “As great as all the lessons and books and therapy sessions and videos and conferences are, they couldn’t teach me nearly as much as quiet service to others does. The more I give, the more I get. Instead of viewing Evergreen as some panacea that will cure my every ill just because I’m occupying a chair, I came to appreciate Evergreen the same way I appreciate our weekly church services: yet another opportunity to practice Christianity.”²¹⁶

For further reading

Gospel Principles (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT, 1992, item number 31110). This book is easy to read, but yet powerful because it teaches the core principles in their simplicity.

“To Help a Loved One in Need,” Richard G. Scott (*Ensign*, May 1988, pp. 60–61).

There are many books by General Authorities and others on gospel subjects that may be helpful.

Adversity

When faced with challenges in life, it is helpful to keep a proper perspective. This chapter explains the purpose, origins, and benefits of adversity, then gives suggestions on how to successfully deal with our struggles.

Why there must be adversity

The scriptures teach that there must be opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:11–14). There must be wickedness to understand the good, there must be misery to appreciate happiness, and there must be suffering to enjoy good health. But simply understanding that adversity will come does not make it easy to face.

Righteous living does not guarantee an easy life

Living a righteous life does not mean that bad things will not happen to you. A common misbelief among members of the Church is that if we strive with all our might to live the commandments, nothing bad will happen to us. We may believe if we are married in the temple our marriage will be heaven on earth, or if we live the Word of Wisdom we will enjoy good health throughout our lives. But the truth is, bad things may happen to the best of people. Elder H. Burke Peterson explained, “We must remember that all rewards for doing good do not come in this life. All penalties for doing wrong are not meted out in this life either.”²¹⁷

Lowell Bennion wrote, “The gospel of Christ is not an escape from the hard realities of life. . . . Both the person who follows Christ and the person who mocks Him live in the world among the same men and where the same laws of nature operate. Many things happen alike to saint and sinner. Cancer takes over in the human body with no regard for a person’s spiritual or moral worth. . . . Innocent children suffer from it, and some of the most wonderful Christians we have known are

not spared its merciless attack. Death itself . . . appears to be without discrimination. Clean-living Christian boys fall on the battlefield with those who curse God. A young and beloved husband and father is taken while a mean and feared husband and father is left to curse his wife and children. On the highway, death takes the careless, the sleepy, and the innocent victims alike with no regard for their Church attendance, tithing records, or love of neighbor that we can observe. The wicked prosper as well as the righteous, and sometimes more quickly. Individual prosperity is no proof of Christian discipleship; neither is poverty. . . . Living the gospel of Jesus Christ does not necessarily bring with it physical health, freedom from accident and misfortune, freedom from pain and suffering, prosperity and long life. As a matter of fact, some who have lived it best with great devotion have shortened their lives and brought considerable suffering upon themselves.”²¹⁸

The Savior came to heal broken hearts, not to prevent them from being broken. Living the gospel will not shield us from pain, but it is a resource to help us deal with pain. Robert L. Millet wrote, “The Savior may not take away our problems, and he certainly will not shield us from all pain, but he will provide us perspective and strength to bear up under them.”²¹⁹

Tragedy is not always a punishment for sin

“And as 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). Tragedy does not always come as a punishment for sin. Of course there are times when we do cause sorrow in our lives and we ought to take responsibility for it. But there are also many misfortunes that come through no fault of our own for which we have no right to blame ourselves. If we do, not only are we victims of the injury or unfortunate circumstance, but we make a bad situation worse by seeing ourselves as bad people who had it coming to us. When things go wrong, it is tempting to assume that if we had been more worthy, or had made a different choice, things would have

turned out like we wanted them to. In his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Harold Kushner wrote, “A sense of our inadequacies and failings, a recognition that we could be better people than we usually are, is one of the forces for moral growth and improvement in our society. An appropriate sense of guilt makes people try to be better. But an excessive sense of guilt, a tendency to blame ourselves for things which are clearly not our fault, robs us of our self-esteem and perhaps of our capacity to grow and to act.”²²⁰ Therefore, we should take responsibility for things that are the direct result of mistakes or sin but not believe that every misfortune is our fault or is a punishment for wrongdoing.

The origins of adversity

Adversity vs. sin

When a bad thing happens in life, we often ask ourselves what we could have done to prevent it. We tend to blame ourselves and search for answers. “If only I could have been more careful.” “If only I could have made a different decision.” Some things are the result of our actions and others simply happen because of the world we live in.

Bruce Hafen wrote, “We might think of the degree of our personal fault for the bad things that happen in our lives as a continuum ranging from sin to adversity, with the degree of our fault dropping from high at one end of the spectrum to zero at the other. At the ‘sin’ end of the continuum, we bear grave responsibility, for we bring the bitter fruits of sin fully upon ourselves. But at the other end of the spectrum, marked by ‘adversity,’ we may bear no responsibility at all. The bitterness of adversity may come to us, as it did to Job in the Old Testament, regardless of our actual, conscious fault.”²²¹

Sin

High degree of fault

Adversity

No fault

It is important that we distinguish between the things that are our fault and those that are not because it is important that we accept

responsibility for things that are our fault. On the other hand, it is unfair that we carry the burden of guilt for things that are not our fault. At times, this may be difficult to judge because between the poles we find such things as unwise choices and hasty judgements. In these cases, it may be difficult to determine how much personal responsibility we bear for the pain we feel or cause others to feel.

Problems because of sin

Much of the suffering in the world is the direct result of sin. Elder M. Russell Ballard said, “Much adversity is man-made. Men’s hearts turn cold, and the spirit of Satan controls their actions. In foreseeing the day of suffering in our time, the Savior said, “The love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound” (D&C 45:27). Violence, immorality, and other evils run rampant on the earth and much adversity has its origin in the principle of agency.”²²² Elder Ballard then explained, “The plan of happiness is available to all of his children. If the world would embrace and live it, peace, joy, and plenty would abound on the earth. Much of the suffering we know today would be eliminated if people throughout the world would understand and live the gospel.”²²³

Problems because of nature

Many of the problems we face in life are a natural result of the world we live in. Elder M. Russell Ballard said, “God has put his plan in motion. It proceeds through natural laws that are, in fact, God’s laws. Since they are his, he is bound by them, as are we. I recognize that for purposes we mortals may not understand, the Lord can control the elements. For the most part, however, he does not cause but he allows nature to run its course. In this imperfect world, bad things sometimes happen. The earth’s rocky underpinnings occasionally shift and move, resulting in earthquakes. Certain weather patterns cause hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and drought.”²²⁴

The atonement heals all suffering

We often think of the atonement only in terms of relief from sin and

guilt. But the atonement is more. Alma taught that Christ would “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. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the *sins of his people*, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me” (Alma 7:11–13, emphasis added).

Regardless of the source of suffering, the atonement can heal the effects of all pain.²²⁵ When suffering is our fault, we can be cleansed through repentance, and “after all we can do,” it can compensate for the consequences of our sins. The atonement can also compensate for the harmful effects of our ignorance or neglect and also for the pain and suffering caused by the willful actions of others.

Sometimes it is impossible to know how much you are to blame in a given situation. A child may stray even when you have made a conscientious effort to raise him. Adam and Eve, Alma, and other righteous people have had wayward children. What we do know, however, is that the Lord’s healing power can mend what we cannot. President Boyd K. Packer reminded us, “It is a great challenge to raise a family in the darkening mists of our moral environment.” He explained, “The measure of our success as parents, however, 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. The Prophet Joseph

Smith declared—and he never taught a 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’ (Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 110).²²⁶

Brigham Young said, “Let the father and mother, who are members of this Church and Kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie, and no power of earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang”²²⁷

In a general conference, President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “I have sometimes seen children of good families rebel, resist, stray, sin, and even actually fight God. In this they bring sorrow to their parents, who have done their best to set in movement a current and to teach and live as examples. But I have repeatedly seen many of these same children, after years of wandering, mellow, realize what they have been missing, repent, and make great contribution to the spiritual life of their community. The reason I believe this can take place is that, despite all the adverse winds to which these people have been subjected, they have been influenced still more, and much more than they realized, by the current of life in the homes in which they were reared. . . . [R]ighteous parents who strive to develop wholesome influences for

their children will be held blameless at the last day, and . . . they will succeed in saving most of their children, if not all.”²²⁸

The benefits of adversity

If a tree grows with much water but little wind, it develops shallow roots, and when the winds come it will topple over. People can also be shallow. Adversity can help you develop strong roots. You came to this earth knowing there would be trials and adversity and that they would refine you and help you develop character and strength.

One of the survivors of the ill-fated Martin Handcart Company said, “We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the church, because everyone of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities.”²²⁹

Orson F. Whitney said, “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven”²³⁰

How to deal with adversity

Since adversity will come to us all, consider the following ideas that can help us deal with adversity.

Recognize that God loves you

God knows you personally. He knows your needs and he loves you more than you have the capacity to understand. You can face adversity much easier when you understand who you are, who your Father is, and who your Savior is, and the relationship you have with Them. You

chose to come to an unjust world where you would suffer. Christ died to atone for your sins. Although Christ died for all of us, He died for each one of us individually. He would have died for you if you had been the only one. He would have suffered in the garden for your sins if yours had been the only ones.

Recognize that others love you

Family and friends also love you. Rely on them. President Ezra Taft Benson said that heavenly hosts are also pulling for you. He called them “friends in heaven that we cannot now remember who yearn for our victory.”²³¹

Trust that the Lord is in control

Elder Richard G. Scott said, “This life is an experience in profound trust—trust in Jesus Christ, trust in His teachings, trust in our capacity as led by the Holy Spirit to obey those teachings for happiness now and for a purposeful, supremely happy eternal existence. To trust means to obey willingly without knowing the end from the beginning (see Proverbs 3:5–7). To produce fruit, your trust in the Lord must be more powerful and enduring than your confidence in your own personal feelings and experience. To exercise faith is to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing with you and that He can accomplish it for your eternal good even though you cannot understand how He can possibly do it.”²³²

Camille Fronk observed, “No one can tell you just how your life will evolve, nor how to avoid misfortune. You can design your most hoped-for life and painstakingly work to achieve it. But I would dare say that fortunately for you and me, it may not unwind as we have planned. There will be surprising turns that we never could have anticipated. The Lord is in control. He is the Potter. And as a result, we have richer, more meaningful lives. As you look at your own past, you can recognize the obvious guidance of the Lord. . . . Why should we question that he will continue to direct us in the future?”²³³

Elder Richard G. Scott explained, “Your Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son love you perfectly. They would not require you to

experience a moment more of difficulty than is absolutely needed for your personal benefit or for that of those you love.²³⁴ You may wish to read Elder Scott's conference address "Trust in the Lord" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, p. 17).

Elder Scott also said, "The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. That progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether initially it be to your individual liking or not. When you trust in the Lord, when you are willing to let your heart and your mind be centered in His will, when you ask to be led by the Spirit to do His will, you are assured of the greatest happiness along the way and the most fulfilling attainment from this mortal experience. If you question everything you are asked to do, or dig in your heels at every unpleasant challenge, you make it harder for the Lord to bless you."²³⁵

Accept that life is difficult

M. Scott Peck begins his book *The Road Less Traveled* with the following insight: "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life *should* be easy."²³⁶

Dr. Peck explained, "[I]t is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning. Problems are the cutting edge that distinguishes between success and failure. Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually."²³⁷

Remember that everyone has challenges

When we consider the challenges that other people have, ours may

not seem so difficult. I know a man who was just a few months old when he lost sight in both eyes. He could have let his disability ruin his life, but instead empowered his hearing and became a concert pianist. He has developed the ability to recreate on the piano any music he hears. Since he can't read the scriptures, he could have become spiritually dormant. But instead, he developed a spiritual sensitivity by listening incessantly to the scriptures on tape.

A colleague of mine has a disabled child who needs total care. They must lift her out of bed, feed her, and change her diaper. She is now seventeen years old and has grown so large that her mother cannot lift her, but has to wait until her husband comes home to move her. Their daughter requires physical therapy, special chairs, and daily medication. As my friend goes about his daily work, I seldom think about the extra emotional energy he gives at home to deal with his daughter's special situation. He is sometimes fatigued by the late nights and the financial pressures, but somehow finds the strength to go on. He does it because he loves her. And he doesn't regret the inconvenience or the extra money it requires, money he could otherwise spend on his other children or on things for himself. I am not sure that my trials with homosexual feelings are any more emotionally taxing than the trials he goes through. When I talk with parents of disabled children, they always say that their capacity to love has been increased and they have been blessed in many ways. They often seem to be the ones who have been able to develop strong character traits of sensitivity, integrity, and endurance that perhaps they would not have been able to develop without the trials. We all need to take the trials we have and use them to our advantage.

I know another woman who fought a battle with cancer.²³⁸ Although she endured pains and heartache that few people understood, she remained cheerful and optimistic. She lost her hair from radiation treatments and after spinal surgery had to wear a metal brace around her head and chest to immobilize her head. As embarrassed as she must have felt by her appearance, she still came to church meetings and smiled and tried to cheer up everyone else. She wrote her own obituary which, in part, reads "Today at the young age of 33 I left this mortal

existence to a holier sphere. I was born . . . to wonderful parents . . . who taught me to live life well. . . . We have three sweet children who I will miss greatly. At the young age of 29, I was introduced to something called cancer. Cancer was my great adversary but I have learned that in this life our enemies can become our choicest friends; the secret is in learning what to do with the conflict.” She came to earth and suffered, and through it learned a little about her nature. An important mystery of life is to discover who we are, and who God is, and a little about our relationship with Him. It is critical to know in our hearts who we really are.

Let adversity strengthen you

Adversity affects people in different ways. For some, it becomes a challenge to overcome, for others an excuse to fail. Harold Kushner observed, “We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it. Pain makes some people bitter and envious. It makes others sensitive and compassionate. It is the result, not the cause, of pain that makes some experiences of pain meaningful and others empty and destructive.”²³⁹

When you face challenges, draw closer to God, even if conditions are not resolved as you would want. Dean Conlee said, “We pray earnestly and emotionally for the Lord to strengthen us and lift us, to prepare a way for us to endure, even to remove the bitter cup if it be his will, and then we release those things into his hands and believe within us that our prayers are heard, and the stress of the condition will be transferred to Him. I have a strong testimony that the Lord accepts our stress and blesses us with strength and courage and hope to continue the fight.”²⁴⁰

Since you have to endure adversity, will you bear it through the bondage of bitterness or through the freedom of forgiveness? When hurt happens in your life, you can either keep it inside and become bitter about it, or you can choose to grieve, let the emotions surface, feel the pain, then give it to the Lord.

Let God carry your burdens

When Alma and his people had come under the oppression of the Lamanites, they cried “mightily to God” for deliverance. The Lord did not remove their persecution, but promised to help them carry the burden. “And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, 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 for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions. And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:13–15).

God can ease your burdens and make them light. When you turn to God, you will not only find the comfort you seek, but in so doing gain an increased testimony of the reality of the Savior and the atonement. In the words of Dean Conlee, “This is the higher purpose of trials in God’s plan: to bring his children to the knowledge of him and his son.”²⁴¹

Don’t expect quick solutions

We live in a day of instant gratification. We want fast food and instant fixes to our problems. If we can’t solve a problem in minutes or days, we become frustrated. We also think that we should be instantly emotionally comfortable. President Boyd K. Packer said, “it was meant to be that life would be a challenge. To suffer some anxiety, some depression, some disappointment, even some failure is normal.” He said, “There is great purpose in our struggle in life.”²⁴²

Don’t expect perfection in all things right now

For some reason, many people in the Church feel they need to be perfect now. While perfection is our ultimate goal, we need to realize that in this life we can only be perfect in some things. We may be able to pay tithing perfectly or avoid drugs and alcohol perfectly. But when we expect perfection in all aspects of our lives, we ask for frustration. We feel ignorant when someone talks about a subject we don't know. We judge ourselves as too fat, too skinny, too short, or too tall. We need to stop believing that we are failures if we don't reach 100% all the time. Mistakes are understandable as long as we learn from them and do better the next time. Even the best of us will repeat some mistakes many times. Continue to learn, to grow, and to move toward your goal. People will accept and love you even though you have faults. All people have faults.

Maintain balance

Learn to keep things in balance. When you are asked to make a dessert for a ward dinner, you could spend half a day making it to perfection, but you need to evaluate what it is worth, considering all your other responsibilities, and spend the appropriate amount of time on it. When I built a shed in my back yard, I had to evaluate how much time it was worth, then built it to that level of perfection. Learn to balance your time and energies among the many things that are important.

Know there is a time for everything

When I was in high school, my father and I were hooked on genealogy and at times spent fifteen hours a week doing research. One year, we submitted thousands of names for temple work. At this point in my life, I cannot spend that much time on family history work because I am working and raising a family. I need to go to the temple as often as I can. However, I should not expect to go as often as my father who is retired and does ten to fifteen sessions a week. I look forward to doing a lot of temple work when I am retired, but I am not going to beat myself up now because I cannot go more often than I do. We are usually our own worst judges. Perhaps when all is said and

done, God may not beat us with stripes so much for what we did not do, but bless us for what we did do.

Make the best of your situation

People who succeed in life don't waste time looking for the right circumstances. They *make* the right circumstances. Take the challenges you have been given, and use them to your advantage. It's always too soon to quit, but never too late to keep trying. You can choose to complain and drown in your problems or you can make the best of the situation and choose to grow through your problems.

Recognize that happiness comes from within

We generate our own happiness and we generate our own unhappiness. Many people say things like, "Everything would be fine if I just didn't have to work such long hours," "If my boss would get off my case. . .," or "If my children would show me more respect. . . ." We tend to blame unhappiness on someone or something else. The truth is that unhappiness is generated internally. Although life can be brutal, relationships can fail, and families can go through crises, it is still *you* who decide how to react. This doesn't mean that you should be happy in the face of a crisis, because there is legitimate unhappiness at times. But there is a time to say "enough" and get on with life. That is what repentance is all about. Focus on what can be changed and not how bad things are. We all think we have it worse than someone else. But if everyone could take all their troubles and put them in a bag and place them on a table, and we could choose any bag we wanted, we would probably pick our own again.

Acknowledge there is more good than bad

God has created a world where there are many more good things than bad. Harold Kushner explained, "We find life's disasters upsetting not only because they are painful but because they are exceptional. Most people wake up on most days feeling good. Most illnesses are curable. Most airplanes take off and land safely. Most of the time, when we send our children out to play, they come home safely. The

accident, the robbery, the inoperable tumor are life-shattering exceptions, but they are very rare exceptions. When you have been hurt by life, it may be hard to keep that in mind. When you are standing very close to a large object, all you can see is the object. Only by stepping back from it can you also see the rest of its setting around it. When we are stunned by some tragedy, we can only see and feel the tragedy. Only with time and distance can we see the tragedy in the context of a whole life and a whole world.”²⁴³

Serve others

We heal ourselves of pain when we reach out to help others. Service to others is the great healer. Harold Kushner writes about the old Chinese tale of the woman whose only son died. “In her grief,” he wrote, “she went to the holy man and said, ‘What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?’ Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, ‘Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life.’ The woman set off at once in search of that magical mustard seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, ‘I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me.’ They told her, ‘You’ve certainly come to the wrong place,’ and began to describe all the tragic things that had recently befallen them. The woman said to herself, ‘Who is better able to help these poor unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?’ She stayed to comfort them, then went on in her search for a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hovels and in palaces, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people’s grief that she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had in fact driven the sorrow out of her life.”²⁴⁴

Overcome discouragement

Read the following story about the inventor Thomas Edison and note his attitude during a trying time. “Thomas Edison devoted ten

years and all of his money to developing the nickel-alkaline storage battery at a time when he was almost penniless. . . . One night the terrifying cry of fire echoed through the film plant. Spontaneous combustion had ignited some chemicals. Within moments all of the packing compounds, celluloids for records, film, and other flammable goods had gone up with a whoosh. Fire companies from eight towns arrived, but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that the fire hoses had no effect. Edison was 67 years old—no age to begin anew. His daughter was frantic, wondering if he were safe, if his spirits were broken, how he would handle a crisis such as this at this age. She saw him running toward her. He spoke first. He said, ‘Where’s your mother? Go get her. Tell her to get her friends. They’ll never see another fire like this as long as they live.’ At 5:30 the next morning, with the fire barely under control, he called his employees together and announced, ‘We’re rebuilding.’ One man was told to lease all the machine shops in the area, another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, ‘Oh, by the way, anybody know where we can get some money?’²⁴⁵ Virtually everything we now recognize as a Thomas Edison contribution came after that disaster. Some of his most famous inventions include the electric light bulb, the phonograph, motion pictures, the electric voting machine, the stock ticker, and the mimeograph machine. How would the world be different today if Mr. Edison had become discouraged and given up?

Others who have gone before you have experienced discouragement and have overcome it. Noah was discouraged when everyone was against him, but he followed through and built the ark. Moses initially resisted his destiny, saying that he was slow of speech, but gained courage and led the children of Israel out of bondage. It was difficult for President Spencer W. Kimball to speak, yet he traveled around the world delivering powerful sermons that are still widely quoted today. Job experienced extraordinary trials. He lost his family, his health, and his wealth, yet he never cursed God. Although Paul suffered much, listen to the positive attitude he expresses in his second epistle to the Corinthians: “We are troubled on every side, yet not

distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8–9).

When you feel discouraged, admit your weaknesses to the Lord and positively work at solving the problem at hand. The following scriptures may provide encouragement: Alma 26:27; Joshua 1:9; Proverbs 3:5–6; Romans 5:3–5; D&C 68:6; D&C 121:7–8; D&C 61:36; 2 Nephi 4:30.

Accept adversity

Ultimately, you have to come to grips with the fact that there will always be adversity. Remember that you are not left alone. Accept the reality of the atonement and its power to compensate for the effects of injustice. It may come in a quiet room after you have thought, and wondered, and become angry, and prayed, and pleaded, and finally, come to peace with yourself. Remember, something inside you is ancient and wise and knows what needs to be done. It is a combination of the Light of Christ, the Holy Ghost, and our own eternal spirit. It is the eternal part of you. Rely on it. You are tougher than you think.

“But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions” (Alma 34:41). Trust in the greatness of God and believe that “he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:2).

Bishop Richard C. Edgley said, “For the faithful, the normal tests and trials of life need not be the enemy of faith. While we don’t necessarily look forward to these obstacles and challenges, we accept them, and we build our lives and faith from them. To the faithful, the very obstacles that we overcome draw us closer to our Heavenly Father by helping us develop a humble, submissive spirit and causing us to be grateful and appreciative of those blessings that flow from a loving Father. In short, these experiences can and often do increase our faith. The faithful do not pray to be spared the trials of life but pray that they may have the strength to rise above them.”²⁴⁶

Conclusion

In the gospel of Jesus Christ we can find comfort in the face of

adversity. Remember that the fruits of righteous living are spiritual, not material. Lowell Bennion wrote, “The religion of Jesus does not enable us to escape tribulation, but it does fortify the spirit of man to accept and face it when it comes. . . . The life founded in the gospel can suffer with patience, can meet adversity with hope, can take malice with forgiveness, can recompense hate with love, and can face death with equanimity. The religious person can find himself in no circumstance . . . in which his religion is not a source of strength to him. In weakness, he knows where to turn for strength; in strength, he remains humble; in poverty he knows whereof his riches consist; in wealth he remembers his brethren in mercy; in health, he is grateful; in illness, he exercises faith.”²⁴⁷

Each of us has hope because of who we are and who God is and who we are together. Don’t pray that God will make your life free of problems, but pray for hope, strength, and courage to bear them. Adversity can bless our lives if we let it purify us and teach us.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Is there not wisdom in His giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we may learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified? If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.”²⁴⁸

For further reading

The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold Kushner.

(Although the author does not believe in the omnipotence of God, his advice on how to cope with tragedy and personal pain is thought-provoking and helpful.)

When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough by Harold Kushner.

If the Gospel Is True, Why Do I Hurt So Much?: Help for

Dysfunctional Latter-day Saint Families by Carroll Hofeling
Morris.

Gay Identity and the Gay Rights Movement

In addition to the personal battle raging within your friend, there are external challenges that may add to the difficulty of resolving his homosexual problems. This chapter explains that if a person has developed a gay identity and assimilated into a close-knit gay community, he may find it difficult to leave it behind. The chapter discusses the origins and objectives of the gay rights movement, including its efforts to normalize homosexuality and limit the options available to those who want to resolve their homosexual problems.

Development of a gay identity

The personal conflict over homosexual feelings creates a difficult internal struggle. After years of trying to find answers and no success at trying to change their feelings, some people become convinced that their homosexual feelings are inborn and unchangeable and they accept a gay identity which finally ends the internal struggle that has caused them so much frustration and pain. Accepting a gay identity has far-reaching implications because being “gay” includes not only personal feelings, but also describes a social and political identity. As they associate with other gay people, they find a great deal of acceptance and feel—perhaps for the first time in their life—that they fit in. Since they often feel that the world has let them down or they feel rejected by the world, they turn to each other for support. There they feel safe, comfortable, and at home.

Gay culture

Larger cities have distinct areas where gay people tend to live or congregate for entertainment. Gay-identified people often move to major cities where they can find a larger gay community. Gay professionals and gay-owned businesses make their presence known by displaying rainbow flags and listing their services in gay yellow pages

published in many cities. They tend to trust and give preference to each other in personal and business dealings. While this kind of trust and unity is apparent in the gay community, it is not unique to it. Suppose you were traveling in a foreign country and felt estranged by the culture and frustrated that you could not understand the language. You then notice someone sitting on a bench reading *The Book of Mormon*. Although you don't understand the words on the cover, you recognize it as *The Book of Mormon* and you suddenly feel a kinship to him and a level of trust and desire to get to know him. In fact, you feel in some ways like you already know him and can trust him. You feel that you can approach him safely, and he will be able to give you help and direction. If he were to invite you to his home for dinner, you would welcome the invitation. Likewise, many gay people feel goodwill and confidence doing business with each other. They find comfort in the gay community because they feel the acceptance they never found among their family, ward, friends, or classmates. Look in the telephone book or pick up a gay newspaper in any large or mid-sized city and you will find dozens of political and social organizations, everything from the Gay and Lesbian Democrats to the Bi-sexual Veterans and the Gay Rodeo Association.

If your friend has lived as part of a gay community, he may have additional lifestyle challenges to overcome in addition to the homosexual problems themselves. Since his emotional support system is likely tied to a gay community and gay friends, he will likely have to move and find new friends who will support him through the difficult process of resolving homosexual issues. Since very few men have the determination to make the move and leave their friends behind, they get stalled before they ever begin to address the homosexual issues themselves. Because of the values the gay community espouses, he may have long since given up on the gospel or any hope of getting married and having a family, and they may no longer be important to him. Without these motivators, few men have the incentive to make such difficult changes in their lives.

The plight of gay people

Most people who have accepted a gay identity feel that life has dealt with them unfairly. They didn't choose to be attracted to the same sex. They may have tried everything they know how to rid themselves of these unwanted feelings, but the feelings persist. And even though they may know the feelings are wrong and out of harmony with the gospel, the only peace they can find is to follow their feelings, so feelings become all-important and they learn to live by their feelings.

Gays and lesbians suffer, often unjustly and unfairly. In addition to their difficult internal struggles, they also encounter the ignorance and prejudice of others. Instead of receiving love and support from their families, they are often ostracized. Rather than being involved in supportive church groups, they find themselves on the outside because even good Christians often don't know how to react to someone with homosexual attractions.

Gay people are evicted by landlords, fired by employers, and even face violent physical attacks. Hate crimes are increasing and some people use AIDS as an excuse to show their hatred.²⁴⁹ Less than 2% of the gay population survives to age sixty-five. They are 116 times more likely to be murdered and twenty-four times more likely to commit suicide than the average person.²⁵⁰ It is a difficult lifestyle where AIDS and other factors cause suffering and premature death.²⁵¹ The collective anger over mistreatment and the frustration and despair caused by their internal struggles are powerful forces behind the gay rights movement.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote the following in the *Ensign* magazine: "Our doctrines obviously condemn those who engage in so-called 'gay bashing'—physical or verbal attacks on persons thought to be involved in homosexual or lesbian behavior. We should extend compassion to persons who suffer from ill health, including those who are infected with HIV or who are ill with AIDS (who may or may not have acquired their condition from sexual relations). We should encourage such persons to participate in the activities of the Church."²⁵²

The beginnings of the gay rights movement

Gay people finally became sick and tired of being mistreated and

began to fight back. In the 1960's, they simply wanted the public to leave them alone. They didn't want to be called names and didn't want to be arrested for going to gay bars. When dialog and reason didn't get results, they began to form organizations and develop protest strategies. Following the social protest strategies of the era, they turned social issues into political issues. Although homosexual behavior is as old as history itself, there had not previously been a social identity based entirely on sexual behavior. The pro-gay strategy was to take the behavioral definition and expand it to become a definition of a class of people. (Some say that ancient Greece had a gay culture. And while it is true they had a more naturalistic view of life, including homosexuality, there was no gay identity. In fact, the Greek language had no word meaning "gay."²⁵³ The concept of a "homosexual person" was created in the nineteenth century.²⁵⁴ Although homosexual behavior was certainly practiced before that time, it was seen as something you did, and not who you were.)

The watershed event of the gay rights movement in America happened in 1969 at a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, where gay patrons where gay patrons fought police in clashes that continued sporadically for two days. The Stonewall uprising is now commemorated in June each year in every major city in the United States with parades and other activities during Gay Pride Month.

Over the years, organizations have been formed to further various gay causes. Many are well-meaning and some are over the edge. A number of highly organized, well-funded organizations attempt to mold public opinion in favor of homosexuality as a normal, alternative sexuality. In 1997, over \$75 million will be donated to these organizations.²⁵⁵ For fiscal year 1997, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force had a budget of \$2.3 million and the Lambda Legal Defense and Educational Fund had a budget of \$3.1 million.²⁵⁶ These significant resources are massed toward achieving multiple discrete and troublesome objectives, such as those that follow.

Political issues

Gay activists turn social and cultural issues into political ones and through various means attempt to achieve a minority status. They define themselves as a class of people, an oppressed minority fighting for civil rights. They merge *being gay* with *gay rights* so that those who oppose gay rights are seen as bigots who hate gay people. This civil rights approach takes on a feel of a racial equality movement and gives the collective gay community a tremendous amount of power. They support gay or pro-gay political candidates to introduce legislation to help move their causes forward.

You have the right to let your legislators know your position on social issues and vote on referenda that come to ballot. Vote for representatives that will uphold the standards you believe. The National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) or The Lambda Report can help keep you informed of current issues. (See the Organizations section of this book.)

Legal issues

Seeking gay rights protection, activists focus on the courts—not the polls. Rather than permitting the voters to decide whether to legitimize gay marriage, they seek to have judges dictate that society will have gay marriage—whether society on the whole wants it or not. They have obtained many changes by nondemocratic, nonpolitical means. “Gay rights” have been created by state and federal judges although there is nothing in the express wording, text, or structure of the Constitution that suggests a fundamental—let alone constitutional—right to sexual expression (whether that expression be heterosexual or homosexual).

See the Organizations section of this book for information on contacting organizations that are addressing these concerns.

Social issues

The pro-gay agenda seeks not only for the right to practice and celebrate homosexuality openly, but wants the endorsement of society. Although gay couples already receive some benefits of marriage

through domestic partnership laws, activists seek to legalize homosexual marriage and redefine the traditional family. They work toward more favorable child custody and visitation rights as well as the right to adopt children. They promote moral relativism, saying in effect, “it might be wrong for you, but not for me.” They also seek a redefinition of gender, with the goal of giving humans five genders from which to choose instead of two. When freed of traditional biases, a person can then decide whether to be male, female, homosexual, lesbian, or transgendered.²⁵⁷ (These concepts are already taught in many women’s study programs at universities.)

These efforts present a real threat to traditional family values. President Boyd K. Packer spoke about this danger in a general conference address in October 1990.²⁵⁸ In 1994, the First Presidency issued a letter that stated, “The principles of the gospel and the sacred responsibilities given us require that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints oppose any efforts to give legal authorization to marriages between persons of the same gender.”²⁵⁹ Speak up for traditional family values and the divinely-appointed roles of men and women. See the “Organizations” section of this book for information on organizations that support families.

Educational issues

Gay activism pushes for an increase in gay and pro-gay school teachers and counselors who are in positions to influence children’s values. Boys are often confused about sexuality during their adolescent years, and a gay counselor’s attempts to help them come to grips with their “gay identity” may add to their confusion and lead them down the wrong path. Project 10 is a pro-gay counseling program in the Los Angeles Unified School District that helps teens accept their gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. The program uses exclusively gay-identified counselors and sexually-explicit literature with students at large in an aggressive search for the mythical 10% of the teens that are gay. In New York schools, first-graders were required to read books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate* to counter the more traditional values taught in the home. Deborah Glick, New

York state assemblywoman and a lesbian, explained why first grade is the new front line of the pro-gay movement: “Most of the parents themselves have tremendous prejudice and bigotry that have been passed on for generations . . . and the reality is that we as a society, if we are to remain free and just, must provide a counter-balance to what kids are obviously learning at home.”²⁶⁰ Pro-gay school programs promote sex education that includes acceptance of homosexuality as a healthy lifestyle and encouragement to explore alternative sexualities. AIDS education is often an avenue for pro-gay indoctrination. Such programs teach “safer sex” but rarely teach abstinence.

If a teenager is confused about sexuality or his gender identity, it is important that he have a safe person or group to talk with. However, pro-gay school counselors and gay clubs are seldom safe. The counselors, club advisors, and guest speakers are not usually supportive of gospel values. They typically encourage students to “come out of the closet” and accept a gay identity rather than to grow past it.

A natural response to these alarming situations may be to confront the pro-gay movement directly. However, experience shows it is generally a waste of time to try to argue with pro-gay advocates in an attempt to come to middle ground. You may therefore want to be proactive rather than reactive and work with your school principal and school board on these issues. File formal grievances against teachers that don’t follow state laws on curriculum. School programs should be balanced and should not belittle traditional values of sexuality. The Focus on the Family organization (see the Organizations section of this book) offers programs with Christian principles.

Religious issues

The gay agenda encourages the ordination of homosexual ministers and a redefinition of theology to accommodate homosexual lifestyles. Gay advocates teach that religious opposition to homosexuality is bigotry that must be stopped. Unfortunately, they are beginning to establish a legal precedence for granting gay rights over religious rights. The following news item appeared in the April 1988 issue of the *Intercessor’s for America Newsletter*: “The Washington, D.C. court of

appeals has ordered Georgetown University [a private Catholic institution] to support homosexual groups on campus. The court ruled that Georgetown's policy which denies support to gay organizations because homosexual practice is contrary to Catholic doctrine to be discriminatory on the basis of sexual orientation and is a violation of the Washington, D.C. area's Human Rights Act. The court also declared that 'homosexual orientation tells nothing about a person's abilities or commitments concerning religion. The compelling government interest to eliminate discrimination against homosexuals outweighs the freedom of religion.'²⁶¹

The response of some Christians is to join anti-gay crusades which do nothing to reduce the incidence of homosexuality, but simply convince gays that there is no place for them in religion. The most effective thing you can do is to learn about homosexual issues in their proper gospel context, then teach others. Evergreen International sponsors educational conferences and other programs. Remember that the fight is not against people who experience homosexual attractions, but against the propaganda that is being taught.

The media

Gay activism seeks equal time and space in the media and encourages writers and producers to include more gay themes and present a positive image of gays. Since there are many liberal, pro-gay producers and journalists, there is a great deal of media exposure.

As a concerned citizen, you can express your opinion to media owners and operators to encourage traditional, family-oriented values. You can also encourage local libraries to have books that present all sides of the issue of homosexuality, including the fact that homosexual problems can be resolved.

Inborn homosexuality

Gay advocates state that homosexuality is inborn and unchangeable. The proposition that a person could change questions the very concept of a gay identity. In addition, recognizing that anyone would *want* to change is to admit there are those who believe it is

wrong and does not make them happy. Gay advocates may go to great lengths to try to disprove anyone who claims to have changed. They may say that such people were never gay in the first place or that they have been brainwashed into believing they have overcome homosexuality and some day will realize they are just suppressing their true homosexual nature. It is ironic that gay advocates have no problem believing that a straight man may discover his latent homosexuality, but they cannot tolerate the idea that a man with homosexual desires may discover his heterosexual nature. Jeffrey Satinover also noted, "There will always be people who seek to change but are not successful, even after many years of effort. Understandably perhaps, some of these relapse into a vocally gay-activist posture and become hostile toward the ministries they perceive as having failed, or even deluded, them."²⁶²

The conservative response from society is to ignore homosexual issues and hope they will go away. This leaves gay activists as the only ones speaking on the subject, giving distorted views of the problems and the solutions. Don't be afraid to speak up and tell others what you know about homosexuality and about the changes you have seen people make.

The normalization of homosexuality

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) is the organization that determines for the professional community what is normal and what is abnormal. Their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* is a handbook widely used by clinicians to assist in diagnosing and classifying mental, emotional, and sexual disorders. The first edition of the *DSM*, published in 1952, listed homosexuality as a mental disorder, a severe form of psychopathology.

By 1968, the gay community had a few organizations in place and one of their first targets was the APA. Over the next few years, protestors interrupted APA conferences, shouting at the speakers and taking control of meetings. After three years of disrupted conventions, the APA agreed to let gay activists be involved in the decision-making process, even though the activists were not professionals in psychiatry

or psychology. Finally in 1973, the board of trustees agreed to redefine mental illness in a way that accommodated homosexuality. Previously, disorders had been determined by deviations from an objective norm, but this redefinition said that the norm should be more subjective, that people should not be considered disordered if they do not experience distress over their condition and if they show no major impairment in social functioning. With this redefinition, homosexuality was removed as a disorder from the *DSM-III*.

The decision by the APA board was not based on data and clinical reasoning nor did it represent the professional opinions of the practitioners the APA represents. Surveys show that a majority of mental health professionals believes that homosexuality is not normal.²⁶³ In his book *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis*, Ronald Bayer describes how clinical decisions are made and the factors that influence those decisions. This subjective standard of normalcy set a dangerous precedent, because without an objective standard nearly any deviation can be considered normal as long as the person is not seriously disturbed by his condition. For example, in the *DSM-IV*, one of the criteria for diagnosing pedophilia (a disorder in which children are the preferred sexual objects) states, "The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning."²⁶⁴ Such changes were also made in the criteria for diagnosing sexual sadism and masochism, transvestitism, voyeurism, and exhibitionism. In their attempt to be politically correct, the psychiatric community has lost the distinction between what is normal and what is right.

Today, a growing number of professionals are dissatisfied with the APA's political commitments and have formed organizations that oppose the APA's advocacy of social issues such as abortion, the environment, affirmative action, gay rights, support of special interest groups, and other issues irrelevant to the profession of psychology. (For more information, write to Psychologists For a Free APA, 1807 North Elm #321, Denton TX 76201.)

The elimination of homosexuality as a disorder in the *DSM* has also

had a negative effect on clinical research in the area of homosexuality. It is difficult to get funding or recognition for research in an area not listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. One of the few organizations currently promoting research and documenting clinical successes in treating homosexuality is the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (see the Organizations section in this book).

The movement to deny treatment

Gay activists seek not only to declare homosexuality to be normal, but also to block a person's attempts to change his homosexuality. They believe that such attempts are simply manifestations of the person's internalized homophobia and self-loathing, and that the only healthy response to homosexual feelings is to accept a gay identity. They seek to make it professionally unethical for therapists to help people grow out of homosexuality. Although homosexuality is no longer classified as a disorder, clinicians who treat those who seek treatment for homosexuality are treating within the guidelines in the *DSM-IV*, section 302.9, "sexual disorders not otherwise specified," "persistent and marked distress about sexual orientation." However, proposals have been presented in both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association to make it unethical for a therapist to offer treatment to those who seek treatment for their distress over homosexual desires. Such therapists would have their licenses revoked and be liable for punitive damages.

Since such proposals are gaining increasing support, it is important to take proactive measures to preserve the right to receive professional help. Therapists who have seen how people can be helped are organizing to find ways to protect the rights of patients who seek treatment as well as the rights of the therapists who treat them. For more information, contact the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (see the Organizations section in this book). While it is true that no one should be coerced into treatment, the reverse is also true that no one should be denied treatment if they want it. Ultimately, it is an issue of personal freedom and self-determination.

Militant gay groups

A small number of political-activist groups have become militant in their tactics. Feeling wronged and oppressed, they are now fighting mad and fighting back with vocal, in-your-face tactics. They have been known to threaten or cause property damage or physical injury. Although most gay people are respectable, law-abiding members of society, these militant gays get media attention and give the impression that gay people are on the fringe of society, feeding incorrect stereotypes.

ACT UP is a civil disobedience organization dedicated to confronting the issues of discrimination against people with HIV infection or AIDS. It has more than a hundred chapters in the United States and abroad. Queer Nation was organized by several members of ACT UP who wanted to focus their energy specifically on gay and lesbian rights issues. According to one of the group's founders, "We wanted to do direct action, to get out on the streets, to scream and yell, to stage very visible protests against anti-gay violence and discrimination."²⁶⁵ Such groups go to radical extremes to shock the public, such as putting up pornographic signs or painting "We're queer; we're here" on businesses they target as homophobic. Since words like "queer" and "fag" have been used derogatorily against gay people, these radical groups have reclaimed the words and now use them proactively for their shock value.

Some groups have the purpose of "outing." They take it upon themselves to identify a person who is gay and force him out of the closet by informing employers, families, and friends that he is gay. Although they do it against the person's wishes, sometimes ruining careers and breaking up families, they feel it benefits the greater cause of the gay movement by showing that greater numbers of people are gay. Identifying successful, prominent people as gay seems to lend credibility to the cause.

Gay activism promotes stereotypes

When we have little experience with something, we tend to stereotype. Although many people think that all gays are alike, the truth

is that the gay population is about as heterogeneous as the heterosexual population. Unless a person knows a relative or friend who is gay, the only experience they have to draw on is what they see in the media. When they watch a gay parade in New York City and see men and women flaunting their sexuality with lewd costumes and behavior, they only see the extremes of the gay population. And when the population at large begins to think that all gays are riotous and lewd, it seems reasonable to ban gays from serving in the military. A gay sailor parading around in drag propositioning other sailors would certainly not strengthen a cohesive fighting unit. While this obviously is not a fair representation of most gay people, it is the stereotype people form in their minds when they see the extremists of the gay movement in the media. They don't see the average man or woman who is a responsible and productive member of society who only asks for reasonable rights and respect. Gay activism gives gay people a reputation they don't deserve.

Latent homosexuality

Gay advocates would like you to think that there is latent homosexuality in all men because it gives credence to their position that homosexuality is natural and occurs to some degree in everyone. What they call latent homosexuality is nothing more than the natural, right desires for companionship, acceptance, and healthy relationships. The only thing potentially homosexual about it is that if not fulfilled through healthy relationships, it could lead to homosexuality.

Homophobia

Homophobia is defined as an irrational hatred or fear of homosexuality. Although there are legitimate cases of homophobia, the use of the term has been expanded to take on social and political meanings. Gay advocates use it widely to refer to those who are hostile toward gay people and even those who disagree with the pro-gay perspective. They consider homophobic those who want to resolve their homosexual problems as well as therapists who try to help them. Some activists have an almost neurotic attitude toward all "straight"

people and blame all their suffering in life on either social or internalized homophobia.

The truth is, those who are hostile toward gay people are usually *prejudiced*, meaning that they have an opinion against it without adequate basis, but not homophobic. Those who disagree with the pro-gay perspective may also do it legitimately out of *conviction*, which is a strong belief. Those who object to homosexuality on religious or moral grounds do so out of conviction, not because of a phobia or prejudice.

For further reading

Unforgiven Sins by Joe Dallas. This novel about the gay rights movement teaches powerful lessons about facing potentially explosive situations with sensitivity and wisdom.

Homosexuality in America: Exposing the Myths (American Family Association, P. O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS, 38803). This twenty-four-page booklet responds to the reality of homosexuality from a traditional family-values perspective.

Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identify by Joe Dallas. Chapter sixteen gives an insightful description of the genesis of rage in gay activism.

Testimonials

My Challenge Has Become a Blessing

Todd Daniels

Everyone is faced with challenges in life, without exception. Although the specific nature of the challenges does not necessarily define who we are, how we deal with those challenges does. When we give in to the impulses brought on by our struggles, we accept the consequences of a life out of harmony with our personal beliefs and, possibly, with the plan of happiness that God has laid out for us. Conversely, when we face the challenge and fight against the urges to forsake what is right, we are molded and sculpted by that battle. It is not likely that we will escape from such battles without a few scars; but we will be stronger and have a greater understanding of our specific purpose and destiny because of the rigors of the fight. Most important, we will have a greater appreciation and humility for the love of a God who is surely the only way out of many of these struggles.

One such challenge for me has been same-sex attraction. It is a battle that no one chooses, nor is it easily won. I remember same-sex attractions since childhood, and as I entered adolescence, those attractions became sexual. For many years I constantly struggled with feelings which I did not understand or want. I felt terribly alone in the world and was terrified that my secret would get out and that people would find out how sick and perverted I was. As I struggled with this internal turmoil, the battle began to manifest itself in my actions. I got caught in an ongoing cycle of loneliness, homosexual fantasies, pornography, and masturbation, and I eventually found myself engaging in sexual indiscretion with others—thinking that this was somehow a solution to my problems.

Of course, just as an alcoholic finds that a drug does not solve his problems, I found that my addictions did not solve mine. That

realization, however, was not enough to alter the behavior. I sought out therapists who I hoped would help me with this dilemma. One of these therapists was not helpful. Although her intentions were good and she wanted me to be happy, she had “swallowed the lie” which has been so carefully propagated by the pro-gay community which encourages people not to abandon homosexual behavior, but to abandon a system of beliefs which does not condone such behavior. Unfortunately, this has become a common approach in the mental health profession. Other therapists were very helpful, however, helping me understand how my struggle had caused me to close out the world to “protect” myself and how I needed to let other people become a part of my life on a close, emotional level. The most helpful therapist was one specifically acquainted with homosexual issues and with the knowledge that the pathway out of homosexuality revolves not around problems with the opposite sex, but in coming to terms with my own masculinity, and in feeling and being included and connected in the male world rather than feeling different and isolated. I also found many friends within the Evergreen organization with whom I could share my successes and failures. I am still close friends with many of those people, and several of us have made successful transitions out of the homosexual lifestyle.

I believe there are some challenges we can plow through alone in life, simply by putting our mind to it and pushing forward. I do not believe, however, that homosexuality is one of these challenges. Indeed, the battle rages on as to what causes homosexuality—is it genetic or is it environmental? Gay rights advocates desperately grasp for any evidence that it is somehow inborn; for them, they insist, it is meant to be and it is pointless for us to attempt to alter “who we are.” Outside this political rhetoric, however, many scientists and therapists believe there are probably a variety of causes which all interact to create a propensity toward homosexuality. However, regardless of the cause, most who have struggled with same-sex attraction deal with issues which have been part of their lives for many years and the thought patterns and ways of reacting to stimuli tend to become part of them.

For this reason, I found that the homosexual struggle cannot be won

overnight. Indeed, the slow and painful process of recovery convinces many that the challenge is not worth it. They accept the homosexual lifestyle rather than the fight. I have known good friends who were fighting the battle by my side several years ago who have since given up. I would argue that they have also given up true happiness in the process.

Because of the difficulty of impacting such deeply imbedded feelings and habits, although the therapy and personal interaction is critical, reliance on God is essential. I am convinced that without His help, I would never have been able to make a transition out of the lifestyle which I hated, but from which I could not escape. Different organizations talk about “surrendering” your problems to God, and I found that this was the only way to truly get past homosexual attraction. I can’t describe exactly how it works, because I think it is probably impossible for me to understand. All I can say is that it does. That does not mean that the change is easy or fast, it just means it is possible, and that God will be by our side as we learn and change.

Many people, particularly those currently struggling with same-sex attraction issues, have difficulty finding any possible good that can come from such struggles. In retrospect, I can say that the struggles and the painful process out of homosexuality taught me much. I learned to rely on God, and that He has put us here to develop faith and there is no better way to do that than to realize that we are completely dependent on Him for everything. The challenge also taught me compassion for my fellow man. We live in a world that tells us so much about taking care of ourselves and tending to our own needs that we often overlook the pain and needs of our brothers and sisters. After having battled with homosexuality for so many years, I can never again look at someone struggling with problems in life without a greater degree of compassion and understanding for them.

Today my sexual attraction is primarily heterosexual, whereas it was clearly homosexual previously. That does not mean I absolutely never have a homosexual thought anymore. However, those thoughts are now simply lingering reminders of the pathways developed in my consciousness over so many years and the real key is that I am no

longer troubled by such thoughts and they fade as quickly as they appear. It is a dramatic difference from my former struggles where I would literally spend hours of the day locked in homosexual obsessions which impacted my work and social life. Now, I am happily married and have a wonderful child. I have never been happier, and I no longer experience the chronic depression which was once associated with homosexuality. I feel no deficits with respect to my own masculinity, nor do I feel compelled to compare myself to other men.

God has truly showered His infinite grace on me because of what I have learned and experienced. I thank Him for the change I have experienced, along with understanding Church leaders who were patient with my long struggle and the periodic setbacks, and who sought to find the resources to help me with my problem. I thank the therapists who challenged me and encouraged me to take some frightening steps toward recovery. I thank my friends in Evergreen who stood by my side and helped me maintain the strength to continue. Finally, I thank my wonderful wife for her understanding and her patience with someone who has a few lingering quirks. Indeed, I think that although it is possible to get past the sexual attraction issues, many who deal with homosexuality never lose the sensitivity which they so often possess. However, that sensitivity, although sometimes annoying, can ultimately be a great strength to families and friends if focused properly.

Change is possible. Life has options and God does not leave us to fend for ourselves. His primary purpose is our happiness, and He will fight our battles if we will rely on Him and constantly trust in His plan of happiness rather than seeking the fleeting happiness the world has to offer.

I Finally Found Answers

Daniel Packard

I went on a mission hoping it would solve my homosexual problems, but it didn't. I came home and became friends with another

LDS man who also had homosexual feelings and connected with him because for the first time there was someone who understood my feelings. Neither of us knew how to reconcile homosexual feelings with God's eternal plan or even His mortal plan of the Church. We knew we were supposed to get married but couldn't imagine being sexually involved with a wife. We had no idea how to change these feelings. Trying to be faithful didn't change them. Going on a mission didn't change them. It didn't take long before we started hanging out at gay bars because there we felt accepted and loved and understood. We stopped going to Church because by then our behavior was contrary to Church standards.

This story has a happy ending, however, because six months ago I found an LDS support group called Evergreen. There I am finding in a positive way the love and acceptance I had been seeking at the gay bars. I am also finding answers to questions I thought had no answers. I know it will take a long time to completely overcome my problems, but I have made tremendous progress already. I am working on changing my attitudes and the way I feel about myself. I'm also working on how I relate to and bond with other men. As I do that, I can see changes in my sexual feelings starting to take place already.

Even though at times I stumble off the path, I now know what I need to do and I won't give up. I know I have a long way to go. I've gone through some dark days and not always with flying colors. But that's the down side; the most important thing is that it has been worth every moment. I'm honestly happier than I've ever been. I'm leaving my worldly value system and becoming a spiritually-oriented person in Christ. Everyone needs to do this, whether they have homosexual feelings or not. We just need to have faith. If Jesus was able to heal the sick and raise the dead, certainly he can heal my homosexual problems.

He Will Help If We Ask

Susan Parkinson

I am thankful for the chance to write about my experiences and

hope that the testimony that has developed from it can help others, specifically spouses, help find your way.

Jack and I have been married ten years and we have three beautiful children. I did not know Jack's struggle with homosexuality until two years ago when he began spending excessive time with a family friend and I began to suspect, but not accept, that he was involved with another man. Finally, a family member confided in me, and I could no longer deny the inconceivable situation I had prayed was not happening.

We have fought long and hard over the past two years to keep our marriage in tact. Those of you who have been through this experience understand the heartbreak, the mistrust, and the damage this kind of revelation can bring. I wrote in my journal shortly after "D-day" (as we call it in our home) that I felt as though a big, dark cloud had wrapped itself around my heart and wouldn't stop squeezing until my heart quit beating. This period of blackness was not something I would recommend for anyone. But something unexpected happened in the midst of it. What I was not prepared for was the growth and the lessons that I could not have learned any other way. I would never have dreamed that there would come a day we could both say that this experience has been a blessing and has brought us closer together as a couple. I am learning that the experiences that cause the most pain also teach the most long-lasting lessons and can bring a proportionate amount of joy, if we choose to let them.

Orson F. Whitney's words have been a great strength to me. He said: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education we come here to acquire that and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven."²⁶⁶ I have found this to be true and through it, I have gained a testimony of many things, a few

of which I'd like to share.

I believe in the power of prayer. For someone like myself, personal revelation did not come second nature. It has been perhaps the weakest link in my chain. But it has strengthened with practice, and I am learning to listen to the whisperings of the spirit that I ignored a few years ago. I am starting to listen to spiritual feelings, acknowledge them, and the hardest part, confront and talk about them. In our nightly prayers, we ask continually for the power to be faithful under all circumstances. And in times of difficulty, I have felt the help of our Heavenly Father.

The Lord said, "I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (see D&C 84:88). I have felt this power when I thought I couldn't walk in the door one more time and be the supportive wife, the nurturing mother, and the hundred other things I was supposed to be. I have felt it when I didn't think I could get up one more morning and pretend my life was ok with coworkers or relatives. And the angels have certainly been there for me on days I'm jolted into remembering that just because we have found Evergreen doesn't mean Jack is "cured."

I have an unwavering belief that our Father in Heaven loves each and every one of us, regardless of our inadequacies. He does not reserve revelation for only the perfect or the prophets of the Church. Each of us is entitled to personal revelation, if we will *listen* and allow it in our lives. I know we all have times we feel unworthy to receive inspiration. But let me suggest that it is at this time we need it the very most. Our independent two-year-old doesn't ask for help until it is long overdue. She'll work on getting dressed for 15 minutes and still end up with her head in the arm hole of her shirt and both legs in one side of the pants, which are backwards, and mismatched shoes on the wrong feet. I have to impatiently wait for her, until exhausted, she finally cries for help.

Unfortunately, this is how I behaved with my Heavenly Father, waiting until I was far into the danger zone and completely exhausted before asking for His guidance. I am learning to seek out His help

every day in the little things, so that I don't find myself all tangled up in the big things. When D-day hit, there I was, both legs in one side of my pants, mismatched shoes and all, saying "*Help!* Get me out of this mess." He is there and waiting to help if we but ask.

In life, sometimes we feel like we can take Satan on in a one-on-one game of basketball and win. One thing is certain, Satan will always win unless we employ the Lords help.

I spent many hours agonizing over "Why me?" "Why am I going through the agony of this trial?" "Is the Lord just trying to measure my inadequacies?" Finally, I am realizing that the Lord does not give us tests to measure us. Just as I give each of my children gradually more and more responsibility to teach them, our Father in Heaven gives us adversity so we can grow and gain spiritual strength.

I love my Heavenly Father. I appreciate His faith in me to overcome the trials I have been given. I am especially grateful for our elder brother Jesus Christ and the atonement that provides us with a way back home, for me and couple of friends I know that weren't born perfect. We are all working toward the same goal whether a spouse, a friend, family or struggler. We are striving to become more like Christ, to overcome our own weaknesses and to someday reach the Celestial Kingdom. I have a long way to go, but I am grateful for the chance I've been given.

A Letter to a Brother

Dear Frank,

I really enjoyed seeing you at the family reunion last week. It's a shame that brothers have to live so far away. I had hoped to find some time to talk in private, but before I knew it, it was time for your flight. There are a few things I wanted to explain. A lot has happened in my life since we first talked about homosexuality four years ago and we discovered that we both have the same problem!

Confronting homosexuality is not easy. There are no easy answers

and no single way of dealing with it. I've spent these last four years trying to figure out what to do about it in my life. I've explored the options and made some choices.

During these four years, I have developed close relationships with several men. With three of them, I considered seriously the possibility of a long-term relationship, but as I considered a life with them, I always came to the conclusion that I couldn't give up my family. I just wouldn't be happy without my family even if I found Mr. Right. I also realized that I can't in good conscience live a double life, having both a family and a lover on the side. So I had to make a choice between the two, and the decision was always to stay with my family. The gospel also means a lot to me, and I know that happiness only comes by living righteously.

I've discovered the roots of my homosexual feelings. I don't have time to go into all of it here, but one of the big problems is that I used to sexualize my emotional feelings for other men. I now realize that what I really wanted all along was closer, more meaningful relationships with them, and not sex at all. With some of the good, close friendships I have now, I find that I seldom have homosexual desires anymore.

As for my behavior in the past, repentance is real, and I feel I have been forgiven. I want you to know that I'm not living a double life. My bishop and stake president know all about my past behaviors and they have confidence in me—and I do in myself—that I can live worthily. It's been about a year now that I feel I've settled my struggle with homosexuality. I no longer feel torn between homosexuality and my family or the gospel. One friend of mine tells me that I'm just suppressing it. But I don't think so. I've thought out carefully what I want from life and have made some conscious choices. My closer friends can see that I've made some significant changes and really am a different person now. I had to look within my heart to see who I really wanted to be. And most important, I feel at peace with the conclusions I've reached.

I love having you as my brother. I look forward to seeing you in September and talking about this some more.

Love, Spencer

A Husband's Perspective

Mark

I believe that my struggle with same-sex attraction started long before the day that a thirteen-year-old boy lost his innocence. I grew up feeling different than I expect most of the guys felt. Small for my class and a step behind in my physical coordination, it was difficult to compete. Terrified that I would be the last one picked for games at school, it seemed like I usually was. I loved my family. My parents worked hard to raise us well. Yet, in a lot of ways, home was not the haven that I wanted it to be. Dad was strict, though I hardly remember a single spanking. I walked in fear of his short temper and the constant threat of discipline. I don't recall being teased in school. I learned early that both image and reputation last a long time and I worked hard to do everything right. I tried to act "normal" even though I felt quite odd.

Always active in Church and scouting, I advanced through the priesthood, received my Eagle Scout, and filled leadership positions in all my Aaronic Priesthood quorums. I enjoyed the social aspects of school. I was fortunate to have a close group of friends at school and at work, but I always discounted their friendship because I was sure they would reject me if they knew the struggle I faced.

I became sexually active at the age of thirteen after having been abused by our dentist. I craved the attention from a man that said "you are someone." I remember praying with all my heart that God would intervene and save me from this man. There was no miracle. For the first time, I believed that God had let me down when I really needed him. From that point on, things were different. It was difficult for a teenager's imagination of heterosexuality to compete with the reality of same-sex experiences. The gap between me and the men I admired

widened. I confided in my bishops as I advanced through the priesthood. They were always kind and supportive, but never seemed to know what to do about my struggles.

I dated in high school. All of my friends did and it was important to maintain my image. I really enjoyed double dating, not so much for the girl I was with, but because it was a legitimate way to bond and associate with male friends. At eighteen, I read about LDS Family Services and asked my bishop if I could go. I had high hopes that I would finally find some answers. I remember kneeling countless times and praying, pleading that God would take this struggle from me. I fasted, I exercised, I studied the scriptures, attended Church regularly, offered service, and even dressed right. I did everything I could think of, yet the feelings remained. After several sessions of talking about my relationships with my Heavenly and earthly fathers, I saw little progress and stopped going.

At nineteen, I wasn't worthy to go on a mission, but I really wanted to go. I worked hard for an extra year, had consistent interviews with my priesthood leaders, and finally an interview with a general authority. I loved my mission. I even loved the MTC. I gained a testimony and finally learned to recognize the companionship of the Spirit. God finally answered my prayers. I was a good, hard-working missionary; that is, until the last month when as a zone leader, a transfer left me alone for three days. I crossed the line and in a way, acted out. I called my mission president and he informed me that the last twenty-three months of my life had been a complete waste. I tried not to believe him, but he was my mission president.

While there was no romantic attachment, I had dated Becky for two years before my mission. She was fun to be with and her mom was a great cook. We became great friends. I looked forward to my mission as a time to break away from the relationship. To my surprise, it grew stronger. One day while walking along a dirt road in South America I realized that I loved her and we were married one year after I got home. Finally, I was cured! During our engagement, I mentioned my past struggles to Becky. I also assured her that it wasn't a problem anymore. I learned the truth within months of our wedding. Marriage

didn't make it go away. I didn't know it at the time but I would eventually learn that same-sex attraction is not a sexual problem. It is a problem of the heart with sexual symptoms.

Becky found out two years later. We sought counseling with an LDS Chaplain who told Becky that I was damned and told me that I had been sexually abused. I didn't believe him. After a few months of counseling, I once again had the problem under control. But a few months later it was out of control and I was afraid to confide in Becky.

Another couple of years passed before I got caught again. We went to the bishop and then the stake president. Luckily we had a renowned therapist in our stake. We started therapy again with the express knowledge that if I ever acted out again, there would be a disciplinary council. The first visit was very intense. Within ten minutes of leaving his office, I had acted out. I couldn't tell him—he was on our high council. The next two years of therapy were helpful, but they were also a sham. He seemed to have no specific knowledge about same-sex attraction and I didn't dare tell him the truth about my continuing struggles. I asked about some sort of support group or at least a person that understood what I was going through. I knew I couldn't be the only Mormon struggling. I was told there were none. I finally decided that I would just have to find a way to cure myself, then some day in the distant future I would clear my conscience by admitting to my wife and bishop that I used to have a problem but I had taken care of it some ten years earlier. I swore to myself that until that day, I would never confess again. Ten years did pass, but I never found a way to cure myself.

Eventually I became two different people. One was a religious, loving father and model husband. The other was a desperate man seeking validation by making sexual contact with other men at any opportunity. It was the only time I felt truly accepted, in spite of my deepest secret. I acted out more and more. The more I did, the more I needed. Like salt water, no matter how much I drank, my thirst increased. My contacts grew more intense and more risky. The more people I could act out with, the more worthwhile I felt, and the number of partners multiplied again and again. I needed it so bad that I was

willing to sacrifice my own life as well as the health of my wife and children—whatever it took to get the next fix.

My two conflicting lives continued for the next eight years. I always seemed to be in therapy for one of a thousand things: anxiety, stress, time management, fear of success, or depression, but never for same sex attraction. I tried the spiritual approach without success as a teenager and as an adult. A dozen therapists proved that the psychoanalytical approach didn't work either. I hated myself. I spent my life comparing my weaknesses to a thousand other people's strengths and I always came up lacking. Eventually the burden became too heavy to carry. I felt emotionally paralyzed and unable to succeed at anything. It seemed hopeless. I could feel myself starting to snap. I had four wonderful children and a great wife. Yet, I could barely get out of bed. One day I realized that I couldn't shrug off the thoughts of suicide anymore and I got scared. With no other way out, my therapist finally convinced me to tell Becky what was happening. It took another six months to build up my courage, but the truth finally came out. She was devastated. After the initial shock had passed, we went to see the bishop. I didn't have much faith in the ability of the priesthood; I had confessed too many times with little effect. I was wrong. My bishop gave me a book to read called *Born That Way*. I read the book and in many ways, I felt like I was reading my own story. Finally there was hope. Someone did share my struggle and they had found answers. When I got to the end of the book there was a phone number for Evergreen International. I nervously called and my life began to change even faster.

Evergreen offered me the answers I had searched for during twenty years of struggle. I learned that there were others struggling just like I was and they were succeeding. It offered an approach that combined the power of faith and the hope of reparative therapy. I quickly learned to love going to group meetings. I had found a safe place where I could talk, share my fears and struggles, and be myself without rejection.

Since my introduction to Evergreen, the process of recovery has been a jagged one. It is paved with many successes and many failures. Most important, I have learned about myself and what I can do to

succeed. Evergreen has helped me learn how I can address the real problem rather than just the symptoms.

My stake held a disciplinary council in March. As I walked in to meet with the stake presidency prior to entering the high council room, they had tears in their eyes. They hugged me and told me that they loved me. Although I was disfellowshipped, I never felt more love from other men than I did that night. My journey home had begun. A life of broken promises and repeated falls left little self confidence. I saw a very long journey. I did not dare to even hope that I would leave the council and not act out again because I had made and broken that promise a thousand times before. I did believe I could be honest. I made two promises that night: that I would be honest and that I would never give up.

There are a lot of things that strengthen me as I journey home chipping away at my same-sex attraction. I would like to share how I learned just a few of these things.

I believe that dealing with same-sex attraction is much like dealing with heart disease. When a person learns that to go without treatment means certain death, he usually goes to great lengths to save his life. He begins by going to a heart specialist. It usually requires surgery, specialized medications, and an aggressive rehabilitation program of exercise and a restricted diet. It takes time and a lot of effort, but it usually works. More important, it offers hope. Something can be done to fight the disease of the heart. When I learned there was hope for my struggle, I decided I needed a special program. I didn't want to be like a critically-ill patient that goes to the hospital for treatment and wanders aimlessly from floor to floor, and room to room, picking up whatever medicine happens to be available. For me, the alternative to suicide was an intense program of study, bishop's interviews, and exercises in risk, honesty, and faith. I also learned the hard way that I needed a specialist. I needed to make sure that my treatment gave me the tools I needed to get well. I sought a counselor that knew the struggle better than I—one who could offer a realistic perspective and a workable plan. I cannot afford to fail.

I have learned that if I want to get well, I must accept responsibility

to get the help I need. I cannot afford to leave my healing up to chance. I study and learn. Becky and I talk for hours at a time trying to sort out the contributing factors. We make the journey a priority. I find that our struggle is often misunderstood and the challenges we face go unrecognized. I generally must educate my priesthood leaders about what my needs are, what realistic expectations are, and explain the process I must go through to get well. I believe that Heavenly Father helps us understand those needs as we seek His Spirit. He makes it possible for us to successfully address those needs. Accepting responsibility also means that I made a commitment to go to Evergreen every week. If I disagree with my therapist's opinion, I tell him. If I don't think I am progressing, I seek change. If my bishop forgets that we have an appointment, I call him.

Pornography plays a major role in my same-sex attraction. It was a stepping stone that led me to acting out and became one of my greatest addictions. I got to the point where I needed pornography so badly that I would drive for several hours just to buy it. Pornography fueled my addiction without the complications of cruising or acting out with someone else. It became a major stumbling block in my battle to set my life straight. In the beginning, it was not an issue that I felt comfortable discussing with Becky. I did address it with the bishop. At first, I simply could not imagine surviving without it. I told him that I had to have it. It was my safety valve. As I progressed, the bishop often encouraged me to get rid of it. One evening, while meeting for our weekly interview, I took advantage of a moment of strength and committed to get rid of it. I left his office with new resolve. It felt good. The very next day I took my stack to a friend's house. We talked. I left the stack with him, and brought home a new one. Rather disappointed with myself, I related the incident to the bishop when we met the following week. Again he encouraged and strengthened me and finally after about six weeks of effort, I got rid of it for good. I used to think that I would shrivel up and die without it. Now I thank my Father in Heaven that I don't have to struggle at that level any more. Oddly enough, each time I left the bishop's office, I was confident that I would succeed. Four times I tried. Four times I failed. It was the fifth

time that I finally succeeded.

I don't believe that we can overcome same-sex attraction alone. I think Heavenly Father expects us to trust in others to help us. It seems that trust is one of the fundamental concepts we must learn so we can heal. I learned that the more people I can trust and rely on, the better I do. Parents, spouses, family members, bishops, stake presidents, therapists, and friends have all helped. This can be an overwhelming challenge and the more support I have, the better I progress. When I share my challenges with these people and they know my struggles, their acceptance is unconditional. I don't have to discount their love for me anymore by thinking that they would reject me if they really knew me.

Because of the years of failure and constant comparison with other men's strengths, I could not love myself. I hated myself. I am learning to love myself as I open up to Becky time and time again. I tell her of my successes and, what is more important, of my failures. She loves me regardless. She often tells me she is proud of me and my efforts even after painful failures. Eventually, I began to believe her and I began to feel I might be able to learn to love me, too.

For me, it is often a difficult and long process as I try to relearn a lifetime of inaccurate thinking. I have made several mistakes in my healing journey that have broken hearts and even caused me to lose some of my friends. But true friends don't turn their backs. They weep with me, pray with me, and continue to love and support me. They strengthen me and encourage me, and I am learning to trust.

I have given my bishop several heart attacks and my setbacks have been frustrating for both of us. I expected rejection and condemnation, but he has always responded with unconditional love, support and encouragement. My association with him teaches me to rely on the Spirit for healing. He teaches me about the atonement. He helped me to finally believe that it even applies to someone like me. He blesses me through the Spirit. I progress faster when I meet with him regularly. I can imagine the Savior's love for me because I see it and feel it when I meet with the bishop.

I firmly believe that all progress we make is based on taking risks.

Once, a long time ago, I took risks and got hurt. It hurt so badly that I eventually stopped venturing out to new ground. I found safety by hiding within myself. Evergreen sports has been a great addition to my life. The long drive is worth the opportunity to associate with other great guys doing what guys do—sports. It means a lot to finally learn how to shoot or dribble a basketball, how to bat, and why not to slide in softball while wearing short pants. It gives me the chance to risk and to address a fear that has bound me for as long as I can remember. I have met some very intimidating people on the basketball court and resented their boldness and strength. But as I learned to play and started to compare our similarities, I found that we held a lot in common and friendships were easily formed.

My therapist teaches me about honesty. I am learning to be openly honest with Becky, with God, with myself, and with others. It isn't easy after spending most of my life trying to deceive everyone around me. When we deceive people in hopes of being accepted, we cheat ourselves out of the very thing we seek. We tend to reject their acceptance based on that little phrase, "If they really knew me, they wouldn't have accepted me." I am also learning to recognize when things are in balance or when I am tipping toward disaster. For me it is like riding a bicycle. When I first learned to ride a bike, I crashed a lot before I really felt comfortable. Then I learned to make the continuous fine adjustments necessary to keep my balance. As I practiced, keeping my balance became instinctive and I could keep my balance without even noticing. Then I could spend more time riding my bike and less time falling off. Now, many of my emotional corrections are becoming a matter of instinct. I still struggle every day, but the struggle is different. I work at keeping my balance rather than picking myself up off the ground.

Open honesty means I share my struggles in their infancy. I tell others about risky places and risky situations before I find myself in them. While I am strong, I constantly build fences for possible times of weakness and I express my concerns before they become actions.

Becky also taught me about the power of faith. Day after day as we held our morning prayer she would ask Heavenly Father to carry my

burden and remove my desires to act out until I was strong enough to carry them myself. Having prayed for a similar blessing for years, I expected no relief. But there was relief. My desires were almost completely eliminated. Through Becky's faith, for the first time I experienced the joys that come from obedience to the laws of chastity. The burdens of guilt are lifted and replaced by a new peace of mind and a greater sense of self control. I had never understood what it felt like to be chaste.

My relationship with Becky has grown immeasurably. We have learned to trust each another, have broken that trust, and rebuilt it more times than I would like to admit. We have learned to talk without judgement and have learned how to be supportive. I feel like I finally have the marriage and friendship I have always wanted—one where I can express my fears and weaknesses and where I receive support and understanding that strengthens me. It makes me more than I would ever be by myself. Becky has also learned to let go. It seems like it would be a lot easier if she could meet all of my needs, but she cannot. I must go back and address the insecurities of a little boy who felt alone, rejected, and even betrayed by other men. She does help me to keep it all in perspective, and even to notice the need to address specific issues. But we both realize that ultimately I am responsible for my success.

Our physical relationship has also grown. Although we have been married fourteen years, most of those years I resented the need to have sex. I avoided it and responded only out of a sense of duty. Although I never thought I would look forward to a normal relationship or find it emotionally satisfying, I can honestly say that I now love the physical relationship we share. It exceeds anything I have experienced in the past, both emotionally and physically.

I believe there are many ways we can experience a change of heart, especially when the powers of heaven are invoked by our faith in God and our works in righteousness. I decided never to return to the disciplinary council until I was sure I was ready. The thought of another broken promise was too much to bear. In June, I returned to the high council, confident in the Lord's confirmation to me that it was

time for the next step. A few new faces had joined the high council in the past sixteen months, including my next-door neighbor. Once again, I was treated to a strong witness that God loves me. The leaders of my stake love me as well. That single night reflected months of work, frustration, faith, and tears. My blessings were restored, and on the fourth of July the entire nation celebrated as I led my eight-year-old son into the waters of baptism. Once again, I thanked God for His mercy, His love, and His priesthood.

I have a personal testimony of this work. I know that it is ordained by God. He has provided a plan that demonstrates His love for us. I know that He watches over each one of us and longs to help us if we will believe in Him. Several times I find myself struggling with all of my strength to succeed. The more I struggle, the more difficult it becomes. When I finally let go and place my burdens before the Lord, He lifts me up. Try as we may, we cannot win this battle alone. I am grateful for the knowledge that He is there for me if I will let Him in.

There are so many areas that I can feel the hand of God working in my life to help me overcome. I have also seen it working in the lives of others. While there are many facets to the progress we make, I have found two essential elements: the hope of reparative therapy and the power of the Savior's atonement and unconditional love. Never have I felt the Lord's influence so strongly in my life as I do now. My mission president was wrong. My mission to South America was a success. I gained a testimony, learned to recognize the companionship of the Spirit, developed a foundation of faith, fell in love with Becky, and influenced thousands of people for good. I have a new mission now and perhaps this calling is greater than the first. And perhaps the results will be more important and significant as well.

I have no doubt that the Lord lives and, more important, that He loves me. He loves each one of us just the way we are. There is hope. We can be happy. He wants us to succeed. He will help us. I believe this struggle tries the faith of some of God's most valiant souls. I also believe He holds a special place in His heart for each one of us. We did not ask for this challenge which in many ways requires effort and sacrifice akin to that of the pioneers who crossed the plains. Yet, we

too shall arrive at our journey's end purified and strengthened as we walk with God. May He bless your every step and lighten your burdens as you seek the mighty change of heart He has promised.

Your Brother in Faith, Mark

A Wife's Perspective

Becky

The day before Mark and I were engaged, he told me that he had been sexually molested by a family friend as a young boy. I reassured him that I loved him and that it did not change the way I felt about him. I told him how sorry I was that he had to go through such an ordeal. We didn't discuss the subject again. I didn't think to ask about any lingering problems or really understand that there could be other associated issues.

We were married in the temple and I felt it was the beginning of a perfect life together. We struggled with the normal problems of young married couples, but all my dreams were coming true and I knew that with Mark by my side we could overcome them all. I often joked with Mark that my only sin was loving him too much.

We had been married just over two years when the first bombshell fell. I found some pornography Mark had hidden. I confronted him and the continuing issues of same-sex attraction were revealed. I heard it, but could not or would not accept it. We went to the bishop and had some counseling from an army chaplain, but the chaplain seemed angry when the Church didn't take any action. He told me to divorce Mark while I could still salvage my life. The bishop, on the other hand, told me that Mark really loved me and if I did everything I could to help him, we would make it. Our first child was four months old and I chose to believe my bishop. Thus began my quest to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, companion, and Church member. The list was endless, but if I could do it all, I would save my marriage and, more important, my husband.

Mark assured me that things were better and that somehow things

had fallen into place. I thought my plan was working. If I were perfect, or if I could just prove to him that I was enough and loved him unconditionally, all would be well. Once again, while never really knowing much about the problem, the subject became a closed issue and stayed closed for two years.

A few days before Christmas, I was looking for something, opened his briefcase, and found another magazine. This time I took our son and left. Mark immediately went to the bishop who sent him to the stake president. I went with Mark to his appointment with the stake president expecting the worst—a Church council. The stake president decided against a council and placed Mark on probation. He advised him to see a counselor in our stake, an authority on sexual abuse and problems. He told me he was sure that Mark truly loved me, wanted to repent, and get better. He said that I could help him by staying with him and loving him and that I should never give him any reason to “act out.” If I would do these things, our marriage would be saved. The stake president told Mark that if anything happened again, there would be a Church council. I told Mark if anything ever happened again, our marriage was over. I returned home and tried even harder to be enough to make Mark “be good,” determined to never give him any reason to “act out” again. We went to counseling with the expert that our stake president recommended, which proved to be a very painful experience for me. I was told that because I was a prudish Mormon woman, I could not expect to make my husband happy. But he seemed to be helping Mark. We finished up our counseling sessions and Mark was taken off Church probation. Things seemed a lot better and again the subject was closed.

Eight years passed. They were pretty good years, although we seemed to always be having bad luck. Mark couldn’t seem to get through school. I became very dependent or codependent on Mark. I lived in fear of making a mistake and causing him to “act out,” and wanted to be with him all the time. Eventually, Mark confided to me that school was a difficult place for him to be. When he said he was having a hard time, I would encourage him to stay home with me. That way he was safe and so was I. We loved being together and we had

some really good times, but we weren't making progress.

One day I suggested to Mark that he might need some counseling. I felt that he didn't feel worthy to succeed and would unconsciously set himself up for failure. Mark did begin some counseling and for a while things got a little better, then the old patterns became apparent again: financial trouble, not doing well in school, and depression I didn't understand. I told Mark I wanted to go to counseling with him because I wondered if I might be contributing to the cycles although I had no idea how. On December 27, as we rode the elevator up to counseling, he told me that he had never really been faithful during our married life. I really had to fight not to pass out right there in the elevator. Mark helped me out of the elevator and then everything went numb. My whole world came crashing down around me. Nothing made sense. I put my life into auto pilot. I was the primary president and my four children needed me. The youngest was barely six months old.

After the numbness came the anger. It came in waves. I tried to hold it back because I thought anger was wrong. Since then, I have discovered that there is such a thing as righteous anger and that it's important to let the anger out. I was angry at everyone: at myself for being so stupid, at God for letting this happen to me, at the Church for misguided counsel, and at Mark for not loving me enough if he ever really had. I felt used as a front for his perverted lifestyle. I started wondering if Mark had HIV, or if I or even my baby had it. The list of things to worry about went on and on.

Slowly over the next few days and weeks the question of "How could Mark do this to me?" changed to "How could Mark do this to himself?" Mark was my light, my love, a righteous and valiant spirit, I was sure. How could things have gone so terribly wrong? That's when Mark and I started talking—really talking for the first time. I wanted to know everything from the beginning. As the story unfolded, there were two things that stayed in my mind. First, he had been sexually abused. Mark was told he had the problem and he needed to repent. Secondly, my husband had contemplated suicide. This was incredible to me—suicide! These two things helped me stay and fight for a thirteen-year-old boy who was robbed of his innocence, whose

cries for help went unanswered. I felt I had been given a second chance with Mark and my family. It would be awful to have Mark kill himself and never really understand why. I wanted to understand now and was willing to try as hard as I could. If there was a chance, no matter how small, I felt I had to try to save my marriage. I truly loved my husband.

Mark's disfellowshipment was actually a very spiritual experience filled with love and acceptance from the great men who were there. I came away with a better understanding of the Savior's atonement and had a true testimony that Mark could become clean again.

Our progress has been slow at times and faster at others. We've had many set backs. We were blessed to find Evergreen, which was wonderful for Mark. It provided me with a lot of books to read that gave me a base for understanding same-sex attraction. I feel Mark is a textbook case. After struggling with ups and downs for a year, things looked pretty bleak. For the first time, I considered divorce as a real option. Mark and I often fought about honesty. Mark's definition and mine were very different. This brought great discouragement to me and Satan took advantage of it. Every day it was like I had a neon sign blinking on and off in my head: "Homosexual. Homosexual. That's what Mark is and he won't ever change." At the time, I didn't realize that because of the abuse Mark didn't really have a true concept of honesty. It was a relief when I finally learned that honesty was something same-sex attraction strugglers and abuse victims have a hard time with. I also wondered if I could ever trust him again. I started to feel I had lost the love I felt for him in the past and didn't know if I could ever feel the same way about him again. Too much had happened.

I decided that I was in no shape mentally to make such a decision. I went to the temple to ask my Father in Heaven what I should do. In the celestial room, I poured out my heart to God. I was told that I was loved, and if I couldn't take any more, it was ok. If divorce was my choice, He would understand and be with me and help me. This was the most amazing thing to me. He would always love me and help me no matter my choices or mistakes. All I had to do was ask. I learned more. He told me that if I did stay with Mark, he would make progress and

that my love for him would grow stronger and bring me more joy than I could ever imagine. He told me to ask Mark to seek a new counselor just for him, one that had experience and success in treating people with same-sex attraction. He told me that Mark should ask the bishop for a priesthood blessing requesting that his burdens would be lightened. I also felt I should pray that he would not be tempted above that which he could handle.

I went home feeling somewhat better, but I didn't fully understand the significance of what had just happened. Mark received the blessing within the week. I prayed every day that he would not be tempted beyond his capacity and that his burdens would be lightened. Mark also found a new counselor through Evergreen. I soon forgot about the things that happened in the temple that night, although I continued to pray for him.

Mark also asked that I seek some counseling for myself. He asked me to commit to go to the friends and family support group sponsored by Evergreen. I wasn't thrilled about doing either of these things but didn't know how to get out of them. Surprisingly, I really enjoyed counseling. It wasn't the painful experience it had been in the past. This time, most of the focus wasn't on Mark. She cared about me and how I was doing. It was also nice to know that my feelings were normal for a person going through this situation. The support group was even better than counseling. The people there were great. I felt loved and cared about as soon as I walked in the door. I knew that I, too, loved and cared about those who were there trying to understand and help the struggler in their lives. I wasn't alone anymore!

Several months later, we were sitting in Mark's second Church council and I listened to Mark tell about the things he had learned and how his testimony had grown. Someone asked how he had learned to trust the Savior and believe in the atonement of Jesus Christ? His answer amazed me. He had learned to trust God from me. As we prayed together, I would ask that his burdens be lightened and that he would not be tempted above that which he could bear. I had no idea that these prayers had any impact. Suddenly, I remembered that night in the temple, and the promises the Lord made to me. I was humbled

and thankful that I had listened and obeyed. All the promises that were made to me in the temple that night have come true.

Mark has made great progress. My love for him is the brightest light in my life next to my love for my Heavenly Father. I know He made all of this possible. My marriage is blessed with a worthy priesthood holder at the helm and my dreams really are coming true. All aspects of my marriage, the physical, emotional and spiritual are all better than I could have ever imagined. I am so proud of Mark and his righteous desires. I am proud of the fact that he has never given up. I'm grateful for a loving bishop who also never gave up and taught me through his example about the Savior's unconditional love. He taught me how to use the atonement and place my pain and burdens on the Savior's shoulders. I am grateful for a loving Father in Heaven who is always with me, who knows me, and understands me. Mark and I have come a long way. Things are good. Mark still has times of struggle and so do I, but we will always strive to keep a balance. We will help each other grow and progress and we will endure to the end. I am grateful for our four beautiful children. They have seen us struggle and grow together. I hope that they know and feel the love their parents have for one another. I hope we can effectively teach them of their Father in Heaven's love for them and the great gift of the atonement that Jesus gave to them.

This is my story. I could not survive these painful times without the love and support of great people: my bishop, stake president, husband, Evergreen and great counselors. Even many who do not know of our struggle but seem to be there when I need them. As the events unfolded, there were many parts of the story that I couldn't understand myself. I was too involved with day-to-day survival to see that each step I take is guided and made possible by a loving Father in Heaven. He never left me alone and somehow endowed me with the strength to keep going.

May He bless you and those you love as you work together to learn and grow.

Love, Becky

Please Don't Let Me Grow Up Gay

Brad Anderson

The best times I can remember were when I was four years old. It was the summer of 1959, and I was growing up in a small town in Upper Michigan. I remember warm summer days of fun and happiness, the eager anticipation of beginning school. After I started school, I found that my anticipation was only answered by rejection and ridicule. Because of the jeers of “sissy,” “fag,” and “queer,” I inverted my energies to self-preservation and I journeyed through grade school and junior high with the girls, which only solidified the jeers I endured.

In an eighth-grade sex education class, I heard how some boys would look up to an older man or a peer as a role model and that this was not to be confused with homosexual tendencies because it would pass. For myself, I knew that my attraction for other males was so intense that it would not pass. At that young, tender age, I knelt by my bedside and cried, begging God that what was happening to me wasn't really happening. I cried and begged, “Please God, don't let me grow up gay!”

In the ninth grade, my friend Valarie joined the Mormon Church and she gave me a copy of *The Book of Mormon*. I read and prayed and, unknown to me, received a testimony. The Church was much different from the Catholic upbringing I had and things did not work out for me to continue attending Church and I soon headed in a far different direction.

At school, I began to hang around with a new group—the hippies of the early 1970s. By age sixteen, I had become involved in the gay lifestyle, had run away from home, and spent the next year and a half bouncing through foster homes. At age seventeen, having graduated from high school, I moved out on my own. During that summer, I hitch hiked to California to “find myself.” During that trip, a Latter-Day Saint couple attending BYU picked me up south of the Tetons and, by the time we reached Salt Lake City, invited me to stay at their house in Provo. I ended up spending a week with them. The Savior whispered, “Come Follow Me.”

Not long after returning to Michigan, two missionaries showed up at my door. I wanted to join the Church, but how could I be both gay and a Mormon? I spoke to the branch president before baptism and shared with him my concerns. He counseled me to go ahead and be baptized, that there was help available to me, and he would locate it. I was baptized and within six months was inactive and back living the lifestyle, believing that there was no help for me.

I later became active in the Church again and began counseling to deal with my homosexual desires and tried to make headway in overcoming this condition. I did all I could to prepare myself to serve a mission. This was during the time President Kimball had issued the great call for young men to serve a mission. I wanted to be like the other guys and serve a mission and bring people to the Savior. After much preparation, and an interview with an Apostle, I was given permission to serve. What a joyous opportunity had been laid before me! What I didn't realize was that the jeering would begin again as early as my first weeks in the Missionary Training Center. My world came crashing down around me. How could I be in Zion and endure such rejection? I thought it would be better to cease to exist, to just never have been. I struggled through the two years and returned home disillusioned, angry, frustrated, and experiencing homosexual desires as intense as before joining the Church, despite six years of counseling. Why had God abandoned me?

I separated myself from the Church and plunged into the gay lifestyle. Throughout this time, the Holy Spirit continually prompted me with the feeling of knowing where I should be—back with the Saints. But how would it ever happen? I was so entangled in the gay lifestyle that my only reply was, "Ok, then you'll have to do it for me." That summer brought a foreboding spirit. I began to feel as though I would not live to see Christmas. I was scared, and in August went to the Catholic Church where I had served as an altar boy, and kneeling, pled for my life. On the twelfth of December I was assaulted on the street, developed a blood clot on the brain, and was given a one percent chance to live. But I did live, and during the ensuing years regained the ability to talk and function normally. During that time, all my

entanglements in the gay lifestyle became unraveled and I knew that God had spared my life.

I came in contact with another member of my ward who was also suffering from homosexual desires and we talked about our feelings. One day we read about a conference that had been held in Utah by a group of Mormons who were overcoming same-sex attraction. The Spirit moved upon me and I knew I had to investigate. It had been twenty-three years since that thirteen-year-old boy had knelt by his bedside and pled to God for help. I contacted Evergreen and we started the Evergreen Midwest Chapter with two participants and a facilitator. We met for many months, knowing that if we would press forward, this chapter would work.

After waiting so many years, I cannot tell you what it is like to finally be progressing! I am coming out of my shell! I have found that there really is a good person underneath all the years of jeering and rejection and I am discovering myself. It is taking time to repair the many years of damage, but what a relief to finally be able to feel at ease with myself, to no longer have to footnote all my accomplishments with "But you're still a fag." It is especially fulfilling for me to see the men in our chapter grow, gain self acceptance, and progress toward the men we are underneath all the garbage heaped upon us for so many years.

The world has a different voice than the one Evergreen puts forth. As Captain Moroni held aloft the Title of Liberty which read, "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children," might we continue to hold this title of liberty as a testimony to the world of what God can do through grace as we resolve our problems. I am thankful I no longer need to look at the best days of my life being in 1959 when I was four. I can now look to today! I am within two credit hours of completing my bachelor's degree, and this fall start work on my master's degree in guidance and counseling. I am employed by the University. As a high priest, I serve as the second counselor in the bishopric of my ward, and this morning, attended the temple. I know that, with God, I will one day find my Eve and as my patriarchal blessing promises: "We bless you to know that

you and the bride that the Lord will prepare for you will work your lives together in the spirit of harmony and love.”

I testify that as God has helped me to this point, He will do the same for you.

It Works!

Buzz Jackson

I have watched Jason Park (the author of this book), over the past seven years, go through a remarkable transformation. He has grown out of his homosexual problems and in the process become a better husband, father, and spiritual leader. Though each person must find his or her unique pathway out of this challenge, following the steps outlined in this book will help. I have seen them work firsthand, in Jason’s life and in my own.

Selected Readings

If you can't find these books at your local bookstore, you can order them conveniently and confidentially through the mail from Evergreen International or from Regeneration Books (see the Organizations section in this book).

Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity, by Joe Dallas (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991). This Christian book provides practical, effective help for restoring sexual wholeness. It also provides information for family members and friends on how to give loving support and explains the rage felt by gay activists. The appendix gives answers to the pro-gay theology. Two chapters address lesbian concerns.

A Place in the Kingdom: Spiritual Insights from Latter-day Saints about Same-Sex Attraction, edited by Garrick and Hyde Ginger Hyde (Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 1997). This book is a collection of life-story essays of men and women struggling with same-sex attraction, as well as spouses and parents. It provides both hope and perspective.

Resolving Homosexual Problems: A Guide for LDS Men, by Jason Park (Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 2006). This book explains same-sex attractions from an Latter-day Saint perspective and gives practical suggestions on how to resolve your homosexual problems. The companion book *Helping LDS Men Resolve their Homosexual Problems* is written to suggest to others how they may help the LDS man as he struggles with these issues.

Helping LDS Men Resolve their Homosexual Problems: A Guide for Family, Friends, and Church Leaders, by Jason Park (Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 2007). This book explains same-sex attractions in a Latter-day Saint context and suggests how to help a man who is struggling to resolve his homosexual problems. It is written as a companion to *Resolving Homosexual Problems: A Guide for LDS*

Men, which is written to the LDS man.

Understanding Male Homosexual Problems: An Introduction for Latter-day Saints by Jason Park (Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 2006). This short booklet gives a brief overview of the causes, challenges, and solutions to homosexual problems from a Latter-day Saint perspective.

You Don't Have to be Gay, by J. A. Konrad (Pacific House Publishing, Newport Beach, CA, 1987). This easy-to-read book is written as a series of letters to a young man unfulfilled in his homosexuality. It teaches from a Christian perspective that people are not "born that way," that homosexuality is not a problem in relating to members of the opposite sex, and that homosexuality can be changed.

AMCAP Journal, vol. 19, no. 1-1993 (Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, Salt Lake City, UT, 1993). This issue of the journal is devoted to the topic of homosexuality and contains articles, interviews and book reviews on homosexuality. It gives pertinent information about homosexuality from an LDS perspective.

Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic, by Elizabeth R. Moberly (James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, England, 1983). A short, scholarly book on the root causes of homosexuality. Although hard for some to understand, this enlightening book states that the homosexual condition is an emotional and social problem, not just a sexual problem. It explains that the homosexual condition is a misguided attempt to fulfill normal developmental needs which for some reason were not fulfilled earlier. It distinguishes between the homosexual condition and its expression in homosexual activity.

Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women, by Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel (Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1993). This Christian book is written to people struggling with same-sex attractions. It provides straightforward ideas and helps.

Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality, by Dr. William Consiglio (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991). Based on teachings developed for Christian ex-gay group meetings, this book identifies six stages of homosexual development and gives practical strategies for change, including

principles of daily self-therapy.

Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach, by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. (Jason Aronson, Inc, Northvale, NJ, 1991). Although written as a resource for therapists, this book can give insights and practical helps to those who struggle with homosexuality themselves. The book is helpful, readable, and consistent with general Christian teaching.

Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, A, by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi & Linda Ames Nicolosi. (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2002) The Nicolosis provide clear insights for identifying potential developmental roadblocks, and give practical advice to parents for helping their children securely identify with their gender. The book is replete with personal stories from parents, children and ex-gay strugglers.

Born That Way? by Erin Eldridge (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, UT, 1994). This LDS book describes the author's personal struggle with same-sex feelings and how she overcame them through the power of Jesus Christ and by applying gospel principles.

God Loveth His Children (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007, item number 04824). This booklet explains God's concern and love for those with same-sex attractions.

Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy, by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. (Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, NJ, 1993). Personal testimonies from homosexual men who tried to accept a gay identity but were dissatisfied and then benefitted from psychotherapy to help free them from homosexuality. Offers insight to both therapists and patients who see homosexuality as a treatable condition. Discusses how group therapy heals and how reparative therapy works.

"Understanding Homosexuality and the Reality of Change" (Impact Resources, P.O. Box 1169, Murrieta CA 92564-1169, phone 800/333-6475). This sixty-minute video suitable for family viewing contains interviews with two men and two women on the roots of homosexual orientation and the change process, as well as

interviews with therapists Joe Dallas and Joseph Nicolosi. This professional video is a valuable resource.

“Homosexuality: Hot Topics for Teens” (Media International, 313 E. Broadway, Suite 202, Glendale CA 91209, phone 800/477-7575). This is a fast-paced video is geared for teenagers. It is a shortened, sixteen-minute version of the video “Understanding Homosexuality and the Reality of Change.” It includes a leader’s study guide.

Homosexuality & Hope: A Psychologist Talks About Treatment and Change, by Gerard van den Aardweg (Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI, 1985). This book states that homosexuality is a psychological problem that can be successfully treated. It discusses self-pity, inferiority complex, self-centeredness, and the value of humor. It states that homosexuality is not genetically based.

Organizations

Evergreen International, 307 West 200 South, Suite 4006, Salt Lake City, UT 84101, phone 801/363-EVER, toll-free 800/391-1000, e-mail address: info@evergreeninternational.org, Web site: www.evergreeninternational.org. This nonprofit organization provides direction and support to Latter-day Saint men and women who want to diminish their same-sex attraction and free themselves from homosexual behavior. It is also a resource to family and friends, professional counselors, religious leaders, and all others who wish to help individuals who desire to change. The organization refers people to affiliated growth and accountability groups and therapists, publishes manuals and newsletters, sells books by mail, and sponsors conferences. Call or write for a list of publications or information on a support group near you.

Regeneration Books, P. O. Box 9830, Baltimore, MD 21284–9830, 410/661–4337 or 410/661–0284. This mail-order organization sells many books written to a Christian audience. Call or write for a catalog.

Exodus International, P. O. Box 87092, Canton, MI, 48187, www.exodusglobalalliance.org, info@exodusglobalalliance.org, phone 416/283-9797. This network of interdenominational Christian ministries offers support to men and women seeking to overcome homosexuality. Exodus maintains a referral list of ministries, churches, and individuals. It also publishes a newsletter and sponsors conferences.

Homosexuals Anonymous, P. O. Box 7881, Reading, PA 19603, phone 800/253-3000 or 610/376–1146. A nondenominational Christian organization that uses a modified twelve-step program modeled on that of Alcoholics Anonymous. The organization publishes a newsletter and other publications.

Sexaholics Anonymous, P. O. Box 111910, Nashville, TN

37222, phone 615/331–6230. A fellowship of men and women who want to stop their sexually self-destructive thinking and behavior. The philosophy and program are taken directly from the twelve steps and twelve traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Family Research Council, 700 13th Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005, phone 202/393–2100. The council is a research, resource, and educational organization that promotes the traditional family. It opposes gay marriage and adoption rights. It publishes numerous reports and newsletters from a conservative perspective on issues affecting the family.

Focus on the Family, 420 N. Cascade Avenue, Colorado Springs, CO 80903, phone 719/531–3400. A Christian organization that seeks to strengthen the traditional family. It has done research on homosexuality and school programs, civil rights laws, and other public policy questions. They publish numerous books and a monthly magazine.

NGO Family Voice, 524 JRCB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84604. A pro-family organization jointly sponsored by the BYU Law School and the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies. It actively supports the policies and principles stated in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” issued by the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and has information and programs designed to help men and women improve their parenting skills. Through its university network, it has access to information and expertise related to overcoming homosexual problems.

National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), 16542 Ventura Blvd., Suite 416, Encino, CA 91436, phone 818/789–4440.

Lambda Report, Peter LaBarbara, Accuracy in Academia, 4455 Connecticut Ave. N. W., Suite 330, Washington, DC 20008, phone 202/364–3085.

Notes

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- 25 Cross-dressing is defined as wearing clothing or cosmetics usually deemed for the other gender, sometimes completely transforming themselves into the personae of the opposite gender. It goes way beyond the female impersonators ("drag queens") who dress up for money or attention. Cross-dressers get psychological relief or pleasure by playing the role of the opposite sex.
A large majority of cross-dressers are male. This is perhaps because our society allows women a much wider range of acceptable choices than men. A woman can wear levis and a t-shirt and not be considered a cross dresser, but a man who wears makeup or a dress is. The same is true of emotional and physical relationships in our society. It is acceptable for women to touch, hug, and even hold hands in public, but the same is not acceptable for men. It is estimated there are more than eight million cross-dressers in the United States — three to five percent of the general population. Independent of biological gender (male or female) and gender orientation (heterosexual or homosexual), cross-dressing is a matter of gender presentation — the dress, mannerisms, and style with which people present themselves.
Cross-dressers typically feel isolated and are secretive about their behavior. For many, it is an escape into fantasy as a way of relieving stress. Cross-dressers often suffer from self-doubt, denial, depression, and suicidal thoughts and acts. Cross-dressing is little understood by the cross-dressers themselves and by the psychiatric community. (See "Hetero Guys in Disguise: The Psychology of Crossdressing, Eve Leonard, *Catalyst* newspaper, Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 1995, pp. 12–14.)
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