

Bishop Keith B. McMullin

Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

Evergreen International 20th Annual Conference
September 18, 2010



There is no more highly charged topic on the public stage today than the one dealing with same-gender attraction. Advocacy groups, politicians, and voices from the fields of law, science and religion trumpet their respective views with great fervor. The media fans each spark of controversy into hotly contested debate. Amid this contest of opinions, several things become apparent.

First, far less is known about the causes of same-gender attraction than is claimed to be known. Preliminary findings are touted as proven facts while retractions or contradicting evidence about the same issue receive little, if any, attention. The result is an abundance of untruth and distortions worthy of Isaiah's warning:

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! . . . [Who] justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! . . . They have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 5:20–21, 23, 24; see also 2 Nephi 15:18–24).

Second, the personal well-being of those struggling with same-gender attraction often declines with each so-called public victory for same-sex attraction. Increased public acceptance of same-sex behavior inevitably leads to a diminution of personal, righteous behavior. When sophistry prevails, the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life is obscured. Hence the Savior's warning: *"Enter ye in at the strait gate; . . . Beware of false prophets, [who] come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:13, 15; see also 3 Nephi 14:13, 15).*

Third, in the chasm between man's ways and God's laws regarding same-gender issues, there stand earnest souls yearning for understanding and solutions to what for them is a moral conundrum. Initiatives to legitimize same-sex attraction deepen their moral conundrum. For example, the cultural adaptations to same-gender marriage will, in time, make the prospect of eternal marriage and family more difficult to attain. Wide acceptance of same-sex attraction will inevitably foster greater deviance from God's laws. These moral disparities remind us again of the Lord's words:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8–9; see also verses 10–11).

In the midst of this contest of opinions and confusion, duly appointed and authorized leaders in the Lord's Church are called upon to counsel and assist those struggling with same-gender attraction. Unlike the world, what these local priesthood leaders do can have an everlasting effect for good on the precious souls seeking their help. They become a *means* for increasing one's faith in Heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ, and in oneself. They become *watchmen* sounding the alarm, turning people from paths that are wayward to the one that leads heavenward. Priesthood leaders become *instruments* for introducing to man and woman a comprehension of God's love and the eternal happiness He wishes to bestow upon them. It is for these reasons that I direct my remarks to the priesthood leaders who are in our audience today.

As you help people who struggle with this human frailty, it is essential that you be doctrinally correct and God-inspired. In the words of President Boyd K. Packer, "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior" ("Little Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 16–18; see also Alma 31:5). The following are several fundamental doctrines and associated practices that will assist you in your ministry. I pray they will also be of great worth to others present who hear them.

Who We Really Are. Many years ago, I served as a mission president for the Church. Upon arrival in the mission, we met and got acquainted with each of the missionaries, elders and sisters alike. Those who were worried or having problems or misbehaving often said, "I am one of your problem elders" or "I am one of your problem sisters." This statement bothered me. It did not ring true.

After a few such exchanges, I began correcting the misunderstanding in this way: "There are no problem elders or problem sisters in this mission. You are a missionary, called of God and entrusted with sacred things. While you may have problems, that does not make you special. Each of us has problems, and together we shall overcome them. But

please do not characterize yourself as something you are not.”

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have reaffirmed that “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

If someone seeking your help says to you, “I am homosexual” or “I am lesbian” or “I am gay,” correct this miscasting. Heavenly Father does not speak of His children this way, and neither should we. It is simply not true. To speak this way sows seeds of doubt and deceit about who we really are. It belittles, depreciates and disparages the individual.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained it this way: “The words *homosexual*, *lesbian*, and *gay* are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns [or pronouns] to identify particular conditions or specific persons. . . . It is wrong to use these words to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual behavior” (“Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, 9).

The Psalmist wrote: “*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour*” (Psalm 8:4–5).

Teach each person of his or her divine nature, that he or she is a son or daughter of God with all of the attributes and potential this implies. Encourage the individual to pray and seek divine confirmation of this truth. To the honest seeker, the confirmation will come by the power of the Holy Ghost, and with it will come the faith and fortitude to conquer challenges arising from same-gender attraction. This truth, when so embraced, will thwart the deceptions advanced by Satan, our vicious and formidable adversary (see 1 Nephi 10:17–22).

Mortal Conditions versus Immortal Possibilities. When I was a youngster, my mother discouraged me from using common language when speaking of sacred or special things. For example, instead of referring to an expectant mother as being pregnant, she encouraged me to say “she is expecting a baby.” In Mother’s view, the latter description was more respectful and reverential, the former more clinical and common. Her teachings have had a salient effect upon me. The older I become, the more meaningful is her wisdom. The more we see and speak of intimate things as mere biology, the less likely we are to view and understand them in the context of exalting theology.

Peter, the fisherman, was devout in living the law of Moses governing what flesh could be eaten (see Leviticus 11). But

as the chief apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, his vision was lifted above mortal or common conditions to view the eternal ways of God for all of His children. This transformation took place as he received the remarkable vision that the gospel was to be taken to the Gentile nations.

The scriptures record that “*Peter went up upon the housetop to pray . . . and he became very hungry. . . . He . . . saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, . . . wherein were all manner of . . . beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to. . . Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*” (Acts 10:9–15; see also verses 16–48). Said Peter of this experience: “*God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean*” (Acts 10:28).

The Lord views us in the context of our immortal possibilities, not in the light of our mortal limitations. He “*esteemeth all flesh in one; [and] he that is righteous is favored of God*” (1 Nephi 17:35). He does not view us as forever poor or halt or maimed or blind, though He is compassionate toward these conditions and knows the purpose of each in the lives they affect. Mortal limitations are with us only for a season. They were not part of us before birth and will not be present in our lives beyond the grave.

“Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”). It is vital to our happiness; it is everlasting and unchanging.

Same-gender attraction is a mortal challenge. As with all such limitations, in and of itself it is neither evil nor sinful. For example, same-gender attractions that result in genuine friendships and beloved, righteous associations are desirable and praiseworthy.

But as with all mortal conditions, if the inclination of same-**or** opposite-gender attraction leads a person to violate the laws of God or to mar one’s immortal possibilities, this inclination needs to be controlled and overcome. Sexual thoughts and behaviors, except for those within the bonds of marriage between husband and wife, fall into this category. Conquering them becomes part of this mortal probation, part of what must be done as we “*prepare to meet God*” (Alma 34:32).

I commend to you the following counsel:

“Most of us are born with [or develop] thorns in the flesh, some more visible, some more serious than others. We all seem to have susceptibilities to one disorder or another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and power to control our thoughts and 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 controlled by*

our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim ‘I was born this 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.

“God has promised that he will consecrate our afflictions for our gain (see 2 Ne. 2:2). The efforts we expend in overcoming . . . weakness build a spiritual strength that will serve us throughout eternity. Thus, when Paul prayed thrice that his ‘thorn in the flesh’ would depart from him, the Lord replied, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’

“Obedient, Paul concluded:

“ *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

“ *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong’* (2 Cor. 12:9-10).” (“Same-Gender Attraction,” 9–10).

Again, the Lord is mindful of and compassionate toward our thorns of the flesh. He knows them and understands the burdens they impose and the eternal purpose of each in the lives they affect. His promise is sure: “*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; see also D&C 12:8; 112:10; 136:31–33).

Priesthood leaders, help those who seek your guidance to gain an immortal perspective of life. Encourage them to “*pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord*” (D&C 68:28). As they do, like the day’s dawn following the dark night, they will triumph over all their infirmities. As it is written, Jesus went “*forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities*” (Alma 7:11–12; see also D&C 58:28; 62:1).

We Know All Mankind May Be Saved. Every person comes into this world pure and innocent before God. We are all born this way! Furthermore, in the words of the Prophet Joseph, “All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement” (*History of the Church*, 6:311). “We believe”—and I testify that it is true—“that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3).

Some years ago President James E. Faust, then a member of the First Presidency, provided these marvelous insights: “The complexities of this life at times tend to be very dehumanizing and overwhelming. . . . All of us benefit from the transcendent blessings of the Atonement and the Resurrection, through which the divine healing process can work in our lives. . . . Through faith and righteousness all of the iniquities, injuries, and pains of this life can be fully compensated for and made right. Blessings denied in this life will be fully recompensed in the eternities. . . . I believe the kind and merciful God, whose children we are, will judge us as lightly as He can for the wrongs we have done and give us the maximum blessing for the good that we do” (“Woman, Why Weepst Thou?” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 52).

Whether spawned by ignorance or misguided intent, heretical is the concept of pre-destination; false is the idea that Heavenly Father is partial or arbitrary or capricious or changeable (see Moroni 8:18); deceitful, even abominable, is the notion that God makes it impossible for men and women, boys and girls, to be morally clean. He is our Father—He does not do such things to His children. He is a God of love and of justice and of mercy (see Alma 7:20; James 1:17). His Son, our Savior, is as well (see Alma 9:6; 42:15).

“*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*” (John 3:16–17).

Furthermore, “*the Lord [Jesus Christ] . . . doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God*” (2 Nephi 26:33; see also Alma 26:37).

Copyright © 2010 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved