

**THE WORTH OF A SOUL IS GREAT**  
**by Elder James O. Mason**  
**Evergreen International 15th Annual Conference**  
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*Elder Mason prepared this talk for the general authority address on Saturday, September 17, 2005, although in the meeting he spoke extemporaneously.*

Congratulations to Evergreen International for sponsoring and organizing this 15<sup>th</sup> annual conference. It is an honor to be a member of its board. As you know, Evergreen sustains the doctrines and standards of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without being affiliated with it.

I express my love and total respect to my brothers and sisters struggling with same gender attraction. You who are true to the faith and obedient to sacred covenants are not few in number. I commend you for your unshakable faith in the face of the unwanted feelings you did not choose to have. I commend you for never forgetting that God loves you and that you are His sons and daughters. I commend you for not forgetting your magnificent divine potential and for using your God-given moral agency in resisting temptation and evil.

I salute priesthood leaders, family and true friends who reach out to assist those with same gender attraction in their journey in the right way.

I have carefully read the inspired remarks of many of the General Authorities who have spoken previously at these conferences. I have borrowed liberally from their thoughts. Elder Dallin H. Oaks' article in the October 1995 *Ensign* on Same Gender Attraction is also gratefully acknowledged.<sup>1</sup> I make no claim for originality in anything I say today.

About a week ago, a letter published in the *Deseret Morning News'* Readers Forum titled, "LDS Brethren hateful to gays" included this paragraph:

"From what I have witnessed in conference for the past few years, the brethren have rarely missed an opportunity to tell gay people exactly what the church thinks of them. I know that in some people's distorted logic, this is "true" kindness, but my

gay friends don't feel the warmth. It feels more like hatred to them."<sup>2</sup>

I respect the right of the letter's author to express her opinion. I haven't missed a Church annual or semiannual conference in more than 20 years. Never have I heard a word or sentence uttered that expressed other than kindness toward individuals with same gender attraction. The Lord was merciful and kind toward the woman taken in adultery. After her accusers had quietly slipped away, the Savior responded to her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more" (John 8:11). He condemned the sin while reaching out with compassion to the sinner. The Church strives, although imperfectly, to do likewise. It teaches members to love the sinner, but shun unrighteous behavior. The Church cannot revoke God's commandments.

Sexual sin is not new to the world. Deviations from God's commandments in the use of sacred procreative powers are grave sins. Old and modern prophets have stood firm in opposing the ever shifting and accommodating position of a secular world on matters of morality.

President Joseph F. Smith taught:

"Sexual union is lawful in wedlock, and if participated in with right intent is honorable and sanctifying. But without the bonds of marriage [between a man and woman] sexual indulgence is a debasing sin, abominable in the sight of Deity."<sup>3</sup>

The First Presidency in 1991 issued a statement on standards of morality and fidelity. I quote a few paragraphs:

"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. Those who persist in such practices or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline.”<sup>4</sup>

The First Presidency saw a difference between sinful acts and inappropriate feelings:

“There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior. However, such thoughts and feelings, regardless of their cause, can and should be overcome and sinful behavior should be eliminated.”<sup>5</sup>

The Presidency in their letter to priesthood leaders stressed that members should reach out lovingly to those struggling to resist temptation:

“Individuals and their families desiring help with these matters should seek council from their bishop, branch president, stake president or district president. We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues. Many will respond to Christlike love and inspired council as they receive an invitation to come back and apply the atoning and healing power of the Savior.”<sup>6</sup>

President Gordon B. Hinckley, again and again, has asked members of the Church to respond with Christlike love. In the April 1987 General Conference address on this subject he urged:

“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 problems.”<sup>7</sup>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Twelve wrote:

“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.”<sup>8</sup>

These unequivocal statements directed not just to gays, but the heterosexual as well, are not hateful. If certain behaviors are abominable sins in the sight of God, and they are, then the Church and its officers would be unloving were they not to sound the voice of warning, just as a loving mother warns and protects her small child from the terrible consequences of swallowing lye. The Church cannot revoke God’s commandments! The Church must label as wrong behavior which impedes eternal progress. Failure to do so would be cowardly and unloving. The world, rejecting eternal values while focusing on the physical and carnal, labels the Church intolerant, judgmental and mean. The opposite is true.

### **The Worth of a Soul:**

The Doctrine and Covenants reminds us to “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him” (D&C 18:10-11). We appropriately use these verses to emphasize missionary work. The verses highlight the infinite value of every person. Why is a soul of great worth in the sight of God? The value of something is often measured by what someone is willing to pay. The high and terrible price the humble Jesus paid in the garden and on the cross highlights the incomparable value of every soul. No matter where we live, the color of our skin, whether we are rich or poor, educated or unschooled, healthy or ill, each of us is of unfathomable worth. We are endowed with celestial potential.

### **Commandments were given after the plan of redemption was made known (Alma 12:32):**

Alma explained to the rebellious Zeezrom that God gave unto Adam and Eve commandments after, and only after, having made known unto them the plan of

redemption. God's commandments flow from the plan Heavenly Father prepared for His sons and daughters.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell in his book *If Thou Endure It Well*<sup>9</sup> wrote,

“If we understand the vibrant plan of salvation of the living God, we will understand too why it is that He loves us enough to remodel and stretch us. C. S. Lewis’s metaphor remains ... the very best:

‘Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on a new floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace.’”<sup>10</sup>

We must stick with the plan if we intend to reach a specific destination. The world chooses not to follow the plan of redemption. Satan passionately does not want us to follow Heavenly Father’s plan. Therefore, he formulates cunning imitations based on the principle of gratification and pleasure. Subtly, his devious detours draw us away from our divine destiny.

The plan of redemption tells us who we really are, why we are here and what we can become. The plan spells out the dire consequences of choosing alternate plans.

### **See things as they really are:**

We must see things as they really are. A friend of mine was born with an eye problem called astigmatism. His corneas are not perfect spheres. As a consequence, things are distorted when he forgets to wear his glasses. Trees, for example, do not have individual leaves, just masses of indistinct green foliage. From

the back of the room the blackboard is a blur. By choosing to wear glasses, he sees individual leaves and even birds in the trees. He also sees words on the blackboard. His glasses do not cure his visual defect, however, with them he gets by quite well.

Satan attempts to distort our vision, or make us blind. God’s plan tells me that my place in an eternal blueprint didn’t begin with my birth in the LDS Hospital. Nor will it end with my death and burial. The plan of redemption helps me understand that without covenants made in holy temples, in the eternities to come I will not enjoy the companionship of father, mother, brothers, sister, wife, children or grandchildren. We are eternal beings participating in a critically important temporary experience. This fallen earth is not our home. We are being tested. Listen to this from the Book of Abraham:

“And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom as those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever.”<sup>11</sup>

And from the 132<sup>nd</sup> Section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“And then shall they be gods because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.”<sup>12</sup>

These revealed visions of what God has in store for His sons and daughters leaves me with goose bumps. Is it worth struggling for? The answer is an obvious “Yes.”

In summary, the plan of redemption provides us with these doctrines:

1. Each one of us is a child of God. He sent us here, loves us and will help us return to Him.
2. We existed before our mortal birth and joyfully accepted our Heavenly Father's plan for our exaltation.
3. God created us male and female. What we call gender is an essential characteristic of our existence prior to birth, during mortality and eternally hereafter.
4. The power of Satan is real. He seeks to make us eternally miserable by undermining individual accountability, by tempting us to misuse our sacred procreative power and by confusing what it means to be male and female.
5. The plan guarantees agency - our divine ability to choose between good and evil.
6. Jesus Christ our Savior suffered, bled and died so that we might be saved by grace after all that we could do. He is our advocate with the Father.
7. Temple ordinances and covenants make eternal family relationships possible.
8. Sacred procreative powers allow parents to be partners with God in preparing eternal spirits for mortality. The Apostle Paul asked, "What? Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is Holy, which temple are ye" (1 Cor. 3:17). "The power of ... procreation is not just an incidental part of the plan: it is essential to it. Without it the plan could not proceed."<sup>13</sup>
9. The purpose of mortal life and the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for celestial glory.
10. Through a loving and merciful Savior, persons who desire to do right but through no fault of their own are unable to have an eternal marriage in mortal life will have an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in a period following mortality if they keep the commandments of God and are true to their baptismal and other covenants.<sup>14</sup>

### **Cause of Same Gender Attraction:**

Learning what causes same gender attraction is important only from the perspective of prevention. Understanding the biological or environmental mechanisms whereby a person acquires it may lead to a method to prevent the disorder in others.

Much has been written and published in scientific and lay literature about cause. Many claim same gender attraction is something a person is born with. Others

argue that the cause is nurture – something in a child's early environment. Still, others claim a person chooses to have same gender attraction. My experience with persons struggling with same gender attraction tells me that this is not so or very rarely so.

Abnormalities in individuals may be classified as congenital or acquired. Congenital simply means present at birth. The word congenital does not explain cause, only that it occurred during the in-utero development of the person. As many as four percent of all newborns suffer from some kind of congenital abnormality. Congenital disorders may be inherited from one or both parents, be the result of in-utero infections (including rubella, cytomegalovirus, toxoplasmosis, syphilis, genital herpes and AIDS) or in-utero exposure to toxic substances such as alcohol, drugs or tobacco. Congenital defects may result from a deficiency of an essential nutrient such as protein or a vitamin. Congenital disorders may also result from a combination of factors during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a well-recognized congenital abnormality caused by the toxic effect of alcohol on a developing baby.

Disorders may be acquired after birth as a result of something in the environmental such as a toxin, dietary deficiency or a perverse interpersonal relationship with a parent, sibling or other.

Genetic disorders result in a large burden of human suffering, and many, of course, are very serious. Genetic defects result in biochemical, anatomical or physiological changes in effected persons. Single gene disorders include almost 4,000 different abnormalities caused by a defect in a single gene. Many genetic disorders are apparent at birth, but others may not appear until early childhood or later. Huntington Disease, for example, that affects the central nervous system does not become apparent until after age 30.

More than half of all known single gene disorders lead to early death. Three-quarters of those are incompatible with life beyond infancy and limit access to schooling, ability to work, or both. Two-thirds impair the reproductive capability of affected individuals.<sup>15</sup>

These congenital and acquired disorders or diseases are not "normal." Even when a disorder occurs in a population with a predictable frequency it is still abnormal. Attempts are made to provide treatment when disorders result in symptoms that detract from a person's quality of life. Individuals with these

disorders often have choices to make. Behavior and therapy may modify the course of the disorders. The diabetic, for example, is treated with a strict diet and insulin. Avoiding foods containing phenylalanine is the treatment for Phenylketoneuria. Special enzymes and antibiotics are used to treat cystic fibrosis. Clotting factors are injected into persons suffering from hemophilia.

Therapies are not easy and often must continue over a lifetime. Rarely is there a cure. These disorders rarely go away. By following a prescribed course of action, however, the sufferer is able to lead a more satisfactory and productive life. Family, clergy, friends and therapists should encourage and assist persons with congenital or acquired diseases.

We do not know whether same gender attraction follows the pattern of any of the congenital or acquired disorders. The ongoing debate about the cause of same gender attraction or whether or not same gender attraction can be cured is irrelevant in the context of true religion. The straight and narrow path leads the right way, regardless of same gender attraction's cause, or whether or not it can be cured. The right way is very simple. Here it is:

- Feelings of attraction toward someone of the same gender should be eliminated if possible or controlled. You did not choose to have these feelings, but you can do something about them.
- Homosexual or lesbian erotic thoughts are the consequences of uncontrolled feelings and they are wrong, just as heterosexual erotic thoughts are wrong. They must be stopped!
- Homosexual or lesbian behavior is a serious sin, as is heterosexual fornication and adultery. It must be stopped!

How one responds to feelings is the key. Alma stated that our thoughts will condemn us (Alma 12:14).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks noted:

“The words *homosexual*, *lesbian* and *gay* are adjectives to describe thoughts, feelings or behaviors. We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify conditions or specific persons. Our religious doctrine dictates this usage. It is wrong to use these words to denote a

*condition*, because this implies that birth [or some other reason] consigns a person to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual behavior.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Role of Agency:**

Once a person reaches the age or condition of accountability no mortal or spiritual power can deprive us of our moral agency. We are responsible for the exercise our agency in the thoughts we entertain and the behaviors we choose. The claim, “I was born that way” does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. Although you did not choose to have these feelings, you are free how to respond. President Boyd K. Packer observed:

“In this matter of chastity we are not at the mercy of our physical bodies. We are moral agents, and these purported “needs” are no different than any other choices we face in mortality. We can choose obedience and spiritual life or we can choose captivity, misery and spiritual death.”<sup>17</sup>

Those with same gender attraction are free to choose not to participate. We must humble ourselves, count our gospel blessings, and take the tough straight and narrow path that leads us to our eternal home and the fullness of the Father.

### **Take Control of Your Life:**

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has emphasized:

“We must learn to live so that a disability that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving a destiny that is eternal.”<sup>18</sup>

We must not change God-given patterns of celestial behavior because of a congenital or acquired disorder. President Spencer W. Kimball taught that homosexuality is curable and forgivable.<sup>19</sup> Though difficult, same gender attraction is no different than many other problems people have.

### **The Course of Action:**

It is so very difficult make necessary changes in our life until we see things as they really are. In order to stop homosexual behavior one must comprehend the seriousness of the transgression, feel deeply repentant, and have a firm commitment to change.

Let me testify that the best way is to never offend the Holy Ghost in the first place. Let the Holy Ghost be your constant companion. When we make bad choices we need to get the light of Christ back. We start the process by acknowledging we have made wrong choices. When we "...let virtue garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly; then shall [our] confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon [our] soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion, ... it shall flow unto [us] forever and ever" (D&C 121:45-46).

Can individuals struggling with some same gender attraction be cured? "With God nothing should be impossible" (Luke 1:37). It really doesn't matter, however, whether or not same gender attraction can be cured. The right course of action remains the same: eliminate or diminish same sex attraction. Control thoughts and never, never participate in homosexual or lesbian behavior.

Is there a place in the Church for a person struggling with same gender attraction? Yes, of course there is. The person resisting unwanted feelings is entitled to every blessing of Church membership. Activity and service in the Church are privileges as well as responsibilities. People must be worthy. Same gender feelings do not make one unworthy or unqualified. Repentance is needed for those dwelling on homosexual or improper heterosexual thoughts or participating in sinful behavior. When they are worthy, bishops may extend appropriate Church callings to members with same gender attraction.<sup>20</sup>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote,

"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. 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...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...The gospel applies on the same basis to everyone."<sup>21</sup>

Temple worthiness applies equally to men and women with same gender and with heterosexual feelings. Sexual powers are sacred and must be controlled and used as God intended.

#### **Obtain the Power:**

Pray for strength to overcome. Through the enabling power of the Savior's atonement some with same gender attraction will be healed. Others will continue to have unwanted feelings. But you will receive strength to do what is right in spite of the burden. Often it is not the burden that is changed, but you will be given power through the Savior to overcome the burden.

We have a power within us from the Lord. We often fail to recognize and use that power. You possess the power to control your thoughts and to restrain yourself from behaviors that destroy. That power comes from the Savior. President Boyd K. Packer observed,

"The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel...Our behavior is not totally controlled by natural impulse. Behavior begins with belief as well."<sup>22</sup>

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland promised,

"God is anxiously waiting for a chance to answer your prayers and fulfill your dreams, just as He always has. But He can't if you don't pray, and he can't if you don't dream. In short, He can't if you don't believe."<sup>23</sup>

All of these steps can provide spiritual power:

1. Scripture study – I hope all of you have accepted President Hinckley’s challenge to read the Book of Mormon through by the end of the year. He promised blessings if we do.
2. Prayer both morning and night
3. Fasting
4. Church attendance and service
5. Listening to living prophets
6. Seeking council of inspired leaders
7. Professional assistance as necessary
8. Repentance as needed
9. Temple attendance, regular and often

**Promises:**

You were not sent here to fail. President Harold B. Lee promised “God shapes the back to bear the burden.” Some day, I know, we will have answers to the almost universal question asked, “Why is this happening to me?” The Lord, speaking to Moroni as he completed his translation of the Book of Ether explained:

“And if men will come unto me I will show unto them their weaknesses. 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 have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”<sup>24</sup>

The Savior came in the meridian of time to redeem, atone, ransom, reconcile and advocate for us. I promise He will be your help, power and strength if you will be loyal and follow Him.

Many men and women, through no fault of their own, are unable to marry. I testify that provision has been made in the plan of redemption, through a loving and

merciful Savior, to accommodate those who through no fault of their own are unable to marry during mortality. A vast number of Heavenly Fathers sons and daughters fall into this category for many reasons. Those with physical or emotional disorders or who die before marriage are examples of those who, at a later time and in another sphere of activity, will have the opportunity to marry and to earn a place in the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom. In the celestial glory we are told that: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelations 21:4).

**Blessings:**

I bless you with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his power to redeem and to lift burdens. I bless you with the power of discernment to remember who you are and to comprehend your divine potential. I bless you that you will be filled with the power of God. I promise, if you will be faithful and keep baptism, priesthood and temple covenants, that no blessing pertaining to exaltation will be withheld because of same gender attraction. In the day of resurrection you will have normal affections and be attracted to the opposite sex. The blessings of Abraham, Isaac and all the Holy Father has will be added upon you if you keep your second estate.

I leave this blessing upon you and testify that the gospel is true and the plan of redemption is real in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Ensign*, October 1995, pp. 7-14

<sup>2</sup> *Deseret Morning News*, September 8, 2005, p. A12

<sup>3</sup> *Gospel Doctrine*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Salt Lake City, Deseret book Company, 1939, p. 309

<sup>4</sup> Letter of the First Presidency, 14 Nov. 1991

<sup>5</sup> Letter of the First Presidency, 14 Nov. 1991

<sup>6</sup> See Isaiah 53:4-5; Mosiah 4:2-3

<sup>7</sup> Reverence and Morality, *Ensign*, May 1987, p. 47

<sup>8</sup> *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996, p. 48

<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960, p. 160

<sup>11</sup> Abr. 3:25-26

<sup>12</sup> D&C 132:20-21

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<sup>13</sup> President Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, July 1972, p. 111

<sup>14</sup> Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star*, 31 Aug 1899, p. 547; discussed by Dallin H. Oaks, *Pure in Heart*, Salt Lake City, Utah, Bookcraft, 1988, pp. 61-62

<sup>15</sup> See *Human Gene Therapy*, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, Nichols, Eve K., 1988, pp. 3-9

<sup>16</sup> *Ensign*, October 1995, p. 9

<sup>17</sup> *Ensign*, June 2005, p. 27

<sup>18</sup> *Ensign*, October 1995, p. 10

<sup>19</sup> *Miracle of Forgiveness*, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1969, p. 82

<sup>20</sup> See *Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems, Suggestions for Ecclesiastical Leaders*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992, p. 6

<sup>21</sup> *Ensign*, October 1995, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> President Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, p. 16

<sup>23</sup> CES Fireside Talk, September 10, 2004

<sup>24</sup> Ether 12:27