

Faithful Responses to Same-Sex Attraction

A Guide For Men



Kyle Martin

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By

Kyle Martin

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Introduction

It is healthy to understand your same-sex attractions and make conscious lifestyle choices.

Many people who experience same-sex attraction seek a way to live their lives in harmony with traditional religious values. As you decide how to respond to same-sex attractions, you can make choices congruent with your personal values, faith, and religious beliefs. This book presents practical solutions that may be helpful to you.

If you believe that same-sex romantic and sexual relationships do not fit within God's plan for you, this book can help you explore questions and make life choices. The book answers the following key questions:

- *What is Same-sex Attraction?* Understand more deeply your emotional needs, desires, and sexual feelings. Consider issues common among men who experience same-sex attraction.
- *How Do You Want to Respond to Your Same-Sex Attractions?* You can choose how to respond to your same-sex attractions. This book guides you through the process of considering options and making choices according to your personal values and life situation.
- *How can family, friends, and church leaders help?* Learn how friends, family, and church leaders can support

people who experience the complex issues of same-sex attraction.

If you experience same-sex attraction, you have options on how to live your life—including identity and sexual behavior. This book presents options and practical solutions that have been experienced by thousands of people in their lives. It contains writings from a variety of people from a variety of religious backgrounds.

Most of the theories, approaches, and ideas in this book relate to men. Much of this information may also be helpful to women who experience same-sex attraction and some of it may not.

The following are core values espoused in this book:

Personal Choice

People who experience same-sex attraction have the right to direct the course of their lives congruent with their values and religious beliefs. There are a variety of ways to respond to same-sex attraction. Some choose to self-identify as gay and others do not. Some choose to engage in same-sex sexual behavior and others do not. People have the right to pursue the options that are self-affirming and congruent with their personal values and beliefs.

Client Self-Determination

Individuals who experience same-sex attractions have the right to decide whether to seek professional counseling or therapy, what kind of counseling to seek, and to determine the desired direction of their therapy

program. This is known professionally as a client's right to self-determination, which is a recognized principle in counseling and psychotherapy ethics.

Tolerance

Regardless of the choices people make regarding sexual identity and lifestyle, people deserve to be valued and respected. Their choices should not subject them to discrimination or ridicule. Demands for tolerance by one group can never justify intolerance or ridicule of another.

What is Same-Sex Attraction?

Same-sex attraction (also known as homosexuality, gay, lesbian, or LGBTQ) refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to people of the same sex.

This chapter defines common terms, and then discusses attractions, identity, and behavior.

Definitions

Same-sex attraction refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to people of the same sex—a man attracted to another man or a woman attracted to another woman. This interest may include desires for their attention, friendship, and intimacy, or fascination with their bodies and other gender traits. It may also include erotic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors directed toward the same sex.

This attraction may or may not be exclusive to the same sex or may be alongside an attraction to the opposite sex. Some of these people may choose to identify as bisexual.

The term *homosexuality* refers to the entire range of issues that includes attractions, feelings, desires, sexual behavior, identity, and all its associated aspects, such as gender identity, self-perception, emotional dependencies, and relationship issues.

A person who experiences same-sex attraction may experience one or more of the following:

- Intense attractions toward people of the same sex. (These feelings may or may not be sexual or erotic.)
- Intense emotional involvement with people of the same sex.
- Sexual behavior.

The term *homosexual* is a clinical term that is considered offensive to some people when used as a noun to identify people who self-identify as gay. It may also be offensive to people who experience same-sex attractions but don't identify as gay. The former typically prefer the terms *gay* (referring to men or women) and *lesbian* (referring to women) and the latter sometimes prefer the term *same-sex attraction* because the terms *gay* or *lesbian* also imply a political, cultural, and social identity. Note that same-sex attraction is also sometimes referred to as *same-gender attraction*, although the two are clinically different issues.¹

¹ *Same-gender attraction* is an attraction to someone with a common gender role. Most heterosexual men feel a kinship, affinity, or attraction to other men who manifest gender traits and roles that they find appealing or comfortable to be around. Since they are drawn to men who have similar gender traits, most heterosexual men experience same-gender attraction.

Most men who experience *same-sex attraction* do not experience *same-gender attraction*. A man with same-sex attraction is typically attracted to gender traits that he feels he lacks—gender traits that he sees as being different from himself. For example, he may see other men as having masculinity that he does *not* have, or he may be attracted to other gender characteristics of men that he feels he lacks. In reality, he is experiencing opposite-gender attraction toward a member of the same sex.

Gender and *sex* are not synonymous. Sex is an underlying biological given (male and female). Gender refers to traits and roles (like masculinity and femininity). Gender traits used to be closely aligned with sex—for example, masculinity with men and femininity with women. But today, gender identities include not just masculinity and femininity, but also transgender, bigender, nonbinary, androgyne, etc.

Sexual orientation refers to the sex to which a person is attracted and which forms the focus of the person's romantic or erotic desires, fantasies, dreams, and spontaneous feelings. The terms *sexual preference* and *sexual inclination* have similar meanings. *Sexual orientation* is also a legal term used in laws that prohibit discrimination based on homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality.

A person may be *heterosexual* (their focus is primarily people of the opposite sex), *homosexual* (their focus is primarily people of the same sex), *bisexual* (their focus may be both or either sex in varying degrees), or *asexual* (no sexual desire for either sex).

Attractions

From a traditional Judeo-Christian perspective, emotional and social interests in individuals of the same

Some people and organizations favor the term *same-gender attraction* as a euphemism to avoid the frequent repetition of the word *sex*, even though they are referring to *same-sex attraction*.

sex are healthy as long as they are not enmeshed or codependent and don't develop a romantic or erotic dimension. When same-sex interests become eroticized, they cross the line that God designed for relationships with people of the same sex. (For a discussion of these religious issues, see the chapter "Spirituality.")

Same-sex attractions almost always develop without any conscious choice. At some point in your life, you may have realized that you were sexually attracted to other men. (See footnote below.) These inner attractions may have become intense sexual thoughts toward other men and may have consumed a great deal of your thoughts and energy. If sexual attractions are not understood and addressed, they can grow into obsessions that interfere with your ability to function at work, at school, and at home, and can be destructive spiritually. It is interesting to note that same-sex attractions are often more compelling than healthy opposite-sex attractions because they may be symptomatic of more than just sexual desires—they are sometimes attempts to fill fundamental unmet emotional and social needs. (See the chapter "Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.")

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. Men have natural social and emotional needs towards other men, and when these needs are not filled in the normal developmental process, they may become sexualized toward those of the same sex.

Thus, the attractions may actually be attempts to meet the emotional and identity needs that were not fulfilled in the normal developmental process. Ironically, although the needs are felt as sexual, sexual intimacy may not fill such needs. The solution is neither to suppress the needs nor eroticize them, but to fill the needs through healthy emotional (nonsexual) means. Here, then, is the irony—same-sex attraction may have little to do with sex. The needs may not be *homosexual*, but *homoemotional*.

Identity

Many men with same-sex attractions report they felt different as boys but didn't know why. For them, the pain of growing up with same-sex attractions was not so much the pain of being attracted to boys, but the feelings of being different. If this describes you, these feelings of being different may have become self-fulfilling prophecies as you separated yourself from the very boys you needed to bond with. You may have longed to feel you were on par with other boys, but this longing only widened the gulf between you and the rest of the guys. Feeling different may have created a mindset that influenced your self-perception and development. When other children sensed this hesitancy, they may have attacked it, confirming that you were different. Thus, you withdrew from other boys to defend yourself from the pain.

You may have sensed your attractions were abnormal because of the gay jokes you heard, so you learned to keep the feelings to yourself, creating further problems of isolation and secrecy, which are powerful forces that kept

your relationship needs from being fulfilled. When the rest of your male friends seemed normally attracted to females, you may have wondered why you were attracted to males. If these attractions were in conflict with your religious beliefs and society's norms, you may have felt that your innermost feelings were wrong and since you didn't choose to have these feelings, you may have wondered if there was something inherently wrong with you. This may have created an internal struggle as you desperately tried to understand these feelings and make sense of them in terms of your own internal values and religious beliefs.

Behavior

As discussed above, for many men, these homoemotional needs may intensify the feelings driving homosexual behavior.

Same-sex attractions can be strong. Because of the intensity of these sexual desires, you may have participated in sexual activities to fill the void you felt. These activities may have felt natural and satisfying, leading you to believe that your needs were inherently sexual rather than emotional. In a desperate attempt to satisfy these building tensions, you may have become involved in sexual activities that provided a temporary gratification of the sex drive, but also left you with deeper feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and frustration. Rather than satisfying the relationship needs for acceptance and companionship, sexual behavior may have only intensified the needs. (Read more in the chapter "Homosexual Behavior.")

Not all men find themselves involved in sexual behavior. Some men have participated in only limited sexual behavior and others have not acted sexually on these attractions.

There is a distinction between having sexual thoughts or feelings and participating in inappropriate sexual behavior. Since the attractions emerged through no conscious choice, you should not feel guilty or ashamed of having them. However, you can choose how to respond to the attractions and decide whether to participate in inappropriate sexual activity.

Sexual *attractions* toward the same sex may distort potentially fulfilling relationships between a man and a woman and can steer you away from the blessings that can be found in traditional marriage and family relationships. Such attractions may divert men from the roles of husband and father and women from the roles of wife and mother.

Homosexual *behavior* is of particular concern to those who believe it violates God's commandments. God created His children as male and female (see Genesis 1:27) and designed that men and women join under the covenant of marriage to procreate and fulfill their eternal destiny. We live on this earth having human experiences to learn and grow so we can become the true men, women, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers that God wishes us to be.

The scriptures are clear in condemning homosexual practices. "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; KJV).

The Bible teaches that sexual relations are appropriate only within a marriage between a man and a woman. Any other sexual relations, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual behavior is sinful. You can choose to avoid inappropriate sexual activity. (See the chapter "Homosexual Behavior.")

Why Do I Experience Same-Sex Attraction?

While there is no consensus about the reasons people experience a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation, research points to a complex mix of biological factors (genetics, prenatal influences), personality, and developmental experiences.

The American Psychological Association states the following: “There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”²

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

² apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation

beings, and our behaviors are the result of many complex interactions.³

Below is a discussion of how personality, biological inheritance, and developmental experiences influence us. As you read these sections, consider how each concept may apply to you.

Personality and Temperament

We all have unique personalities with 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 same-sex 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 may react differently. For one person, a negative situation may be manageable, while for another it is a devastating crisis.

³ See *Archives of General Psychiatry* 42, "Theories of Origins of Male Homosexuality: A Cross-Cultural Look," pp. 399–404.

Biology

Biological inheritance may play a role in influencing behavior or feelings. Some people seem susceptible to certain actions and may be drawn toward them or become addicted to them more easily than other people. For example, 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, and alcoholism. Likewise, there are theories that biological predispositions influence the development of homosexual attractions when other life experiences are also present.⁴

Beyond such predispositions, some scientists have searched for more direct genetic causes—a gene or chromosome that determines sexual orientation.⁵ None of these studies has shown any direct genetic cause of homosexuality.

Some studies hint at a genetic or embryological biological component but have not proven that same-sex attraction is an inborn or biologically determined characteristic. The researchers acknowledge that their findings are not conclusive and simply hint at what some of the

⁴ See Friedman R. C. and Downey, J. “Neurobiology and Sexual Orientation: Current Relationships,” *Journal of Neuropsychiatry* 5, 1993, p. 149.

⁵ Friedman and Downey, p. 149

contributions may be. Furthermore, most of these studies have not been replicated. Sadly, some news reports have misrepresented or sensationalized the facts, leading some people to believe that homosexuality is a genetic trait. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association recommends that people not use the argument that homosexuality is biological because there is simply not enough evidence. No genetically determined human behavior has yet been found.⁶ Most researchers and scientists believe there is no single cause, and that the factors may be different for different people.

The following sections briefly summarize the more significant research in these biological areas.

TWIN STUDIES

Eight major studies of more than 10,000 sets of identical twins during the last two decades all arrive at the same conclusion: gays were not born that way. “At best genetics is a minor factor,” says Dr. Neil Whitehead, PhD in biochemistry and statistics.⁷

Identical twins have the same genes or DNA, and they are nurtured in equal prenatal conditions. Therefore, if homosexuality is caused by genetics or prenatal conditions and one twin is gay, the co-twin should also be gay. If both twins are not gay, then homosexuality cannot be genetically or embryologically dictated. “The

⁶ Whitehead, Neil L. & Briar. *My Genes Made Me Do It!*, Huntington House Publishers, 2014, 1999.

⁷ Ibid.

predominant things that create homosexuality in one identical twin and not in the other have to be post-birth factors.”

Same-sex attraction (homosexuality) is caused by non-shared factors—things that happen to one twin but not the other, or a personal response to an event by one of the twins and not the other.⁸

CHROMOSOME STUDIES

In 1993, news reports claimed that scientists had found a correlation between DNA markers on the X chromosome (region Xq28) and sexual orientation in a selected group of homosexual men.⁹ The study suggested the chromosome may play some role in about 5 to 30 percent of gay men. Larger, more recent studies have not found such chromosome associations.¹⁰

⁸ Read summaries of the results of these twin studies at hollanddavis.com/identical-twin-studies-prove-homosexuality-is-not-genetic

⁹ Hamer, Dean, et. al. “A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation,” *Science* 261, 16 Jul. 1993, pp. 325. Also see Hamer, Dean and Copeland, P. *The Science of Desire*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994, pp. 145–46.

¹⁰ *Washington Post*, 31 Oct. 1994, pp. 5–6. Also see “The Biological Evidence Challenged,” May 1994, pp. 50–55 and *Scientific American*, “Gay Genes, Revisited,” Nov. 1995, p. 26. See “Genome-Wide Association Study of Male Sexual Orientation,” Sanders, Alan R., et. al., *Scientific Reports*, December 7, 2017. See “Not 'Born That Way' After All” at salvomag.com/post/not-born-that-way-after-all

HORMONE STUDIES

Studies have shown that in some cases the mothers of homosexual males experienced 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."¹¹

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

¹¹ Ehrhardt, A.A. and Meyer-Bahlburg, H.F.L. "Effects of Prenatal Hormones on Gender-Related Behavior," *Science*, vol. 211, 20 Mar. 1981, p. 1316.

human sexuality, but they do not control the direction of it.”¹²

BIOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of the role that genetics play in the development of sexual attractions, people who experience these attractions can make conscious choices about their behaviors. Although researchers have found a gene present in 77% of alcoholic patients, we know that alcoholics can control their behavior and lead productive lives. You have control over your destiny. You have moral agency and can determine the course of your life.

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.”¹³ No study suggests that a simple cause–effect relationship exists.¹⁴ And Dr. Earl Wilson wrote, “the disputed evidence for physical causes of male homosexuality is even weaker when it comes to

¹² Tripp, C. A., *The Homosexual Matrix*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975, p. 12.

¹³ Byne, William and Parsons, Bruce. “Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50, Mar. 1993, p. 228.

¹⁴ Hubbard, Ruth and Wald, Elijah. *Exploding the Gene Myth*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993 and “Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,” Byne, William and Parsons, Bruce, *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50, Mar. 1993, p. 228.

lesbianism.”¹⁵ Of 37 inheritable traits, sexual orientation is the least likely trait.¹⁶

Developmental Experiences

Life experiences shape emotional development, self-perception, and how attractions feel or are managed. For some people, these experiences contribute to added distress or challenges.

Summary of Personality, Biology, and Developmental Experiences

Personality (temperament), genetics, and developmental experiences all have a place in influencing our sexual attractions. It is important to appreciate the complexities of sexual orientation and resist the urge to search for simplistic explanations. In addition to any influences of genetics or the environment, the individual plays an important role in determining his or her identity.¹⁷

Our character grows out of the choices we make and the experiences we live through. Some people are naturally

¹⁵ Wilson, Earl D. *Counseling and Homosexuality*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1988, p. 76.

¹⁶ See “How heritable are human traits like personality, height, mental health, physical health, education, religiosity, and conservatism? (h² estimates)” at SpencerGreenberg.com/2024/06/heritability. Also see “Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence” at mygenes.co.nz.

¹⁷ See *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation (Ideologies of Desire)*, by Edward Stein

shy, anxious, quick to anger, or prone to dependence. Others struggle with commitment. We usually do not choose these tendencies. Instead, our adult personality develops through a mix of heredity, family influences, and countless small decisions made over many years. Together, these forces create patterns in the way we feel, think, and act.

Will Your Same-Sex Attractions Always Be the Same?

Sexual feelings and attractions can vary in intensity, focus, or manageability over a person's lifetime for some individuals, due to natural life changes, aging, reduced emotional distress, spiritual practices, accountability, or other personal factors.¹⁸ For example, some report attractions becoming less intrusive, compulsive, or dominant after healing emotional challenges, building healthier relationships, or living congruently with their values, even if core patterns of same-sex attraction persist.

You can gain greater emotional health as you address issues such as those listed in the chapter “Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.” The goal is to achieve improved emotional health and a lifestyle aligned with your faith and values.

¹⁸ See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_fluidity

How Do You Want to Respond to Your Same-Sex Attractions?

Determining how to respond to same-sex attractions is a personal choice that you must make according to your personal values and life situation.

Many people who experience same-sex attraction seek to live their lives in harmony with traditional religious values. As you decide how to respond to same-sex attractions, make conscious choices according to your personal values and life situation.

Define Your Personal Values and Religious Beliefs

The first step in this process is to clarify your personal beliefs and core values. Spend a considerable amount of time thinking about your inner values and writing them down. Don't just accept the beliefs of your family or your church. Identify what matters most to *you* personally. Pray sincerely to know God's will for you. Once you discover for yourself what is eternally true and you internalize those values, you can make sound choices.

You may ask yourself questions such as the following:

- Do I believe in a loving God who wants the best for me? Do I identify myself as His son or daughter?

- Do I believe that homosexual behavior fits within God's plan for me?
- Do I believe that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to God's plan for our eternal destiny?
- Do I believe that the sacred powers of procreation should be used only between a man and a woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife?
- Do I believe that I can choose my response to life's situations, including same-sex attraction?
- Do I believe that I can find happiness and meaning without participating in same-sex sexual relationships?

Obtaining self-clarity empowers you to do things because *you* want to do them. You no longer perform out of duty, respect, or fear. Discipline comes from within and you have the will and integrity to subordinate desires and impulses to the values you determine are important. It is a process of creating a deeper conscience and awareness of the values that govern your behavior. When you look to yourself and no one else, you become the master of yourself.

Determine How You Want to Act on Your Feelings

Considering your personal values and beliefs, determine how you want to act on your feelings. You shouldn't ignore or suppress your same-sex feelings because they are real and powerful. Suppressing them won't make them go away. Suppression means a continual struggle

where, at best, you are celibate but miserable, and at worst, you lead a double life by outwardly being a religious person but secretly engaging in homosexual behavior.

Some people choose to identify as gay. They decide to “come out” and live openly as gay men or lesbian women. Such a gay identity often includes social, cultural, and political perspectives. Some people believe that they are born gay and that their *only* option for happiness is to accept a gay identity, acknowledge it openly, and participate in homosexual behavior. This view is not shared by all people who experience same-sex attraction nor by all psychological professionals.

Although accepting a gay identity is a fulfilling option for some individuals, others may choose not to identify themselves as gay because they feel that such an identity and lifestyle is not what God would have them do.

Others choose traditional marriage and family. They approach same-sex attraction as an opportunity for growth, and they seek to make behavioral decisions in keeping with God’s commandments. This decision may not bring you immediate relief because you will still face the conflicts of your same-sex attractions. Same-sex attraction 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.

Don't remain undecided. Some people straddle the fence in a state of indecision. They may resist accepting a gay identity because it conflicts with their personal values or because they want a traditional family. But at the same time, their same-sex urges are strong, and they feel a need to pursue sexual gratification. People in this condition are typically frustrated because they have not resolved their inner conflicts. This is a state of imbalance and desperation. It typically provides unfulfilling relationships both at home and on the outside. For their own sanity and emotional health, people need to make conscious choices and pursue a defined direction.

Address Underlying Issues

As you live according to your values and beliefs, it will be important to address the underlying issues that may be intensifying your same-sex attractions. The goal is to resolve any issues that dominate your life or behavior or keep you from achieving your life's goals.

The chapter "Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction" describes emotional and psychological issues that may be relevant to you. Improvement in these issues can help you be more emotionally healthy. The remaining chapters in this book provide practical tools for working on these issues.

Once you identify the issues and deficits in your life situation, you can learn ways to fulfil those needs in appropriate, nonsexual ways. As you resolve underlying issues, you will see your feelings and attractions in their proper context.

Plan of Action

Develop a personal action plan considering the specific things you want to address. Since some of the issues may be complex and difficult to address, your success depends on creating and following a personal plan of action.

MAKE A SELF-INVENTORY

The first step in a plan of action is to determine where you are. Spend several hours defining your current feelings and actions in some detail. Not only can it help you recognize where you are currently, it can also be a helpful comparison later to measure the progress you make. Your therapist and church leader can help give some additional perspective as you ask questions such as the following:

- What are my current habits, compulsions, and addictions? (Specifically identify the behaviors, their frequency, and intensity. Be sure to include fantasies, pornography, masturbation, and other sexual behavior.)
- What problems do I have with envy, lust, and pride?
- How well do I understand myself? What do I understand my divine nature to be? How do I describe my current feelings of self-worth?
- Am I honest with myself and with others? Do I see things as they really are or do I pretend some problems don't exist? (List them.) Do I make excuses or lie to cover my actions? (What actions and in what situations?) Do I make excuses or lie to hide my

feelings? (What feelings and in what situations?) Do I make excuses or lie to avoid confrontations or situations that make me feel uncomfortable? (What situations?)

- How do I feel about myself? Do I like myself? (How much and why?) Do I love myself? (How much and why?) Do I enjoy spending time alone with myself? (Why or why not?)
- Men: How would I describe my relationships with other men? Women: How would I describe my relationships with other women? What close friendships do I have? What do I long for in relationships with men and women? To what degree are those needs currently being fulfilled? Do I develop unhealthy dependencies? (Give examples.)
- How do I describe my relationship with my father and my mother? Do I enjoy spending time with each of them? How well do we communicate emotionally? In what ways are we honest and not honest with each other? Do I hold grudges? (List them.) Do I believe that he or she loves me? (Why or why not?) Do I feel his or her love? (Why or why not?) Do I feel he or she is proud of me? (Why or why not?)
- How do I describe my relationship with God? Do I believe that He knows me personally? Do I believe that He loves me? (Why or why not?) Do I feel His love? (Why or why not?) Do I feel He is proud of me? (Why or why not?) How often do I pray? (Is it quality time talking with Him?)

- How well do I understand gospel principles? Do I understand faith, repentance, and forgiveness and do I act on it? How much or how little do I let God into my life? How often do I think of God when faced with temptations?

Not only should you take the time necessary to carefully consider questions such as these, but it is important to *write down your answers*. Although this may seem like busy work, it will be valuable both now and later. It will help you now as you put together a strategic plan of action because the answers can help you consider areas that need improvement. The information will also be helpful to you later. Sometimes we make progress in such small increments that we don't notice the progress. Being able to look back later and read your answers will help you see the progress you have made. When you get discouraged, you can read where you were and gain encouragement by seeing the progress you have made.

DEVELOP SPECIFIC GOALS

With your initial self-inventory in hand, you can sit down with your therapist or with a friend and identify the areas where you want to concentrate. Be sure to include specific things do to repair, build, and grow. Pick a few areas and write down specific things you can do to improve. A goal without a written plan of action is just a wish. As you read the remaining chapters of this book, consider how each issue relates to you personally and write them down so you can frequently refer to them, reevaluate them, and add to them.

Consider both emotional and spiritual goals. The *emotional repairing and maturing* section of your plan may include things like 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 self-worth and feelings of masculinity for men and femininity for women.

The *spiritual development* section may include growing in ways such as surrendering to God, having a mighty change of heart, overcoming envy and lust, giving charitable service, and developing spiritual wholeness. Personal growth and healing come as you put total faith in God who has the power to change your life. There is no condition you could be born into that He cannot repair. There is no condition that could obstruct your temporal and eternal happiness and potential that He cannot correct.

Both the emotional and spiritual aspects need to be addressed during the process, or it won't be complete. Some people say, "I've tried fasting and prayer and scripture reading, but it just doesn't work!" Others say, "I've been in therapy for years and I just can't seem to make progress." Some people develop healthy relationships to meet their emotional needs but neglect the spiritual needs. If you grow emotionally, but not spiritually, you won't have the spiritual power necessary to make it through difficult transitions. If you move along the spiritual track, but not the emotional one, the

temptations may be overpowering. This process of growth includes practical steps but also requires faith.

Ask your therapist or other confidant to help you gauge how you are growing both spiritually and emotionally. You may need to increase work in one area or another to keep them in balance. When the effort is not balanced, 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.

REPAIR, THEN BUILD

It may be helpful to think of your efforts in terms of a two-step process:

1. *Repair*. Fix the mess, such as correcting your self-image, addressing past trauma, resolving gender identity conflicts, and controlling compulsive behavior.
2. *Develop*. Build a better future, such as making life choices, growing emotionally, developing healthy relationships, and following God.

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.”¹⁹

CONSIDER MULTIPLE FACTORS

People who experience same-sex attraction have often faced multiple issues at critical times in their lives. These may include issues such as rejection, envy, abuse, identity, distrust, or fear. Numerous things may have to be in place at the same time for you to make significant progress. Almost always, it requires things like sincere spiritual growth, individual therapy, and sticking with a program for several years. Those who commit to this level usually see significant progress in addressing their challenges.

Some individuals are masters at avoiding the real issues in their lives. For them, it may take a trained therapist to help them understand and resolve their challenges. Once they discover their needs, then they can find legitimate, healthy ways to fill those needs. Although you can control homosexual behavior in the short term by exercising willpower, the emotional deficits and unmet social needs will not go away until you legitimately fulfill the needs and mature.

KEEP BALANCE

Peter explained, “In my own life, I have come to recognize the need for balance. I believe that a lot of the

¹⁹ Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Calendar*, 25 Mar. 1996.

difficulties I have had is the result of an imbalance. I had too few close friendships during certain childhood and adolescent years. I had too much preoccupation with sex during some adolescent years. I had too little access to a father model during early childhood. I had too little acceptance from 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 male friends.”

Not only can the imbalance contribute to the development of problems, but a continued imbalance can contribute to failure as you try to resolve the problems. Your life is like a quilt. The colors and textures of the individual pieces and threads all combine to make a work of art. Be sure you work on intellectual, physical, spiritual, social, and emotional goals in a balanced way.

SET BOUNDARIES

Another reason people fail in their efforts to control homosexual behavior 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 that he can enter the bar and socialize with his drinking buddies but not be tempted to drink, he is fooling himself. You may need to establish boundaries that you commit not to cross.

Physical boundaries may be easy to define but there are also other boundaries to consider that may be more difficult to define, such as emotional boundaries. If you find it easy to fall into emotional dependency, you may need to establish emotional rules and hold to them.

Although you may not always be able to control how you feel, you can choose how to respond to those feelings. Your emotions give you clues to understanding yourself.

Abuse can 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, define your own boundaries. To avoid being abusive of others, respect their boundaries.

You are the steward of your body and have the right to determine who can touch your body. If you have been the victim of abuse, you may have come to feel that others have a right to touch and use your body. This false perception can be changed by discovering your self-worth and working through the effects of abuse with a therapist. If you have become enslaved in sexual addictions, you may feel you are helpless in controlling physical intimacy. But with professional counseling and God's help, you can overcome addictions and gain control and self-respect.

Take the time now to evaluate current boundaries because they may be nebulous. Setting and obeying personal boundaries is a way to show self-integrity and self-respect. Setting boundaries is not just a one-time event; it is a constant process of defining, redefining, evaluating, and maintaining boundaries.

Set boundaries with the media you expose yourself to. Even things that aren't sexually titillating can negatively affect you, like gay-themed movies and TV shows.

MONITOR PROGRESS

It is common to have recurring doubts as you work on your action plan. Even as you make progress, you may at times become discouraged or have returning doubts. To overcome these doubts, look back at your previous self-assessments and compare your current conditions with them. This will not only give you encouragement but can help you adjust your plan as needed.

BE ACCOUNTABLE AND WRITE IN A JOURNAL

We can receive support by being accountable to others—to God, to your church leader, to your therapist, and to a spouse or close friend. It is also important to be accountable to yourself through introspection and journaling. Spend time thinking and writing in your journal about the events and feelings you experience each day. Stephen Covey reminds us that “keeping a journal of our thoughts, experiences, insights, and learning promotes mental clarity, exactness, and context.”²⁰ Don’t just record events superficially. Think and write about deeper levels including your thoughts, feelings, dreams, and ideas. Record anything that moves you, whether the event is happy or upsetting. Describe your feelings and try to determine why you feel the way you do. Studies show that people who write regularly in journals feel less stressed about their lives and more in control.

²⁰ Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Calendar*, 1996, 12 Mar. 1996.

Journal writing is a way to monitor and direct your life. With the fast pace of life, it can be helpful to pause for a few minutes each day to reflect on what happened and why. The act of writing in a journal gets your thoughts outside your head and slows down your thinking process so you can make connected, complete thoughts. Sometimes, our life passes by us as if it were a dream. But life is not a dream, and journaling is a way to help you recognize what is happening in your life and keep it directed. As time passes, your interpretations of the past will change. So don't just write down facts and events but also describe how you felt at the time. When you clearly know your thoughts, you will be less afraid of them and will see them for what they are. You may also compare current entries with previous entries to evaluate the progress you are making. Journaling can be especially helpful if you do not have someone available with whom you can talk things through.

Journaling is also a process by which you can work out grief and healing. If you have unresolved issues with your father, writing him a letter in your journal can be a way of working things out and bringing closure to painful situations.

USE A MULTIFACETED APPROACH

You will be more successful if you use all the relationships and resources available, such as family, friends, counselors, church leaders, faith, prayer, group and individual therapy, books, and support groups. You may need to grow in areas such as coming to understand your true self, confirming your masculine identity, healing old wounds, forgiving, reconciling relationships

with others, and learning to control your behavior. And most important, spirituality will need to play a major motivating role. Commitment to and faith in God is the key to applying healing power in your life. If you are ready to do these kinds of things, you can be successful.

CONSIDER WHO YOU SHOULD TELL

When and who you should tell about your feelings and attractions are matters that you must determine for yourself through prayer and inspiration. What is best for one may not be for another. You may feel that those who are closest to you should know about your efforts so they can help and support you.

SPOUSE

If you are married, your spouse deserves to know about your attractions. You cannot be of one flesh (see Matthew 19:5) if you hide important parts of your life from your spouse. Spouses are sometimes in tune with their partner's feelings before their partner ever understands them.

Jason explained, "I was married and had children before I realized I had same-sex attractions. 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 trying to understand them. I explained my feelings of loneliness, and we talked about masculine 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 words *homosexuality* or *same-sex attraction*, 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 helping 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.”

Ginger explained her situation as follows: “My husband...told me about his struggles with same-sex attraction...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.”²¹

PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

Jason explained, “I have disclosed my attractions to my older brother since I suspected he also experienced same-sex attraction. The fact that we have shared this part of our lives with each other has brought us closer together. I have chosen not to tell my parents or other family members because I feel it would not be helpful or necessary to do so.”

Steve 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 non-emotional 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

²¹ Hyde, Garrick and Hyde, Ginger, eds. *A Place in the Kingdom: Spiritual Insights from Latter-day Saints about Same-sex Attraction*, Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 1997, p. 13.

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

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. You and your spouse should prayerfully decide whether to tell your children, and when. If you tell them, explain that you are not perfect (if you have made behavioral mistakes), but don't discredit yourself or demean men (or women) in general. If the children don't respect the role of men and fathers (and women and mothers), they may develop identity problems themselves.

FRIENDS

Some people have also found a very positive experience in telling a close friend. 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 has helped them feel loved for who they really are, rather than for the facade they tried to present. This realization often improves their self-perception.

Todd described his experience sharing personal issues with friends as follows: "True friends will always accept us, even though they cannot completely relate. Having said that, it is amazing to find how many people can relate to same-sex attraction even though they may not have personally experienced such. I have found that everyone I have shared my 'terrible secret' with has accepted me and become a closer friend because of the

sharing. Indeed, the process was a necessary part of my healing.”

USE CAUTION

Although the above stories are positive experiences, don't expect that everyone's reaction will be positive. Some individuals have been ostracized from their families or have lost close friends when they told them about their same-sex attractions. The people you tell are human and come from varied backgrounds. They have their own limitations and hang-ups, and each will react differently. Some can display unconditional love, but others may lash out at you. Some may blame themselves while others may blame your friends or other situations in life. Be patient and give them time to come to understand, just as you expect them to be patient with you. If they hesitate initially, don't interpret it to mean that you are unacceptable or unlovable. Recognize that now having shared with them, your relationship can grow to increased levels. Deeper relationships are worth the initial pain they may cause.

Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction

The issues listed below are common human challenges that can intensify distress for men who experience same-sex attraction. Improvement in these issues can help you be more emotionally healthy.

Many men who experience same-sex attraction report facing one or more of the following challenges in their lives. Regardless of sexual orientation, these issues can contribute to emotional distress, shame, or difficulties with self-esteem and relationships. Addressing them through healthy means, such as therapy, support, and spiritual practices, often leads to personal growth and alignment with your personal values

If you experience any of the issues listed in this chapter, addressing them may help improve your emotional health. Working with a professional therapist could be helpful. The more of these issues you experience, the more strongly you should consider professional therapy and the more likely you are to benefit from it. Most of these issues are long-lasting and do not tend to go away on their own.

Gender Incongruity

Many men who experience same-sex attraction feel inadequate in their masculinity. Having diminished feelings of masculinity does not mean that a man sees himself as feminine or that he wishes he were a woman. There is a considerable difference between feeling inadequate as a man and feeling feminine. How you feel about yourself is crucial and inner feelings of being incomplete or inadequate need to be resolved.

For a boy, the concept of masculinity (what it means to be a man) is typically internalized before puberty by interaction with, and validation from, other boys and men. If you were confused about what it means to be a man or did not feel affirmed in your masculinity, you may have internalized the concept of masculinity in unhealthy ways with frustrating results. For some, feelings of gender inadequacy or shame can intensify emotional distress or complicate self-acceptance, sometimes intersecting with attractions.

Gender incongruity is a sense of being incompatible with, or not conforming to, your internalized definition of masculinity. Men with gender incongruity look at other men and think, "I am not like them, and they are not like me. I am different and that difference makes me less." It is likely that nearly all men on occasion feel like they don't fully measure up to their masculine ideal. But gender incongruity is much deeper than just not fully measuring up. It is a pervasive sense that you are lacking in vital qualities or capacities that are essential for masculinity.

Gender incongruity is a subjective experience, which means that it is based entirely on individual perspective. It seems to be essential for all people to feel congruent with their own gender. Males need to see themselves as adequately matching the traits they believe are appropriate for men. And they need to feel capable of fulfilling the roles expected of males in their society.

When an individual feels incongruent with his gender, he may experience a painful conflict between what he thinks he *must be* and what he thinks he *can be*. Additionally, the concepts of *gender shame*, *gender double-binds*, and *gender imperatives* (discussed below) can cause men to see themselves as being at odds with what they believe a man is supposed to be.

If gender incongruity is an issue for you, you may want to work with a professional therapist. He can help you think through and define for yourself what is masculine for you. You may find two books by Robert A. Johnson helpful: *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*²² and *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*.²³ The book *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus*²⁴ by John Gray may also

²² Johnson, Robert A. *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*, Harper & Rox, New York, 1989.

²³ Johnson, Robert A. *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*, Harper & Rox, New York, 1989.

²⁴ Gray, John. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex*, HarperCollins, 1992.

help you understand the physical and emotional differences between men and women.

Gender Shame

In their book, *Facing Shame*, authors Merle Fossum and Marilyn Mason describe shame as “an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging the self.”²⁵ Toxic shame is commonly distinguished from healthy shame in this way: healthy shame is the knowledge that we have *done* bad; toxic shame is the belief that we *are* bad. “Shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being.”

Shame is like a virus that can infect anything. It can contaminate a person’s beliefs and attitudes about their body, personality, family, or job. It can corrupt their perspective on their behaviors and life experiences. It often exploits a person’s weaknesses and can even undermine their strengths and abilities. Once the intense feelings of shame have taken hold in a person’s life, they lose the ability to think rationally about that part of themselves. They see everything through those feelings. It leads them to hide, lie, avoid, quit, cover up, keep secrets, and turn down opportunities. This curtails their freedom and makes growth difficult. So, breaking the

²⁵ Fossum, Merle A. and Mason, Marilyn J. *Facing Shame: Families in Recovery*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1986.

grip of shame is essential to any psychological healing process.

Shame can also become attached to masculinity, creating what is called *gender shame*. This can develop when a boy internalizes from his environment any of the following messages: males are bad, it is bad to be male, it is bad for *me* to be male, or I am bad at being male. These messages can come from a mother communicating to her son in blatant or subtle ways that she wishes he were a girl, that she sees him as a girl, or that she doesn't want him to be or act like a boy. It can develop when sisters or other girls tease or humiliate him for acting like a boy. Boys in this situation may try to please those around them by abandoning their maleness. This message can also come from boys or men ridiculing or insulting his male traits, such as his body, voice, mannerisms, or lack of athleticism. This may cause the boy to resent, fear, or avoid other males.

Over time, it can become a core facet of his identity and can turn a boy against his own maleness and negatively color his view of other males, blocking his natural desire to emulate them. This can gradually deepen his disconnection from other men. And most significantly, gender shame can come from a boy's harsh judgments about his own male attributes, particularly related to his body and athleticism. Some boys respond to this by becoming fixated on developing their masculine attributes, especially their physical attributes. Other boys may give up and ignore their bodies.

If you are experiencing shame, consider working with a therapist to become free of its effects.

Gender Double-Binds

A double-bind is a situation where there is no good way out—where there is pain or trouble no matter what you do. You're damned if you do and damned if you don't. In its most pure form, a double-bind occurs when a person is given two messages or commands that contradict or conflict with each other in such a way that responding appropriately to one prevents an appropriate response to the other. When a boy or a man experiences contradictory messages about males and about being male—and he has no way to resolve the contradiction—he is in a gender double-bind. Below are three examples of the many ways this can happen.

- A boy comes to believe that he is incapable of becoming a normal man and that he'll be shamed if he tries. But he also believes that he'll be worthless if he doesn't become like them. His choice is shame or worthlessness.
- A boy feels an aching need for friendship and acceptance from other boys. But he is unable to form connections with other boys either because he can't relate to them, they bully him, or his parents won't let him. He is faced with either the pain of an unmet need or the distress associated with trying to fulfill it.
- A mother discourages her son from being like his father and encourages his gentler nature and behavior. This alienates him from other males. But he intuitively knows he belongs among the males. He faces the choice of being alienated from his own gender or contradicting and disappointing his mother.

Individual therapy can help you address gender double binds.

Gender Imperatives

Some men report becoming preoccupied with certain male traits they feel they lack, which can create inner pressure or fixation. They may consider these traits to be necessary to be truly masculine or to be considered attractive, desirable, good, valuable, loveable, or complete as a man. When they see someone with the trait—or when they think about the trait—they may experience powerful feelings of pain, longing, curiosity, envy, or lust. These obsessions are called *gender imperatives*.

These patterns can heighten emotional pain or fixation for some men but addressing them through therapy or self-reflection often reduces obsession and promotes healthier self-perception. Therapists are trained to help you desexualize and decrease the intensity of your imperatives. Therapy can help reduce the intensity of these preoccupations and promote healthier self-perception.

Difficulty in Relationships with Other Men

DISAFFILIATION AND DEFENSIVE DETACHMENT

Painful experiences with males can lead to emotional distance or difficulty trusting or forming normal bonds with men, creating a state of *disaffiliation*. This can amplify loneliness or relational challenges. Addressing it fosters healthier friendships and self-acceptance.

Defensive detachment is where a male not only pulls away from other males but also puts up an unconscious block against the possibility of ever reconnecting. Men need connection with other men. So, if a man is detached, his natural needs for attachment, resonance, approval, and support go unmet.

Negative stereotypes of other males can contribute to disaffiliation. These stereotypes can be formed directly from bad personal experiences or from anti-male complaints and criticisms from others. The distance from other men that is created by defensive detachment perpetuates negative stereotypes because it prevents the man who experiences it from getting to know what other men are really like. They only know their ugly side. Holding onto negative stereotypes alienates these men from their peers, which prevents them from fulfilling core emotional needs.

Gender incongruity can also contribute to disaffiliation by causing a male to avoid other males out of a sense of being different or strange. The male may fear that if the other males get to know him, they will see his strangeness and will reject him. Likewise, disaffiliation can reinforce gender incongruity since the less time the male spends with other males, the fewer of their traits he will adopt. Gender incongruity and disaffiliation can become a mutually reinforcing negative cycle.

These kinds of negative experiences with males cause some boys to form unhealthy relationships with males in adulthood. There are four broad categories of unhealthy relationships: oppositional, detached, inauthentic, and needy. Males who become oppositional respond to other

males with rejection, anger, or disgust, which is a defensive wall against reconnection. Males who become detached tend to be disinterested, uninvolved, and distant from other males. Males who develop inauthentic relationships tend to be anxious and superficial with other males, presenting a friendly false self that protects a fearful self underneath. And males who develop needy relationships often long to be taken care of, obsess about male intimacy, and may be dependent on other males for attention, affection, and approval.

Since connection with others of one's own sex is a core need, if a male is disaffiliated from other males, his natural needs for same-sex connection, affection, affirmation, and resonance will go unmet. For some, feelings of gender inadequacy or shame can intensify emotional distress or complicate self-acceptance, sometimes intersecting with attractions.

DEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

A dependent relationship is where one person requires another person for his survival. Dependency is beyond the normal need for friendship and intimacy. It is a virtual obsession with another person, where you cannot function without him. You need constant reassurance from him, consistent displays of affection, and large quantities of time. M. Scott Peck explains that people in dependent relationships "are so busy seeking to be loved that they have no energy left to love."²⁶ He explains that

²⁶ *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2023, p. 98-99.

“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.”

Two people really love each other “only when they are quite capable of living without each other but *choose* to live with each other.” You may need the help of a therapist or support group to overcome relational dependency.

CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

A codependent person is someone who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior. If you find that you are obsessed with controlling another person’s behavior, or if someone else is obsessed with controlling your behavior, you are in a codependent relationship. Some men have controlling mothers who are not happy unless they are involved in every aspect of their sons’ lives. To become emotionally healthy, some men have had to confront their mothers about their controlling influence. They had to help their mothers see how their control affects them negatively.

OBSESSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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

Learn to want people to thrive even outside your influence or control.

Greg explained, “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 you find you are entangled in a dependent, controlling, or obsessive relationship, you may need the help of a therapist to understand and unravel the situation.

Unhealthy Responses to Women

Females can wound young boys by smothering, criticizing, controlling, or ignoring proper boundaries. Some boys who have experienced such wounding develop unhealthy relationships with women in adulthood in which they either push them too far away or cling too closely to them, creating unhealthy relationships.

To understand this issue, it is helpful to look at the relationship experiences that created those issues. Females—including mothers, sisters, extended family

members, teachers, babysitters, and others—can wound a boy in many ways. They may overwhelm him with their attention, smothering him with too much love or concern. They may control, dominate, or overprotect him, leaving him feeling emasculated and incapable. They may over-connect with the boy and use him as a confidant, perhaps pulling him into their problems with other males, including conflicts with his own father, grandfather, or brother.

Females may also criticize a boy for his weaknesses, causing lasting feelings of shame, insecurity, and self-doubt. Sometimes, females specifically shame boys about being male or about their male traits, creating gender shame. Conversely, they may overpraise him with complements that are overdone, unrealistic, or insincere. And females, especially mothers, may sometimes rely on a boy emotionally or even physically, requiring him to take care of them, creating in him a sense of being engulfed and used, and fostering feelings of guilt if he tries to be independent.

By failing to observe boundaries and standards of modesty, females may sexualize the relationship with a boy. They may do this by leaving bedroom or bathroom doors open while they are changing, bathing, or using the toilet, or by walking around the house in their underwear or even naked. They may sexualize him by commenting on his body or by talking to him about their sex lives. And occasionally, females also directly abuse boys by engaging them in sexual behavior or deliberately exposing them to pornography.

Experiences like these cause some boys to form unhealthy relationships with women in adulthood. If you experienced any of these issues, you may want to discuss them with a trained therapist to help you deal with the issues in a healthy way.

Men who experience same-sex attraction often describe unhealthy relationships with women that may be grouped into four broad categories: oppositional, avoidant, enmeshed, and comfortable. As you read the descriptions below, consider if any of them fit you. Your experience may be a combination of these, or different with different women.

- *Oppositional.* Men who become oppositional tend to reject women and push them away. They may do so out of feelings of resentment, dislike, disgust, or even hatred. Or they may do so in reaction to feeling threatened and endangered by women. Some men are completely conscious and blatant about their hostility toward females. For others, negative feelings toward women may show up only in subtle behaviors and thoughts of which they are barely aware. And some men may be completely unconscious of their opposition.
- *Avoidant.* Men who are avoidant of women tend to experience feelings of fear and anxiety, which may cause them to keep their distance. Or they may simply feel apathetic and indifferent toward women, perhaps treating them as if they don't exist.
- *Enmeshed.* Men who are enmeshed with women tend to feel needy or dependent on women's support and

approval. They may subordinate themselves to women, allowing themselves to be controlled by them. The dependency may go the other direction as well, as in the case where an elderly mother is dependent on her son for assistance in ways that disrupt his ability to live his own life. And the man may be bound to maintain this situation by feelings of guilt. If he tries to free himself from the entanglement, his guilt overwhelms him and he gives in.

- *Comfortable.* Men who are comfortable with women tend to seek out females and female settings as sources of security and consolation. In this case, “comfortable” means something more than simply being at ease with women. It implies an over-familiarity and over-resonance with them, sharing interests and perspectives, or feeling included as “one of the girls.” And it often includes using women and female settings as places of resort and safety.

Gender Distortion

Many men who experience same-sex attraction describe distorted perspectives or beliefs about women. They may develop beliefs about women that are not accurate for women in general, even if they may be true about the women within their own families. For example, they may view all women as needy, manipulative, weak, moody, complaining, or whining. On the other hand, they may idealize women, viewing them as good, pure, untouchable, or even sacred.

Men who experience same-sex attraction may also develop incorrect or immature perceptions of themselves in relation to women. They may see themselves as needy or weak in their relationships with women or as undesirable, vulnerable, and inferior to women. They may feel incapable of handling the demands of an intimate opposite-sex relationship. On the other extreme, they may see themselves as being superior to females.

These perspectives of women can impact a man's sense of gender. For many men who experience same-sex attraction, females were the predominant influence in their lives growing up. Women provided them with role modeling and friendship while the men in their lives may have had little impact on them. This may have left these men without a clear sense of gender. To them, the roles and differences between men and women may seem ambiguous or distorted.

Distorted views about women or gender roles can complicate intimacy and relationships. Healing these perspectives often improves overall emotional and relational health.

General Anxiety

General anxiety can take many forms and affect people in many ways. As you read the checklist of anxiety symptoms below, identify those you identify with. Also, consider how often, how long, and how intensely you experience these symptoms.

- Feeling anxious or worried and having difficulty controlling the worry.

- Feeling restless, keyed up, or on edge.
- Getting tired or fatigued easily.
- Having a difficult time concentrating or finding that your mind goes blank.
- Being easily irritated.
- Holding tension in your body.
- Having difficulty falling or staying asleep or waking in the morning not feeling rested.

If you experienced three or more of these symptoms within the past few months, you may consider seeking help from a professional, particularly if the symptom has been distressing or debilitating.

Social Anxiety

Fear of social situations can make it very difficult for people to fulfill their needs for closeness with others. Review the list below in the same way you reviewed the list above, identifying the symptoms that fit you and noticing the frequency, length, and intensity of each symptom you acknowledge.

- You fear being embarrassed or humiliated in a social situation (particularly with unfamiliar people) or in a situation where you believe your performance is being observed or scrutinized.
- You experience anxiety or panic when you are in such situations.
- You try to avoid these types of social or performance situations out of fear of becoming anxious.

- These problems interfere with your daily routine, social life, schooling, or occupation.

If these symptoms fit you, you should strongly consider contacting a professional for help.

Depression

Depression may result from unresolved childhood issues, current life circumstances, or chemical imbalances in the brain. Depression can take different forms depending on the number of symptoms and how long they last. As you review the depression symptoms below, notice the symptoms that fit you. Consider how often, how long, and how intensely you experience these symptoms.

- Feeling depressed, sad, or empty.
- Frequent crying.
- Lack of interest in pleasurable activities.
- Decrease or increase in appetite or significant weight loss (not due to dieting) or weight gain.
- Difficulties with sleeping: either unable to sleep or sleeping too much.
- Moving very slowly, like you are in slow motion; or being agitated and moving around restlessly.
- Feeling fatigued or without energy.
- Feeling worthless or guilty.
- Having difficulty thinking or making decisions.
- Thinking about harming yourself, death, or suicide.

The more of these symptoms you experience and the more severe or long-lasting these symptoms are, the more important it is for you to seek professional help. Even checking two of these symptoms could indicate a need for help if the symptoms are distressing, debilitating, or long-lasting.

Sexual Compulsions and Addictions

Sexual *addiction* is the loss of control of sexual behavior, which then becomes worse over time. People with extreme sexual addiction literally cannot stop the continual intensification of their sexual acting out, even when their behavior has cost them their job, relationships, financial security, or even their freedom.

In contrast, *compulsive* sexual behavior doesn't worsen over time, and its consequences tend not to be as extreme as for the addicted person. Even so, it can still be a serious obstacle to growth.

Addictive and compulsive sexual behaviors can include masturbation, pornography, cruising, sexual activity with other people, engaging in intense romantic relationships, and other behaviors.

Below is a list of symptoms of addictive or compulsive sexual behavior. As you read the list, keep track of how many items you experience.

- Inability to stop engaging in relationships or sexual behaviors that you feel are wrong.
- Loss of control over the frequency of your sexual behavior.

- More extreme sexual behavior over time because the old behaviors no longer provide the same high.
- Shifting back and forth between feeling that your sexual problem is out of control and believing you have it under control.
- Using sexual behavior or relationships on a regular basis to deaden painful feelings or forget your own problems.
- Keeping your sexual behavior or relationships secret and perhaps even lying to cover them up.
- Spending large amounts of time or money pursuing sexual behavior or relationships.
- Making promises to yourself or others that are later broken because of your sexual behavior.
- Life becoming unmanageable because of your sexual behavior, neglecting your job or family responsibilities.
- Serious consequences resulting from your sexual behavior, like the loss of a job, financial distress, the breakup of a marriage, or being arrested.

If you experience even a couple of these symptoms, you may be experiencing addictive or compulsive sexual behavior. The more symptoms you have, the more likely it is that you need help to regain control of your sexual behavior.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can profoundly affect trust, gender perceptions, self-worth, and sexual patterns. Sexual abuse occurs when one person uses another for his or her own sexual gratification against their will or without their consent. It occurs when an older and more powerful child engages a younger or smaller child in sexual activity. And it occurs when an adult engages a minor in sexual activity or exposes them to sexually explicit material or language.

Some examples of sexual abuse include:

- Being exposed to sexually explicit talk.
- Being exposed by another person to sexually explicit images or videos.
- Being exposed as a child to sexually stimulating behavior by older people.
- Being exposed to nudity, seeing someone engage in sex, or watching pornography.
- Being touched intimately on the genitals or other parts of the body.
- Being asked or forced to touch another person intimately or have sex.

Sexual abuse can contribute to gender incongruity. Some boys who are sexually abused by other males wonder about their own sexuality. They know that males are supposed to enjoy having sex with females and so it becomes confusing for them when a male seems to enjoy having sex with them. This is especially confusing if they

became sexually aroused during the abuse. Most boys who are sexually abused experience tremendous feelings of guilt and shame. For some, that shame attacks their sense of masculinity, causing them to feel wrong as a boy.

Sexual abuse can contribute to same-sex disaffiliation. Some sexually abused boys become fearful of other males or angry and resentful toward them. They may lose trust in their father or an older brother for not protecting them. Depression, anxiety, shame, and low self-esteem often engendered by sexual abuse can cause them to isolate themselves from normal activities with peers. And their gender incongruity may compel them to avoid connection with other boys for fear of being seen as “queer.”

Sexual abuse can lead to compulsive relational and behavioral patterns. Some individuals who have experienced traumatic events or relationships during childhood will unconsciously create circumstances in their adult lives that lead to similar traumatic events or circumstances. Psychotherapists refer to these patterns as repetition compulsions. These patterns can form in response to sexual abuse, resulting in adult sexual behavior that mirrors the abuse. It is believed that repetition compulsions are unconscious attempts by adults to master or get control of childhood situations in which they had little or no control. It may also be an effort to resolve conflicting emotions around circumstances that create contradictory feelings, such as fear or shame and sexual pleasure.

If the sexual perpetrator is female, sexual abuse may create disinterest, disgust, fear, and hatred toward women. In addition to blatant sexual abuse of boys by females, it is common that females sexually abuse boys in less obvious ways, such as having poor boundaries regarding modesty around the house and having poor boundaries regarding sexual talk, such as mothers or sisters discussing their sexual relationships when a boy is present.

Trauma from such sexual abuse can profoundly affect trust, boundaries, and emotional patterns. Professional therapy is valuable for healing and well-being.

Negative Core Beliefs

Negative core beliefs are often based on a sense of defectiveness, vulnerability, or helplessness and hopelessness. Men who experience same-sex attraction also tend to have negative core beliefs about their own maleness, about relating with other men, and about women. Below is a list of common negative core beliefs.

Defectiveness

- I am a bad person.
- I am not loveable.
- I only deserve bad things.
- I am a disappointment.
- I am worthless.
- It's only a matter of time before I am rejected.

Vulnerability (Unsafe)

- I am in danger.
- I can't protect myself.
- It's not safe to show my emotions.
- I am misunderstood.

Helplessness and Hopelessness

- I can't do anything about it.
- I can't change.
- I'll never accomplish much.
- I won't ever have good things.
- I will always be alone.

My Maleness

- I am weak.
- I am not masculine enough.
- I am a sissy.
- I don't look like a man.
- I can't assert myself.
- I have no power in my life.

Relating With Men

- I can't trust men.
- Men will reject me.
- I can't understand men.

- I can only relate with other same-sex attracted men.
- Men are dangerous.

Relating with Women

- I can't trust women.
- Women are disgusting.
- Women will drain and use me.
- Women are overwhelming.
- It's bad to want sex with a woman.

Body Issues

When people have a preoccupation with their bodies or with specific bodily features or flaws, it is a condition known as *body dysmorphic disorder*. Review this list as you did the previous lists.

- Excessive concern and shame about a defect or flaw on your face or body that others have either never noticed or have repeatedly told you is not a problem.
- Preoccupation with being too fat or too thin, even though others would consider you to be within a normal weight range.
- Excessive worry that your muscles are not big enough, even if others see you as being muscular, fit, or having a nice physique.
- Going to excessive lengths to hide perceived physical flaws.

- Being preoccupied with trying to get an accurate view of your body and feeling like you can never see it accurately.

Body dysmorphic disorder is closely related to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and can be a particularly difficult problem for men who experience same-sex attraction. Men's feelings about their bodies are often tied to their feelings about their masculinity. Therefore, shame, worry, or preoccupation about their bodies can have a devastating impact on how they feel about themselves as men.

If you checked any symptoms on the list above, please contact a trained psychotherapist for help.

Obsessive-Compulsiveness

Obsessive-compulsive tendencies are common among men with same-sex attraction and can create severe obstacles to growth. Obsessive-compulsiveness has two sets of symptoms: obsessions and compulsions. These symptoms are listed separately. Some people have both types of symptoms while others only experience one.

Obsessions are thoughts, impulses, or images that seem to come to a person's mind regularly and are difficult or impossible to get rid of. Make note of any of the following symptoms that apply to you.

- Preoccupation with being contaminated by body fluids, dirt, germs, insects, animals, sticky substances, or a disease.
- Fear of getting an illness.

- Needing to save or collect things or feeling worried about throwing things away.
- Needing to have things in order, symmetrical, exact, or lined up.
- Having to write perfectly or feeling you need to start over if you make a mistake.
- Feeling excessively afraid about being wrong or bad, having bad thoughts, saying bad things, or being punished.
- Fearing that you will harm yourself or someone else or worry that you have been or will be responsible for someone being harmed because of your actions.
- Fearing that you will do something that you cannot control.
- Having sexual thoughts that are not enjoyable and that you cannot control.
- Needing to count objects, steps, stairs, or behaviors.
- Worry about saying things wrong or leaving out important details.
- Worry about losing things or making mistakes.
- Being easily bothered by certain sounds or by the texture of things.
- Excessive religious or superstitious fears or beliefs.

Compulsions are behaviors that a person feels unable to stop himself from doing or things that a person must do in a very specific way. The person may feel driven to do it in response to an obsession, like those listed above. In

other words, the obsession drives the person to do the compulsive behavior. He may have to do it so that he can stop feeling anxious about it. Or he might just do it automatically without even thinking about it.

Compulsions can either be outward physical behaviors (like washing your hands or checking locks) or internal mental rituals (like counting or thinking through past events repeatedly).

Sometimes people don't recognize that their compulsions are excessive until they take into consideration what other people do or until others tell them that it is excessive. If you wonder whether some of your behaviors are compulsive, ask someone you trust to give you an honest answer. Write down the symptoms of compulsive behaviors that apply to you.

- Excessive personal cleanliness and grooming practices, either done frequently or done in a very specific way (hand washing, showering, brushing teeth, shaving).
- Excessive cleaning or care of the house, yard, car, or objects; having to clean certain items yourself rather than allowing others to do it; or cleaning or caring for things in a very specific way or using very specific tools or products.
- Avoidance of contamination or germs by avoiding certain objects, staying away from certain places, wearing gloves or special clothing, or using excessive protective barriers (like on toilet seats).
- Checking to be sure you haven't been harmed or haven't harmed someone else.

- Checking locks, doors, windows, blinds, light switches, and appliances or equipment.
- Checking yourself for illness or disease.
- Saving useless items, buying or collecting items that you don't use, or having difficulty getting rid of items that are no longer useful.
- Reading or writing things repeatedly, having to rewrite something because you made a small mistake, or keeping excessive lists or journals.
- Repeating activities or behaviors for no reason other than a feeling of compulsion or repeating something you've said several times because you don't feel heard.
- Counting objects, items, or behaviors.
- Arranging items in specific orders or patterns, compulsively arranging things symmetrically.
- Excessive repetitive thoughts, like prayers or reassuring statements.
- Frequent confessing of bad deeds or wrong behavior, even when those actions are not considered wrong to others.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) can be a serious roadblock, but it's also very treatable. If you checked even a single item in the two previous lists, this could be an indication of obsessive-compulsive *tendencies*. If you checked a few items on each list, it is a strong sign that you may be dealing with obsessive-compulsive disorder, requiring professional help.

Post-Traumatic Disturbance

People who have experienced abuse or other types of traumatic events earlier in their lives sometimes suffer from a variety of difficult symptoms because of those experiences. Consider the symptoms below.

- Recalling traumatic events through flashbacks (which might include images, sounds, or smells), disturbing dreams, or frightening thoughts related to the events.
- Reliving painful past events as if they were happening in the present. Sometimes this can even include seeing images from the trauma and experiencing the same feelings.
- Becoming upset or disturbed by things that remind you of the trauma. This can include places, people, objects, sounds, and smells. It can include being touched in certain ways or being in certain physical or emotional situations.
- Avoiding talking or thinking about the trauma or having only vague memories of it.
- Avoiding places, situations, activities, or people that remind you of the trauma.
- Feeling a loss of interest in certain activities that you previously enjoyed. These activities may or may not have anything to do with traumatic events.
- Being unable to feel certain emotions, such as anger, love, or joy, or having sudden outbursts of irritation or anger.

- Feeling disconnected or alienated from other people.
- Not seeing yourself as having a future or being unable to imagine future events, such as a career, being married, seeing your children grow up, or growing old. Expecting yourself to die young.
- Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep because of disturbing thoughts.
- Having difficulty concentrating because of disturbing thoughts.
- Being jumpy or easily startled.
- Being intensely aware of, or sensitive to, your circumstances; being on the constant lookout for danger. This can create anxiety and exhaustion.

Experiencing just a few of these symptoms can make life difficult and detract from your goals in life. If you identified one or more of the items above, it would be a good idea to consult a therapist. If you marked a few items, especially if you marked higher numbers, you should seek help from a professional trained in trauma recovery work.

Biological and Physical Issues

Certain biological factors and physical traits may affect an individual's sense of his masculinity and on his relationships with other males. Conditions that cause males to feel different or to be singled out from their peers can interfere with their relationships with other males and can also cause them to feel incongruent with what they believe males are supposed to be. Conditions

such as the following may cause males to be singled out in negative ways, but sometimes also in positive ways.

- Having a physical deformity.
- Being overweight or underweight.
- Having high or low intelligence.
- Concerns about penis size or being uncircumcised.
- Having an unusual appearance, whether attractive or unattractive.
- Experiencing puberty later or earlier than the peer group.

Physical traits and medical conditions that interfere with gender-typical activities, especially athletics, can similarly interfere with both same-sex affiliation and gender congruity. These can include:

- Having an atypical body size.
- Having poor body coordination.
- Lacking strength and endurance.
- Experiencing illnesses or debilitating diseases.
- Having physical disabilities.

Temperaments that separate males from other males can also block same-sex affiliation and foster feelings of gender incongruity. Temperaments are inborn personality traits that are observed from infancy and tend to be stable throughout life. Biology may influence children's temperaments and their preferences for sex-atypical activities and peers, leading them to feel

different from others of their sex. For example, temperament can predispose boys to be:

- Avoidant of harm.
- Uninterested in seeking adventure.
- Sensitive and emotional.

Homosexual Behavior

Although you experience same-sex attractions, you can choose your behavior and set personal boundaries on your actions. Avoid bad habits and addictions because they can compromise your power to choose.

This chapter assumes you have determined that you do not want to engage in homosexual behavior. You believe that God's law of moral conduct includes sexual abstinence outside of lawful marriage between a man and a woman, and fidelity within marriage.

This chapter is organized as follows:

- Principles to consider about changing your behavior.
- Suggested actions for changing behavior patterns.
- Specific advice about controlling fantasy, pornography, masturbation, and homosexual behavior.

Appropriate Intimacy

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

PHYSICAL INTIMACY

We all have basic emotional needs for affirmation, affection, attention, and approval. If these needs were not

met during childhood, emotional gaps may have been created, and in the search to fill them, some of those longings may have become sexualized. If this describes your experience, the goal now is to step back from these sexual feelings without becoming emotionally numb. You can learn to express affection in healthy and appropriate ways that meet your real emotional needs.

This can be tricky for men because male affection is limited in contemporary Western 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 out of the norm in many cultures for two men to do the same. For some men, this arms-length intimacy is sufficient for their needs, while other men 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 score at a sports event), 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 may 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 bonding 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 healthy if handled appropriately. It may be helpful for you to think through cultural norms and establish your own personal boundaries.

Roger explained, "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 when men touched each other, and I tried to follow their lead." Many men will respond positively if you ask them for a hug.

EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy includes the sharing of your personal thoughts and feelings. Emotional intimacy increases the more you disclose yourself to others. Because of the shame you may have felt, you may have learned to hide your true self from others, and maybe even from yourself. Once you come to understand and appreciate who you really are, you owe it to yourself to share that person with others. When you do, you will be able to support each other. Life and love are meaningless if they are not shared and those who find a way to be open with each other can be more emotionally healthy.

Ben explained, "Once I started 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 is 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 YOUR NEEDS FOR INTIMACY

All your needs for intimacy will not be met perfectly all the time. There will be some disappointment. Don't become discouraged and stop trying to build relationships when you become disappointed. Disappointment does not mean rejection. Be confident in the fact that other people give you their time, even though you may wish they would give you more attention or verbal or physical signs of affection. Learn to accept their intangible forms of affirmation. Remember that most men bond by *doing* things rather than *talking* about things. If another man is spending time with you doing things, recognize that he is saying that you are worth spending time with. His smile may mean the same as a hug.

To better understand how men express themselves, you may want to read the books *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus*²⁷ by John Gray or *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*²⁸ by Robert A. Johnson.

²⁷ Gray, John. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex*, HarperCollins, 1992.

²⁸ Johnson, Robert A. *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*, Harper & Rox, New York, 1989.

Understanding Your Behavior

Behaviors are purposeful and are governed by valid, ordered sequences of experience. While homosexual behavior may appear illogical to many people, it served what you viewed as a useful purpose and was rational from your point of view. It may have felt very natural and familiar. Because of emotional experiences, people may build emotional and relational walls to protect themselves. The painful irony is that these walls, once created for safety, can become the very barriers that trap them and keep them in bondage.

BEHAVIOR IS A CHOICE

Do your current behaviors build you up or tear you down? Look back at the values and goals you set for yourself in the chapter “How Do You Want to Respond to Your Same-sex Attraction?” Do your current behaviors take you toward or away from your ultimate goals? When you behave contrary to your personal values, your internal feelings of self-worth decrease, but when you behave consistently with your personal values, your feelings of self-worth increase. Integrity is to have the moral courage to make your actions consistent with your knowledge of right and wrong. As you look at your behaviors, if you find any that are incongruent with the things you really value in life, change them to actions that are congruent with your values and with eternal gospel principles. All people have sexual urges and if we control those urges, we gain self-mastery and strength. If we yield to our carnal desires and urges, we get weaker until our actions are beyond control.

We devote our lives to whatever receives our time and attention. Over time, our hearts turn toward the things we repeatedly choose. It is worth asking whether your daily habits move you in healthy or unhealthy directions. Every choice you make today shapes your future.²⁹ Your future can be weakened or strengthened depending on how you choose to live now.

Stephen Covey wrote, “Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.”³⁰ You didn’t have a choice about the emergence of your same-sex attractions, but you do have a choice in how you respond to them. Although a person may crave food, he can learn to control his appetite and does not have to become obese. You have the choice of engaging in inappropriate activities or avoiding them. Each new choice in your life is an opportunity to move away from unwanted behaviors and toward a more desirable state.

You become truly free when you master your desires and have control of yourself. You may not immediately be able to free yourself from unwanted thoughts simply by desiring to do so. However, you *can* choose to govern your behavior. You *can* choose to control your actions.

²⁹ “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good....” (Isaiah 55:2)

³⁰ Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Calendar*, 1996, 15 Jan. 1996.

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. (Read the section “Sexual Compulsions and Addictions” in the chapter “Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.”)

An action that begins as a small or seemingly harmless experiment can lead into a destructive cycle. What starts as a simple trial can become a habit. Habit can turn into dependence, and dependence can grow into addiction. Its influence increases gradually. The chains of habits often feel too light to notice at first, yet over time they strengthen until they become very difficult to break.

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 ability to choose. He may not be free to drink without addiction, but his agency allows him to choose not to drink at all.

Although we are free to choose, once we act on those choices we are bound to the consequences that follow. A person is free to take drugs or not. But once he chooses to use a habit-forming substance, he must face the results of that decision. Addiction gradually takes away future freedom to choose. Through chemical influence, a person can even become disconnected from his own will.

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 sensual pleasure adds to the addictive nature of the action. Combining sex with drugs is particularly dangerous. 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.... [I]t’s bondage of the worst kind because there’s so much shame and remorse attached to it, making it terribly secretive and usually dangerous.”³¹

Joe Dallas explained, “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*.”³²

If you are 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 God. Whether such mastery

³¹ Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict: Hope for Men Who Struggle with Sexual Identity*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, pp. 127-8.

³² Dallas, p. 63

happens overnight or takes a significant amount of time, it can happen. You may need to enlist the help of a twelve-step program, a support group, and a therapist to overcome addictions.

Avoid addictive behaviors because they compromise your will and work counter to your goals. Behaviors that are reinforced continue and even become stronger. Those that are controlled become manageable. If you control your thoughts, you can overcome habits and achieve your goals.

It is interesting to note the similarity between same-sex addictions and other compulsive behaviors. The things that trigger people to act homosexually are often the same things that those immersed in other addictions cite as instigating factors for their addictive behaviors. The instigating factors (stress, insecurity, depression, etc.) are the same; they simply have different methods of expression.

Addictions have physical, emotional, and spiritual components. Physically, you may be hooked on the excitement, the “rush,” the adrenaline “buzz” of the sexual experience. You may be emotionally hooked through envy or shame. And spiritually, you may feel rejected by God and tempted to act in rebellion.

PASSIONS

Passions can be powerful. Throughout history, people have gone to great extremes to satisfy their passions. In their pursuit of sexual desire, some have lied, cheated, stolen, and even destroyed families, friendships, and

careers. A man who covets his friend's wife may risk the ruin of both households simply to satisfy his desire. Most of the time, people caught in this pattern do not stop to consider the consequences. Even when they do pause to think, the drive can feel so powerful that the consequences no longer matter.

As bad as you may consider your passions to be, they have a useful purpose. Don't ask to be rid of your passions, rather learn to control or handle your passions. Wise use of your passions can help you develop true love which comes through controlling and directing your passions, not by allowing them unrestrained expression. In the classic musical production *Camelot*, there is a line with good advice for us all. When the love triangle between King Arthur, Guenevere, and Lancelot began to deepen, King Arthur said, "We must not let our passions destroy our dreams."

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Personal growth and progression require setting and maintaining boundaries. In fact, a critical spiritual lesson to learn is to become masters of ourselves. In contrast, some people say that to deny yourself worldly pleasures is to deny your true self. They emphasize *feeling good* rather than *being good*. They describe any form of self-restraint as self-loathing or homophobia. However, a peaceful society requires restraint, boundaries, moderation, and temperance. Why should that be the case everywhere *but* with homosexual behavior?

SETTING SAFE BOUNDARIES

You will likely need to set boundaries to get your behavior under control. By setting personal boundaries, you use your agency to temporarily limit certain individual freedoms to help achieve more important eternal freedoms. If you know you are susceptible to certain addictive behaviors, you can decide for a time to limit your access to places or conditions that might make it easy for you 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. Choose boundaries that keep you well inside a zone of safety. Old habit patterns must be starved before they shrivel and die.

PERSONAL SPACE BOUNDARIES

Human beings need affection. Hugging and physical touch are 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 one person may be too intimate for another. When a person is starved for affection and conditioned to respond sexually, an otherwise appropriate hug may arouse or make him think inappropriate thoughts. Therefore, it is important to be aware of what is comfortable and appropriate both for you and for the other person. Once you define your personal boundaries, let others know what they are. And before you hug someone else, be sure you know it is within his personal boundaries.

SEXUAL BOUNDARIES

As steward of your own sexuality, you are responsible to set boundaries so that others do not use you in inappropriate ways and that you do not use others inappropriately. In addition to obvious sexual actions, there are other areas to be avoided. Flirting, innuendo, and suggestive conversation show disrespect for the other person and are a form of manipulation and predatory behavior. Fantasizing sexually about someone else is using them without their permission. Such actions affect your self-concept and your relationship with the other person. This is a particularly difficult area for people who have been abused sexually, because they often have difficulty differentiating between sexuality and true loving feelings, or they may not feel they are allowed to have or “deserve” to have boundaries.

EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

You often cannot control how you feel. Although you can choose how to respond to your emotions, you may feel happy or angry or physically attracted through no choice of your own. Emotions are not necessarily right or wrong; it is not always good to be happy, and not always bad to feel sad. However, understanding these emotions can give you clues to understanding yourself. Others can violate your emotional boundaries by doing things such as the following: telling you how you should feel, telling you they know how you feel, taking it on themselves to fix things for you, dumping their emotions on you, or using you to make them feel better without regard for what it does to you. Of course, you can violate the boundaries of others by doing the same things to them.

INTELLECTUAL BOUNDARIES

Our thought processes reflect our feelings, opinions, and perspectives, and not necessarily facts. You have a right to sort out what you think. And you need to give others the right to think and decide for themselves as well. If you disagree with someone, it is not your job to fix their way of thinking.

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 in yourself.

MEMORIES

Your memories can be marvelous gifts, but, at times, they can also seem like a curse. If you previously indulged in illicit sexual behavior, it may be hard to forget graphic details. Your mind may continually bring these memories to the surface to entice you back into old thoughts and behaviors. Your memory may magnify the good times in the past, reminding you how exciting and pleasurable it was, but will leave out the heartache, loneliness, and frustration you may have felt. Joe Dallas explained, "Your memories look good only because you're not seeing them panoramically. Take them to their logical conclusion, considering not only what you did and enjoyed, but where it was leading you, and you get a

more accurate picture of your past. That's how you shake off the power of 'good' memories—you view them with an eternal perspective."³³ When you are reminded of the past, try to gain an accurate and complete picture of it.

Our minds and emotions remember experiences and continue to be drawn toward them long after we have satisfied the needs that originally drove us to them. Memories take a while to forget, and we may be vulnerable to those possibilities until we forget the memories of them. But over time, the memories will fade if we don't dwell on them or reinforce them. And the best way to hasten that process is to make new, better memories to replace the old.

JUSTIFYING HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Emotional difficulties do not grant 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 with a woman—they should be allowed sexual expression with men. But God has revealed a law of moral conduct, which is abstinence outside of lawful marriage between a man and a woman,

³³ Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict: Hope for Men Who Struggle with Sexual Identity*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1991, pp. 137.

and fidelity within marriage. Nevertheless, some still argue that it is not fair that they are prohibited from acting on their same-sex feelings. They 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 unmarried 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.

Some people try to justify homosexual behavior by saying that our enlightened modern society now sees it as an acceptable expression between two individuals of the same sex who love each other. However, this is not God's moral law.

Another subtle form of justification is lowering our personal standards and living beneath the blessings we could receive. We must be careful to avoid the attitude that says, "God, I am doing the best I can do. This is simply who I am." Instead of striving for the gospel standard, we may slip into a tolerant and indulgent mindset that reasons, "If I only slip occasionally, I am still better than I used to be. God understands my weaknesses." Some people maintain this mindset for years and convince themselves that continuing in sin is reasonable because of their emotional or psychological struggles. It is unfortunate when anyone accepts a standard for themselves that is far below what they are capable of achieving.

TEMPTATION

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

Temptation is not identity. Just because you are tempted by same-sex feelings, it does not mean you are an evil person. Satan may continue to tempt you with things from your past, although you may have left them behind.

Temptation is not a sign of low spirituality. Don't feel that you are failing spiritually because you experience 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 Jesus!

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

Weakness is not sin. Sin comes from willfully disobeying God and requires repentance so we can be forgiven and become clean. Weakness, however, is a natural part of mortal life. It includes our limitations, emotions, illnesses, imperfections, predispositions, and lack of knowledge. Weakness is not a sin, and it does not make

us unworthy of the Spirit. God gives us weakness to help us remain humble and to encourage us to rely on Him. Through humility and faith in Jesus Christ, God offers grace, which strengthens us and can turn weak things into strong things. Even Jesus experienced mortal weakness, though He was without sin, so He could understand and help us.³⁴

Suggested Actions for Interrupting Behavior Patterns

IDENTIFY THE CYCLE AND STOP IT EARLY

Sometimes a specific behavior can be linked in our memory with a very intense positive feeling. Because the two happened at the same time, the brain connects the behavior with the feeling, and this emotional memory can later drive compulsive behavior

One method for changing behavior patterns is to identify these emotional memories that quietly push us toward unwanted behaviors. This method is called the Feeling State Flash Technique³⁵, and it helps reduce the emotional pull of these memories, so the behavior no longer feels automatic or urgent. Here are the basic steps

³⁴ Ulrich, Wendy. "[It Isn't a Sin to Be Weak](#)," *Liahona*, April 2015.

³⁵ The Feeling State Flash Technique is a therapeutic method that combines Feeling State Theory by Robert Miller and the Flash Technique developed by Philip Manfield and Lewis Engel. See ReintegrativeTherapy.com/feelingstateflashtechnique.

1. *Notice the problem feeling.* Think of a behavior you want to change and the strong positive feelings that come with it.
2. *Pick a memory.* Recall one moment when that feeling was especially strong. You do not need to focus on the details.
3. *Choose a pleasant focus.* Pick something calming or enjoyable to hold in mind. This helps you stay comfortable.
4. *Do the Flash process.* While keeping your pleasant focus in mind, your therapist guides you through quick, simple actions that help your brain soften the emotional charge in the background.
5. *Notice the change.* After a few rounds, the memory usually feels less intense. As the emotional charge fades, the behavior loses its pull.

A MINDFUL APPROACH TO SEXUALITY

Mindfulness is a technique that helps us see that thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations are important, yet they do not define the deepest part of who we are. Rather than reacting automatically or labelling ourselves quickly, mindfulness opens an inner place where we can reflect, feel, choose, and grow. This approach helps reduce shame, fear, and confusion and supports clearer thinking, stronger agency, and a more peaceful

relationship with sexuality. Consider the following ten principles for exploring sexuality and identity.³⁶

1. *Recognize something deeper than thoughts, feelings, and the body.* Mindfulness draws attention to the awareness beneath our experiences. We are spiritual beings in a physical body. You can observe experiences without treating them as the definition of who you are.
2. *See thoughts, including sexual thoughts, as thoughts.* Thoughts arise and fade. They can repeat, shift, and soften over time. When you observe them without obsessing over them, they lose their power to define your identity. You can let them pass without letting them shape who you think you are.
3. *See feelings, including sexual feelings, as feelings.* Feelings are vivid and compelling, yet they rise and fall like waves. When we treat them as passing experiences instead of identity statements, we reduce unnecessary shame and increase emotional freedom.
4. *See physical sensations, including sexual ones, as sensations.* The body carries real sensations, but we do not have to interpret them as identity. Sensations are events in the body. We can acknowledge them without assuming they determine who we are or what choices we must make.

³⁶ See “A Mindful Approach to Sexuality, Part I,” by Jacob Hess, Blake Fisher, Blaine Hickman, and Ty Mansfield at <https://bit.ly/mindful-approach>

5. *Get out of your head and into your body.* Modern life keeps many of us caught in constant thinking. Mindfulness encourages returning to the body with awareness and calmness. Practices like a body scan help us reconnect with physical presence and reduce rumination.
6. *Experience the body as distinct from self.* The body is a sacred stewardship, yet it is not the full measure of our eternal identity. When we avoid over identifying with the body, we prevent pride or shame from dominating our lives and keep our focus on our spiritual center.
7. *Experience emotion as distinct from self.* Emotions can feel permanent, but they are not. Mindfulness helps us observe emotions without assuming they define us. This separation expands our freedom to choose how we respond.
8. *Create space for agency in responding to experience.* Mindfulness increases the space between stimulus and response. In that space we reclaim our agency. We can choose our actions based on commitment and faith rather than automatic impulses. In relationships, this allows love to be a chosen devotion rather than a passing feeling.
9. *Embrace discomfort rather than fearing it.* Difficult emotions or experiences are not always signs that something is wrong. Sometimes discomfort signals growth. Mindfulness helps us tolerate and work through discomfort without panic.

10. *Allow growth to unfold over time.* Identity and desire can shift gradually throughout life. Mindfulness helps us welcome change with curiosity. It allows us to influence our growth gently and intentionally in ways that align with our highest hopes and sacred commitments.

WATCH FOR TRIGGERS

Learn what sets you up for behaviors you want to avoid. Triggers may include situations or events such as a song that brings back specific memories, certain types of music, TV programs, movies, the use of alcohol or drugs, provocative clothing, cruising areas, or specific locations that bring back memories of homosexual events. Once you understand what influences you, then you can avoid those situations or change your perceptions.

Marcos explained, “Spiritual highs or other positive events always used to trigger me. Since inwardly I didn’t feel I deserved the good experiences, I subconsciously engaged in self-defeating behaviors to counteract the spiritual high or good feelings. I also think it was Satan’s direct attempt to dilute the positive effect of the experiences and drive the Spirit away.”

You may also be vulnerable when you feel bored, stressed, angry, lonely, tired, hungry, depressed, discouraged, in pain, inadequate, or guilty. When these conditions arise and you feel like acting out, look at the situation and try to find a legitimate fix. If you are hungry and tired, rather than searching for sexual gratification, get something to eat and go to bed. When you feel sexual desires, try to discover what your real

needs are. It may be that you feel lonely or isolated and the real need is for friendship. Set up a network of friends that you can call when you need help.

CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS

Since your thoughts determine your actions, it is important to keep your thoughts clean. Carefully select your reading material, the movies you see, and the other forms of entertainment so you can have good thoughts rather than unwholesome desires. With discipline and effort, we have the capacity to control our thoughts and actions. This is part of the process of developing spiritual, physical, and emotional maturity. Thoughts generate actions which lead to habits which develop character which influence our destiny.

BE ACCOUNTABLE

An important element in changing your behavior is to be accountable to someone. You should make an accounting to God in daily prayer, confessing your weaknesses and asking for His strength to make it through the day. You should also be accountable to your church leader regularly. You can be accountable to your therapist for how well you are following your plan of action. In addition, you may need another person in whom you can confide. This may be someone from your support group who also experiences same-sex attraction, or it could be a close friend who cares about you. In the Book of James we read, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Alex explained, “When I got tempted to seek sexual encounters, I could instead call a friend who knew of my difficulties and I would ask if we could get together and play racquetball, or go to a movie, or simply sit down and talk for a while. Often such activity only served to get me through a single night when I was having problems. *But it got me through one night.* Remember that when we are talking about addictive behaviors, the old twelve-step motto of ‘one day at a time’ is all we can ask for and probably all we should attempt. Over time, I found that my crises tended to diminish in intensity and frequency, but there were many nights I had to call one of my emergency resources.”

EXPERIENCE HEALTHY EXCITEMENT

Why do we turn to sexual feelings to meet our needs? Sex is one of the most intense experiences people have, and whatever it touches can feel more vivid and alive. Just as salt brings out the flavor of food, sexual feelings can intensify the emotional impact of almost any experience. They can create a surge of excitement, especially when a person feels lonely, bored, or discouraged.

Antonio explained, “One of the reasons I was enticed by homosexual activities was that I wanted more excitement in my life. The gay life held a certain mystique for me and homosexual encounters appeared exciting.”

REPLACE NEGATIVES WITH POSITIVES

As you break from negative influences, be sure to replace them with new, positive activities and relationships. Rather than trying to *discard* a bad habit or a bad thought,

you need to *replace* it with something good. When you remove the seemingly exciting homosexual behavior, your life may seem dull unless you fill the void with new, uplifting, and rewarding things. When you take cruising from your life, you will find many hours you can now devote to your family, your church, or service to others. You may want to start a new hobby or spend time developing new relationships with people. Make time for activities you enjoy. Studies have shown that when people work on projects or activities they enjoy, their blood chemistry is altered almost immediately in a positive way.

If you focus on the negative—the things you *can't* do—the past you are trying to leave behind may seem more attractive. Instead, focus on the positive—the great things you are working toward. The old behaviors brought only temporary pleasure, while the new ones can bring lasting joy. Changing behaviors does not have to be viewed as restrictive. Instead, look at it as opening a whole new world of opportunity. The old behavioral patterns were restrictive; they locked you into addictive patterns of responding and they held you back from the things you really wanted. Changing your behavior to be in line with your values will let you move to higher levels of fulfillment and joy. Don't concentrate on the things you are removing from your life but focus on things you will add to your life.

The Apostle Paul admonished us to “put off...the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

New spiritual things need to replace old carnal habits and thoughts. We must diligently seek a new life to replace the old.

APPROPRIATELY RESPOND TO SETBACKS

As you begin to face issues head on, you may temporarily experience increased stress as old wounds are opened and dealt with. As a result, you may experience a greater pull toward old behaviors to cope with these increased feelings. Therefore, be on guard with increased resistance to avoid setbacks. Recommit yourself to your new goals, knowing that as you work to resolve your issues, the temptations may be strong, but your determination can be even stronger.

If you do backslide, don't think that everything is lost. Don't minimize the consequences of what happened, but realize it is only a temporary setback and don't let it defeat you. A slip or even a fall does not return you to point zero. Get back on your feet with new resolve and remember that all forward movements are cumulative and make a difference. The very fact that you feel bad about it shows you are progressing. Don't cover up the pain because pain is a warning. Feel it completely, repent, pick up the pieces, and move ahead. Learn from your mistake, so if you see the pattern developing again, you will have the experience and tools to stop it before it develops into homosexual actions. Focus on the progress you have made. Read your journal to remind yourself how far you have come. If you don't reach your goal the first time, don't consider yourself a failure. Failure is when you don't try at all.

Consider how you would respond if you were to eat something you shouldn't when on a diet. You could tell yourself that you slipped and then immediately return to your diet, or you can feel guilty and fall into a cycle of overeating that harms your progress. If you continue to binge, you will regain the weight you lost and then blame the diet for failing. In reality, the diet was working. It was your response to the setback that led to the defeat.

Your personal plan of action contains specific things you need to do. If you don't keep on guard and follow your plan, there is a chance you could slip or fall. Just like a car, you need to keep yourself well maintained to function properly. If you let spiritual, emotional, physical, or intellectual things slide, you put yourself in jeopardy. Maintenance will be important throughout the rest of your life. Just like the recovered alcoholic, you may need continued vigilance. The changes you make in your life can be as permanent as you make them.

Feeling continued temptation does not mean you are failing to make progress. In fact, temptation can be a sign that you are still fighting for what is right. The real danger comes when a person begins to accept sin as something good, because at that point it stops feeling wrong and starts to feel natural. If sin becomes the acceptable solution to the pain, then you have learned to choose it over God. But the fact that you continue to try means that you have not accepted the easy way out and you know there is something better. The scriptures do not promise that we will reach a place in this life where we are never tempted again. We need to continually

watch and pray so we do not fall into temptation. But we can be reassured we are no longer the people we used to be as we continue to improve and come closer to God.

Fantasy

Mark Laaser writes that the three building blocks of sexual addiction are fantasy, pornography, and masturbation.³⁷ 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.³⁸ Whatever we allow to enter our minds will always bear fruit. Fantasy is damaging because it keeps us separated from reality. When you fantasize, you build a self-focused, self-pleasing world of fragments of people and situations which you rearrange to meet your 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–

³⁷ See *The Secret Sin: Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, ND, 1992, p. 29.

³⁸ Allen, James. *As a Man Thinketh*, London, UK. 1903. Chapter 1, "Thought and Character."

28). The gospel standard of chastity calls for cleanliness of both thought and action. The way to keep your actions appropriate is to keep your thoughts clean.

Pornography

Sexual desire is a gift from God and an important part of spiritual life. When used appropriately, it is nothing to be ashamed of or to feel guilty about.³⁹ However, the multi-billion-dollar pornography industry distorts God's gift of sexuality through increasingly shocking perversions.

WHAT IS PORNOGRAPHY?

Besides the obvious videos, websites, and magazines, pornography includes anything that arouses you, even if it is not graphically explicit. If images of muscled men excite you, you may need to avoid them for now.

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 is not so bad after all. However, many people can attest to the fact that pornography is addictive and destructive to healthy relationships.

³⁹ See *God Loves Sex: An Honest Conversation about Sexual Desire and Holiness* by Dan B. Allender

PORNOGRAPHY DRIVES AWAY THE SPIRIT

We should avoid pornography because it drives away God's Spirit and religious people desperately want His Spirit to guide them. The Spirit cannot dwell in unholy places.

PORNOGRAPHY FEEDS FANTASIES

Pornography presents images that are completely removed from real life. It offers a world of exaggerated masculinity, exaggerated femininity, and sexual activity without consequences. In these fantasies, the other person becomes an object that can be controlled and used at will. Pornography creates the illusion of intimacy without the responsibility or reality of interacting with an actual human being.

Pornography feeds sexual fantasies. These reinforced feelings can work against other efforts you make to resolve issues in your life. The fantasies in your mind are a product of all the garbage you allow to enter your mind and once you allow these images in, they can be recalled years later. Research has shown that sensory stimulation such as arousal through pornography releases the hormone epinephrine, which locks the experience of stimulation in the brain, unlike the mental storage of less charged stimuli.⁴⁰ If viewing pornography is accompanied by masturbation, the combined effect

⁴⁰ See McGaugh, James L. "Preserving the Past—Hormonal Influences on Memory Storage," *American Psychologist*, Feb. 1983, pp. 161-74.

heightens the mental images. Such images are very difficult to erase from the memory banks of the brain.

Although you are not responsible for the desires that made you want to fantasize, you are responsible for allowing thoughts, stories, and images into your mind to fuel the fantasies. They make homosexual behavior appear enticing and can lead you into the addictive cycle of visualizing, then rationalizing, then acting.

PORNOGRAPHY INFLUENCES BEHAVIOR

The primary male response to viewing pornography is to masturbate. Pornography can be powerfully addictive. What begins with simple curiosity can grow into a habit that soon takes control. Research shows that people who continue to engage with pornography often find themselves seeking more extreme material over time. Continued exposure can dull spiritual sensitivity and gradually erode a person's moral awareness. A person can become trapped by carnal thoughts and actions. Since thoughts often shape behavior, ongoing exposure can eventually lead to acting out what has been nourished in the mind.

PORNOGRAPHY FEEDS FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

When people view pornography, they unconsciously compare their bodies with extraordinary models. This can reinforce feelings of physical and sexual inferiority, because no normal person can measure up to the hyper-masculine images of men or the hyper-feminine images of women found in pornography. As people indulge in pornography, their feelings of inadequacy and envy merge with lust and eroticism and magnify feelings of

sexual attraction. Pornography distorts how we view ourselves and others, potentially decreasing our capacity to relate realistically to other men and women.

ELIMINATE PORNOGRAPHY

Marco explained, “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 to 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.”

Here are a few ideas on eliminating pornography from your life:

- Understand your use of pornography (when, what kind, how often, how long, and what effect has on your life).
- Explore the feelings behind your use of pornography, such as when you are bored, lonely, angry, stressed, or tired.
- Determine what has helped so far in overcoming it.

- Consider a trusted person to be a mentor who can help you plan ways to limit your access to pornography and to whom you can be accountable.
- Practice replacing unclean and negative thoughts with virtuous and positive thoughts.
- Consider professional counseling. Some people cannot overcome pornography without professional help.
- Participate in a local addiction recovery program.⁴¹
- Consider a system such as Covenant Eyes.⁴²

For more help overcoming pornography, see Resources in *Overcoming Pornography*,⁴³ and articles about overcoming pornography.

Masturbation

Almost all males who experience same-sex attraction have a particular problem with masturbation. From a religious perspective, it is a form of sexual immorality that diverts men and women from the proper use of procreative powers. It does not edify and inspire but it is an unhealthy habit that holds you back from learning to deal honestly with yourself and those around you. It is also unhealthy when it becomes the primary means of sexual gratification and is accompanied by erotic

⁴¹ See AddictionRecovery.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

⁴² See LDS365.com/cov

⁴³ See LDS365.com/por and LDS365.com/tag/pornography

fantasies. The practice can become habitual and progressive, leading to other immoral behaviors, and is usually associated with pornography and sexual fantasies.

The following are some ideas to conquer masturbation:

Separate habits from identity. Your online behaviors do not define you. If you use pornography, don't believe that you are broken, unworthy, or bad.

- See the behavior as something you can change, rather than something you are.
- Approach healing with less shame and more resilience.
- Build a healthier understanding of sexuality.

Identify small, achievable goals. Don't expect to overcome habits all at once. Small, realistic goals work because they:

- Build confidence step by step.
- Reduce the shame associated with setbacks.
- Make your progress visible and concrete.
- Help you develop long term habits rather than short bursts of willpower.

Examples of small goals include:

- Reducing screen time during vulnerable hours.
- Setting up simple device protection.
- Practicing one healthy coping skill per day.

- Check-ins with a mentor once a week.
- Replacing one unhealthy habit with a healthier activity.

Over time, many small steps add up to major transformation.

Identify the triggers and stop the cycle early. It may help to identify the events that lead you to masturbate so you can stop the cycle at the first warning signs. It is much easier to stop at the beginning of the cycle than when you are halfway into the cycle. If you find that masturbation is always preceded by looking at pornography, then find ways to stop the cycle before looking at pornography. If it occurs at a certain time or place, then take action to change your routine so you can enjoy more healthy habits.

Identify the real needs behind the desire to masturbate. What are your real feelings and needs for which masturbation has become a substitute? Is it a need for friendship? Do you want to feel appreciated by someone? Are you lonely and just need someone to talk with? Is it your way of dealing with stress, depression, boredom, or anger? If you masturbate, will these real needs be satisfied or only intensified? Understanding these feelings and needs, you can plan in advance to deal with them in a healthier way.

Keep a log of temptations and how you dealt with them.

Record the following in a confidential place for at least a month:

- The triggers that started you into the cycle that ended in masturbation. (Was it loneliness, hunger, fatigue, stress, fantasy, pornography?)
- What you could have done to stop the cycle. (What specific actions and at what points?)
- The actions you plan to take next time you are in this cycle to stop it. (Be specific.)
- What you can do to be spiritually, mentally, or emotionally stronger so this won't happen again.

Review this log periodically to see if you can identify patterns, then talk with your church leader and therapist to get their perspectives and suggestions. If your masturbation is excessive or habitual, it may require intense effort on your part and therapeutic help to overcome it.

Be accountable to God in prayer. Acknowledge your weakness to God in prayer and ask for His strength. Admitting a problem is the first step in solving it.

Be accountable to a church leader. As embarrassing and personal as it may seem, you should talk with a church leader about this problem. You will not be the first person who has talked with the leader about masturbation. Accountability to a church leader is not only an important step in the repentance process, but his love and support on such a personal matter can be healing. He can provide ideas and a perspective that can be helpful as you overcome your habits.

Be accountable to a trusted friend. You may wish to define an accountability agreement with a close friend or

member of your support group. Agree to talk with him about your temptations (avoiding specific details) and how you plan to stop the cycle next time. His perspective and support can be encouraging.

Sexual Behavior

For many men who experience same-sex attraction, many of their sexual encounters are with strangers or casual acquaintances. Because of their urgent desire for sexual contact, they find themselves connecting with another man for an evening or even a few minutes of pleasure. Anonymous sex can happen quickly—it may take only minutes from first meeting to engaging in intimate sex. But it is sex without feelings. Some sexual encounters involve the use of drugs to prolong or heighten the sexual experience. This is especially dangerous because the drug use can impair judgment, leading to risky sexual behaviors, sexually transmitted infections, date rape, and robbery or assault.

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

Although casual sex can bring physical pleasure and temporary satisfaction, afterwards, you are left with even

deeper feelings of loneliness, rejection, and frustration. Rather than satisfying your need for the love of a friend, casual sex only intensifies the needs. It leads to an addictive spiral that feeds itself. The sexual experience generates more feelings that evoke even more acting out. After each sexual encounter, you feel used and of less value.

You can keep your behavior in line with your 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). There is no challenge beyond your ability to handle. As you turn to God, He will provide a way to get through the trial. Every time you do the things that are right, the light inside you increases and the darkness decreases. This light enables you to call upon the powers of heaven when you need help.

Choice, Freedom, and Responsibility

We all have the power to choose how we will respond to life's situations. Those choices have consequences, and our lives are the net result of those choices. This chapter discusses our freedom to choose and the relationship between responsibility, accountability, and authority.

Alex explained, "In one of my support groups I developed a close friendship with a Christian man who had a beautiful family. 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 decision was because he felt he had no choice."

Choice

Our lives are made up of small choices. The little decisions shape our character and make us who we are. Our character is the composite—the net result—of all those small choices. We have the power to choose, and those choices influence our eternal lives.

One of the reasons we are on this earth is to be proven—to see if we will follow God. God has given us our agency—the power to choose—and no person or organization can take it away. Even those who were confined in Nazi concentration camps had the power to

choose how they would react to their situation.⁴⁴ They could respond with contempt and hate for their captors, or with love and compassion for their fellow prisoners.

Freedom

What can be taken away or reduced in this life is our *freedom*, which is the power to act on our choices. Dallin H. Oaks explained that “free agency is absolute, but in the circumstances of mortality freedom is always qualified.”⁴⁵ He explained 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 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 agency to choose to temporarily limit certain individual freedoms to help us achieve more important eternal freedoms.

⁴⁴ See *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor E. Frankl.

⁴⁵ Oaks, Dallin H. “Free Agency and Freedom,” Brigham Young University 1987–88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches, *BYU Publications*, Provo, UT, 1988, pp. 46–47.

You may choose to set personal boundaries. For example, if you know you are susceptible to certain addictive behaviors, you can decide to limit your access to places or conditions that might make it easy for you to participate in those behaviors.

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.”⁴⁶

Consequences

We tend to think of agency as a personal matter. But we sometimes forget 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. An astronaut, for example, makes the choice to enter the rocket. He can withdraw any time before the rocket fuel is ignited, but once it is, he is bound by the consequences of his choice. We reap what we sew (see Galatians 6:7–9). Actions have consequences.

Responsibility, Accountability, and Authority

Management and leadership are less effective when there is a breakdown in the balance of responsibility, accountability, and authority. Not only can it be a source of failure in companies, but also in individuals.

Responsibility is an agreement between two or more people for the purpose of achieving desired results. The

⁴⁶ Ibid.

expected results should be mutually understood and accepted by all parties.

Accountability is a consequence of assigned responsibility. When a person has responsibility over a given task, he must answer to achieve the desired result.

Authority is the ability given to a person to complete the assigned responsibility. It includes access to the appropriate resources (personnel, money, equipment, etc.) to complete the job.

It is important that these three elements be in balance. A manager must assign responsibility, hold the person accountable, and delegate the proper authority. How does this relate to you if you wish to take control of your life and make intentional choices? You need to

- Take personal responsibility for your actions and the direction of your life.
- Be accountable to someone.
- Exercise the proper authority (1) by giving yourself permission to act and (2) by giving permission to someone else to check up on you.

RESPONSIBILITY

Some people believe that they are not responsible for their actions. With such a philosophy, it is easy to develop a “victim mentality,” believe that you were “born this way,” and that you have no control over your homosexual actions. In reality, we are responsible for our actions, and those actions will shape our future.

The first step is to take full, personal responsibility for what you have been, what you are, and what you will become. Even though you didn't ask for same-sex desires, take responsibility for how you respond to them. Don't feed self-pity by acting like a victim of life and external situations. Don't blame your environment or your genes for your situation. You are not a helpless victim of circumstance. You are a son of God with divine rights and abilities.

In the short term, it may be easier to avoid problems than to face them. But hiding from things that are troublesome only makes them worse in the long run. Problems are best solved by facing them head-on.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is an eternal principle. In life, we are accountable to God for everything He gives us. 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). Accountability helps us keep our integrity and helps us grow.

As you seek to manage your sexual behaviors, identify those to whom you will be accountable:

- *To yourself*, honestly admitting your situation and issues.
- *To God* in daily prayer, confessing your weaknesses and asking for His strength to be successful.

- *To your church leader* for sins that should be confessed.
- *To your therapist* for how well you are following through on the things you committed to do.
- *To a confidant*—a friend in whom you can confide and provide you support.

In the book of James, we read, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Once you identify those who will help you be accountable, talk with them about the specific things for which you want them to hold you accountable. For example, you may wish to commit to calling someone whenever you feel tempted to act out sexually. Give them specific questions you want them to ask you. It is important to be completely honest with them. If you slip, you may be tempted not to tell them the whole truth. But remember, you have made an agreement with them for the purpose of helping you and it will do you no good to hide the truth from them even a little.

AUTHORITY

The next step is to give them authority or permission to check up on you. Since you asked them to follow up with you, don't get upset when they ask you difficult questions. If you feel frustrated or controlled, remember that you asked them to check on you.

With this accountability agreement, be careful that you don't try to shift to them part of the responsibility for

your actions. You cannot blame them if they do not call you or if you cannot reach them in an emergency. You are fully responsible for your own actions. Their job is to remind you of that. As you learn to be accountable, you will feel self-empowered.

Another aspect of accountability is to recognize you have authority over your own life if you give yourself permission to act. Because of past failures, you may feel powerless to act. But as you exercise authority over your own life, you will soon find that you can make significant changes in your life. You can act and it will make a difference.

Therapy for People Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction

Professional therapy can help you strengthen self-understanding, explore sources of distress, reduce dissonance between values and desires, heal emotional wounds, build secure identity and relationships, control compulsive behaviors, and live congruently with your faith and values. This chapter provides suggestions on choosing the right therapist and explains the therapeutic process.

People who experience same-sex attraction often seek therapeutic treatment to understand and address certain emotional and psychological issues. (See the chapter “Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.”)

Helpful therapy focuses on exploring the sources of distress, the person’s beliefs and values about sexuality and gender, and the nuances of their experience with sexuality and gender.

The goal of therapy is to help you better understand and resolve dissonance between your values and same-sex desires, develop a secure sense of self and male identity, and help you make healthy life choices that are consistent with your personal values and religious beliefs. It is a process of self-understanding, self-acceptance, and growth.

Personal Choice

People who experience same-sex attraction have the right to direct the course of their lives congruent with their values and religious beliefs. You can choose whether to self-identify as gay. You can choose whether to engage in same-sex sexual behavior.

Client Self-Determination

If you are conflicted over your same-sex attractions, you have the right to decide whether to seek professional counseling or therapy, what kind of counseling to seek, and to determine the desired direction of your therapy program. See the heading “Professional Ethics” below.

Choosing The Right Therapist

Choosing the right therapist is critical because the wrong therapist could do more harm than good. Look for a therapist who can understand and support you in your personal values, beliefs, and goals. If you are a religious person, your ideal counselor would be one who supports your religious values and understands your spiritual motivations.

A therapist should not impose his personal values on you. A therapist should help you understand your issues and assist you in making choices congruent with your personal values and religious beliefs.

Consider what type of therapist you need. *Psychiatrists* are medical doctors specializing in treating individuals with emotional problems and thus can prescribe medication if necessary. They usually charge higher fees

than other practitioners. *Clinical psychologists* usually have an academic doctoral degree (Ph.D.) and are trained in testing and individual therapy. *Social workers* may have doctorates or Master of Social Work degrees, and may counsel individuals, work with small groups or troubled families, and handle much the same range of emotional problems as the other practitioners.

It is advisable that men who experience same-sex attraction choose a male therapist because they can be in a better position than a woman to help a man work through some of the issues common among men who experience same-sex attraction. A therapist of the same gender is in a better position to help you understand your gender and guide you into relationships with others of your gender. If your therapy experience is successful, the close emotional relationship you develop with your therapist can be healing in itself and can encourage you to develop deeper relationships with others of your gender.

Some of the organizations listed at the end of this book can provide recommendations of therapists who fit the descriptions above.

Since therapy is a major investment of time and money, be sure that your therapist will be able to provide you with the help you need. Discuss with your therapist how he or she will approach therapy with you. Talk about your values and what you expect from therapy. Don't hesitate to talk about the finances involved and be sure they fit within your budget. Your medical insurance may cover some of the visits.

The Therapeutic Process

Part of the therapeutic process may be to explore the past. If we learn from the past, we can improve the present. Understanding the past is helpful to many people. However, there are four cautions:

1. *Don't blame the past for your situation* and assume the role of a victim who has no control over the present. No matter how painful the past has been, you are responsible for what you do in the present. Your goal now is to learn what you can do to resolve your current issues.
2. *Watch out for invented memories.* There may be a tendency to invent past experiences to explain the present. If you read that certain childhood experiences can cause certain reactions, you may come to believe that those things happened to you in your childhood. You may reinterpret or skew the past or even invent in your mind events that never happened, all to make sense of the present.
3. *Not finding all the answers in the past does not mean you can't resolve the present.* Jason described his experience as follows: "At one point during my therapy I was trying to understand why I developed certain feelings during grade school. My therapist gave me an assignment to go back to my elementary school and spend an hour walking around the playground and try to recreate the feelings I had during a certain event. I did as he suggested but never found any clues. To this day, I don't understand why I reacted to the event the way I did. Although I didn't find any clues to the

present, I don't let that bother me. The past doesn't have to be completely explained."

4. *Don't concentrate on the past to the exclusion of the present.* Although the past may hold keys to helping you understand the present, concentrate most of your time on your current feelings, actions, plans, failures, and successes. Understanding the past is only valuable if it helps you to deal with the present. The extent to which the past is important depends on the level of trauma in the past. Unless you have experienced abuse, you may not need to spend much time dealing with the past. If you have been abused, you may need to grieve and resolve past trauma.

Questions to ask yourself after your first session:

- Does the therapist seem to understand and care how I feel?
- Does he see clearly what is going on?
- Do his ideas make common sense, or do they seem strange or extreme?

If the answers to these questions are not satisfactory, you may want to find another therapist. Stand your ground if the counselor's requests violate your personal values or standards. The best counselors will respect your position even if they don't share it.

If Therapy is Not Available to You

If you cannot afford therapy or if there is not a good therapist available, you can still benefit by reading

carefully selected books (“bibliotherapy”), by journaling, and by trying to analyze your life. Set up a plan of action and follow through on that plan. (See the chapter “How Do You Want to Respond to Your Same-Sex Attractions?”) Look at your life as though you are watching a video and identify the things you want to change, then make specific assignments to yourself to develop relationships and do things to build your self-image. You can be accountable to God through prayer, to yourself by using your journal, and to a trusted friend.

Individual Therapy

A trained therapist can guide you through personal growth. He is your personal counselor to help you put all the pieces of the puzzle together. He can help you see how to integrate efforts such as support groups, personal relationships, spiritual growth, and efforts to control sexual behavior. He can help you see in an objective way how to keep your life in balance. He can be your mentor and your confidant.

Individual therapy may be an essential part of the process of understanding your same-sex attractions and related issues. Although it will not take care of all your needs, it can give direction to all your activities. For example, if you also participate in group therapy, a support group, or a community men’s group, your therapist can help you see how all these pieces fit together and help you keep them in balance.

As you talk with your therapist, you will discover things about yourself. Often, because of shame or guilt you may have buried some things so deep within that you don’t

even realize them yourself. The therapist is trained to ask the right questions to help you see things in perspective and guide you through the process. Use him as a sounding board. Be honest with him about your problems, concerns, and fears. Don't keep any secret from him. Therapy will be most effective when you have a completely open and honest relationship. The therapist is bound by ethical standards to keep everything you say confidential. He can't even tell another person that you are seeing him. Together you can develop action plans, and you can report back to him on both your successes and failures. The journey won't seem so lonely or difficult if you have a therapist by your side. Individual counseling can help you to do the following:

- Identify and resolve personal issues and underlying factors.
- Identify and clearly define your personal goals.
- Develop a personal action plan and then help you work on the plan.
- Identify and work around the roadblocks.
- Receive encouragement when you get discouraged.
- Increase your awareness of things you need to work on.
- Give insight into your feelings and actions.
- Give an outside perspective.
- Identify your personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Provide a forum to talk things out and get feedback.

- Provide someone to be accountable to for your behavior, growth, and personal plan of action.
- Learn to generalize lessons learned to other situations.
- Learn to internalize new information.
- Learn how to live congruently with your personal values and belief system.
- Learn to control compulsive behaviors and addictions.

Make your sessions count. If making changes in your life is important to you, do all you can to make your therapy sessions as effective as possible. Many people find it helpful to make written notes about their sessions and refer to them often. Some people find it helpful to write in a journal as much detail about each session as they can. That allows them to later review the things discussed and monitor progress. Specially make notes about things you want to think about further or pursue in a future session. Be sure to write down the assignments you receive from your therapist and be sure you follow through with them.

Group Therapy

Group therapy can also be helpful but is usually 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 run by a trained therapist who is there to facilitate the discussion in meaningful ways. Since support groups are not guided, it may be 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.

If you are involved in group therapy, it is important that you also receive individual therapy so that you can work out issues that come up in the group setting. Group therapy can help you to:

- Get the mutual support of others who share some of the same issues.
- Hold each other accountable.
- Learn to accept others and feel accepted by them.
- Learn to disclose.
- Discuss issues of importance and get feedback from others.
- Learn to generalize to other situations the lessons you learn.
- Learn to internalize new information.
- Learn relationship and communication skills.
- Learn to be assertive.
- Reinforce newly learned traits.
- Experience relationships and activities in a safe environment, as a bridge to the outside world.
- Learn compassion for others as you begin to see their challenges from their perspective.

Todd had been so guarded that the people in his life knew very little about him. When he began attending group therapy, he finally had the chance to share his struggles with others, and he slowly started to open up. He wrote the following: "Each time, it became a little easier. I noticed that rather than feeling dangerous, sharing feelings and growing close to people on an emotional level was kind of nice. 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."

Professional Ethics

Professional therapists are ethically bound to respect your choices. It is unethical for a therapist to try to impose his personal beliefs on you. A therapist acts ethically by presenting alternatives and letting you make decisions for yourself. A therapist should ensure that you make a free and voluntary choice by using an "informed consent to treatment."

Enter therapy with specific goals that you want to work on, such as self-perception, emotions, shame, difficulty in relationships, anxiety, depression, compulsions, addictions, or trauma. (See the chapter "Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.")

Homosexuality is no longer considered a clinical disorder. However, therapists may still work with individuals who seek help for the distress they feel about their same sex attractions.

Therapeutic Results for Distress About Same-Sex Attraction

In surveys of participants in value-congruent programs or therapy (often faith-aligned and focused on emotional health), individuals commonly reported benefits such as the following:

- Minimized distress about same-sex attractions.
- Diminished shame.
- Growth in self-esteem and self-acceptance.
- Reduction in suicidal thoughts.
- Functional resolution in controlling homosexual behaviors.
- Emotional healing.

You can gain greater emotional health as you address issues such as those listed in the chapter “Issues Common Among Men Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction.” The goal is to achieve improved emotional health and a lifestyle aligned with your faith and values.

Support Groups

Many people who experience same-sex attraction find support groups to be helpful. This chapter explains how they can provide understanding, acceptance, and encouragement.

Many people who experience same-sex attraction find support groups to be helpful. A support group should be a safe and confidential place where you can feel the love and acceptance of others. It is a place to find encouragement from others who have similar values and goals. A support group can help reduce your 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 a sports program can be helpful.

A support group is about helping others. In the beginning, you attend to help yourself, but you soon discover that you find the help you need when you extend help to others. When you begin to care more about their needs than your own, you find healing in the process. You realize that you have something to offer to others.

Support groups emphasize dialogue as a way of learning. As you listen to each other, perhaps for the first time you will listen to yourself. The typical newcomer sits and listens and soon discovers that 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 his issues, they still accept him. Once the fear of rejection is gone, he finds that he has the courage to relate to others in the group and eventually to men outside the group. Support groups can help you by providing:

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

A support group alone may not provide answers to all your issues. A support group should never take the place

of a church, your circle of friends, or a professional counselor.

Depending on your personal issues, you may find individual or group therapy helpful. If you have addictive behaviors, you need the help of a twelve-step program (see the chapter “Organizations and Resources.”)

Choosing a Support Group

Support groups have varied purposes and goals. Before deciding to participate in a support group, review its goals and practices carefully to ensure it aligns with your vision of the kind of support you want. Before you choose a support group, get a copy of their written literature and read the group’s mission statement. (If they don’t have a mission or values statement, they likely have not defined their purpose well enough for it to be a healthy environment.) Does the group function according to the written statements? Do the values and beliefs of the group match yours? 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? Are members of the group required to support each other in healthy, positive behaviors and avoid encouraging or engaging in negative behaviors?

Joining a Support Group

When you first attend a support group, you will likely go through the following stages:

- *Fear and anticipation.* You may have concerns as you attend your first meeting. Will the other men accept me? Will I be able to open up to them?
- *Sense of relief.* Although your first meeting can be frightening, you will soon find that it is easy to make friends because people are there to lend support. Most people report an enormous sense of relief to have found a group of people who also experience attractions and whose values and beliefs match theirs.
- *Curiosity and sharing.* The next phase is one of learning new information and exchanging ideas with others in the group and hearing what has helped them to be successful.

Open and Closed Group Formats

An *open group* is one where you can attend group meetings whenever you like. A *closed group* is one where the participants are identified and each makes a commitment to attend all meetings for a certain duration. Closed groups are more stable because the same people attend on a regular basis. Because of this continuity, the participants tend to be more dedicated and accountable to each other, and it is easier to trust members.

How to Support Each Other in a Group

The Bible exhorts us to bear one another's burdens (see Galatians 6:1–2). We also read, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him

that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10).

Alex explained, "The men in my support group were able to give me a lot of support and help. They understood my feelings and helped me find solutions to my problems. When I felt vulnerable, I called them and they talked me out of inappropriate actions. They were genuinely concerned about me, and I was genuinely concerned about them. I relied on them many times. I never would have made it without the love and support I got from my friends who were always there when I needed them."

The following suggestions can help you have effective relationships in your group:

Be a consistent support to others in the group. Make attendance at the group meetings a high priority. Consistency is important both for your own progress and that of other participants.

Be honest with yourself. Many people tend to keep issues hidden and festering. Many people feel that they are the only ones to have same-sex attractions. Admitting your feelings can be a first step in healing.

Be honest with others in your group. Sharing with others in the group can help relieve feelings of isolation. As you openly explore your feelings in regular meetings, you can get much needed support from those who have experienced the same things in their lives. You can help each other be accountable and you can share with each other the things that you have found to be helpful.

Confront and challenge other group members. Sexual activity thrives in secret, and the group can be a place to bring it to light. Group members who are trying to control their sexual behavior can challenge each other kindly and respectfully and help others be honest with themselves when they see rationalization or denial.

Respect the rights of others. Respect the right of others to have opinions different from yours. No one should ridicule or belittle another participant, even jokingly, nor should they be judgmental or critical of others. Like you, they are struggling with difficult circumstances.

Give equal time. Don't dominate the discussion time but allow others the chance to express themselves as well. Allow equal time even to those who appear not to want to talk. You have a responsibility to help them feel comfortable and bring them out of their silence.

Have a proper spirit in every meeting. Although the meetings don't need to be somber, they should have a tone of respect for each other. Every meeting should begin and end with prayer to invite God's Spirit to guide you through the process. Watch your conversations so they don't drive the Spirit away.

Avoid inappropriate conversations. Share your feelings and experiences with others, but don't give graphic details of sexual activities or divulge locations, websites, or names of apps where sex or pornography is available. Don't assume that everyone knows what you know. Keep conversations about others positive. Do not let the discussion turn into a pity party that tears others down.

Instead, encourage one another in positive and helpful ways.

Help others recognize and develop feelings of self-worth. Help others see their value as individuals. Always watch out for others and when it appears they need extra help, do all you can to include them and help them feel part of the group. In addition to acts of kindness, tell them you love them and appreciate their friendship. Help them see that their friendship is of great value to you.

Move to deeper levels of conversation. It is usually easy to talk about surface, knowledge-based things. Although this kind of conversation is necessary to build a relationship, be sure that you also discuss feelings. When you begin talking about your feelings and emotional reactions to things you move into the areas that will be the most beneficial.

Be accountable to each other. Group members should hold each other accountable by asking each other to report regularly on their progress toward their goals. You may want to organize a buddy system so that when you are tempted to do something inappropriate, you have a buddy you can call to help.

Be wise in your activities with other participants. Don't participate in activities that cause you to be vulnerable, arouse same-sex feelings, or include physical intimacy with others. Avoid inappropriate jokes and innuendo. Don't spend excessive time with any one participant to protect yourself and the other person from emotional dependency or from the possibility of sexual behavior. Limit the time you spend with group members. Spending

excessive time with them limits your time to associate with others from outside the group.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Many people who have same-sex attractions have chosen not to disclose them to others outside the group and could be hurt by the release of information about their situation. In some cases, even spouses may not be aware of their participation in the group. Rules of confidentiality ensure privacy for everyone. It is a safeguard of special significance to those who may hesitate to participate in a group if they have any reason to believe that private information about them could be revealed to others.

In addition to protecting the identities of fellow participants, it is vital to keep confidential everything that is said in the group. A helpful phrase to remember is: “What we say here stays here.” Outside the meetings, don’t mention the people you saw or repeat the things you heard. One careless slip of the tongue overheard by someone else could have a devastating effect on a fellow participant. While this principle may be clear in theory, putting it into practice may not always be easy. The following general guidelines may be helpful:

- *Keep identities anonymous.* Most groups have guidelines about using only first names and last initials.
- *Membership lists.* Lists of names, telephone numbers, and addresses should be kept only when necessary. If you keep lists of members, guard them with strict care.

- *Return addresses on mailings.* If the organization mails materials, consider not including the name of the organization in the return address.
- *Messages.* When leaving messages, be careful not to identify the individual with any group or meeting or to inadvertently divulge information that may be revealing. Assume that the person who receives the message knows nothing about the individual's involvement with the group. Be aware that some people pretend to know more than they really know to get information from you, sometimes unintentionally (out of curiosity) and sometimes willfully (out of spite). Either case can be damaging. Since others may have access to the individual's voice mail or e-mail, leave only the information you would give to a stranger.

Spirituality in Group Meetings

For many people, spirituality can be a great motivator in achieving their personal goals. If this is your motivation, it is critical that you make spirituality a key ingredient in your support group program. You can strengthen each other by sharing testimonies, praying for each other, and encouraging each other to be righteous. There are many encouraging stories from groups about spiritual experiences that have had a profound influence on their growth and recovery. If your group is not having similar experiences, evaluate your activities and plan for ways to invite God's Spirit into all you do.

Safety Boundaries

In addition to the safety rules of the group, it is important to establish personal boundaries. While the group process is helpful, it can also open you to dangers you need to manage. In the group setting, you experience emotional intimacy with others on levels that perhaps you have not experienced before. Although you do not talk about sexual details, the fact that you discuss sexual problems may make you vulnerable. If your discussions open old wounds, you may experience anxiety or hurt and be tempted to revert to old patterns of behavior to relieve the pain. Since each person in the group discusses his or her area of vulnerability, others can wittingly or unwittingly take advantage. Therefore, boundaries must be established for the protection of everyone in the group. These external controls are safeguards to prevent you from responding to situations in unhealthy ways.

You will likely need to set personal boundaries on what you will and will not do after the meeting.

John explained, “When my friend Randy first joined his support group, he was so relieved to find other men with similar goals, that he didn’t want to go home after the meetings ended. He would stay in the parking lot talking with his newfound friends for hours. He also discovered that he was vulnerable during these late-night chats alone with other men and found himself getting intimate with one man. He quickly had to set boundaries to stay out of trouble and committed never to be alone with another man because he knew there was safety in numbers. He also set for himself a limit of thirty minutes after the meeting, at which time he would get in his car

and go home. He found that if he was not careful, from 9:00 to 11:00 p.m. after the meeting he could undo all the good he did from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the meeting. Go home while you are still on a spiritual high so you can continue to think through new ideas and keep positive thoughts on your mind. Keep the momentum going and don't lessen the experience with something less uplifting."

If two members of the group carpool to the meetings, it may be a good idea to hold them accountable each week for the time they were alone together. When they arrive at the meeting, ask them how the drive went, and before they leave after the meeting, ask them if they feel they are vulnerable and what they intend to do about it.

For many people entering a support group, boundaries are nebulous, and while there is room for growth, there is also the potential for sexual problems if it is not managed properly. Watch for people who cross boundaries or don't set boundaries. Challenge people to look at how they respect themselves, how they set boundaries, and how they maintain integrity for themselves.

If group leaders suspect problems, they should confront those involved to determine if there are problems. Such confrontation should not be accusatory, but in a spirit of concern for their welfare and a desire to help them grow. This can be a good learning opportunity for those who may not know how to interact with each other socially in appropriate ways.

If sexual activities occur, group leaders should intervene immediately since sexual activity can quickly destroy the

unity of the group. The leaders should confront those involved and discuss the occurrence to help them understand what led to the behavior and to set in place precautions to avoid a recurrence.

How to Find a Support Group

To find a support group whose values and beliefs match yours, see the chapter “Organizations and Resources.”

Sports

For some men, sports is one of the things that separates them from other men. If you didn't participate in team sports with other boys, you may now feel apart from the world of sports with other men.

If you have never developed a skill at a sport, you may want to consider joining a community league that teaches adults the basic rules of the game and provides opportunities to play the sport. Participants learn how to function on a team and have the chance to interface with other men and minimize their fear of the sport.

Jeff wrote, “I wanted to overcome my inhibitions and rid myself of the crippling envy I'd felt.... 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 college. 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 I regarded as a challenge.”

Participation in sports can help you do the following:

- Learn the rules of the sport and through practice gain a certain level of skill.
- 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.

Jason wrote the following about his experience with learning sports as an adult:

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. In college, it seemed that all that my roommates cared about was sports. So, on Saturdays while they were vegetating on the couch watching one game after another, I went to work or to 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.

In my thirties, I knew it was time I learned at least something about basketball and football, so I joined a men's sports group. The first time I showed up at 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 feelings of 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 our church basketball team.

The next season was softball, and I had greater fears. Even though I 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 in my journal after my first softball practice in the sports program:

“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 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 always catch the ball or to be able to throw it all the way to the infield. In the 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 good at softball; I just want to feel comfortable enough to join in an occasional game. 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. 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 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 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 felt I was a fat, uncoordinated little boy again. I was up to bat, and the pressure was on me 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 despite 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 must 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 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 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 with 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 insurmountable 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.”

How Can Family, Friends, and Church Leaders Help?

Your loved one needs the support and encouragement of friends, family, and church leaders to deal with the complex issues that confront him. Multiple healthy connections in church, social, and personal life can make an enormous difference.

Living with same-sex attraction can be complex—and much more difficult when faced alone. Multiple healthy connections in church, social, and personal life can be an enormous support.

Provide Encouragement

Most people who experience same-sex attraction need lots of encouragement and motivation to deal with the complex issues that confront them.

People who disclose their same-sex attractions to you may well be among the most courageous individuals you will ever meet. Revealing this very personal part of life is often extremely difficult, especially when doing so for the first time. Acknowledge their courage.

They may need you to remind them about their growth and progress over time. Some people have difficulty noticing their own growth and don't recognize it until someone else points it out.

It is important to maintain a realistic and practical perspective. There are no quick fixes for many of the issues they may deal with. Encourage them to as they progress gradually and as far as they are able.

If you have suggestions to offer, ask for his permission before doing so and then state your thoughts and opinions with humility. As you provide advice and correction, balance it with many expressions of love, admiration, respect, and affection.

Remain true to the beliefs and values you share, even if he strays from those values.

Facilitate Support

Individuals who experience same-sex attraction need support from several sources: family, spiritual leaders, friends, mentors, and skilled professionals. Help them see what support they have and what additional support they need.

It may not be necessary for everyone in a support network to know about the person's same-sex attractions. Ask permission from your loved one before you disclose the nature of his issues to others. If he is the one to tell others, it may help him feel in control of his own information and give him experience rising above his shame.

Your goals in providing support should include helping them do the following:

- Develop healthy, nonsexual relationships with other men.

- Strengthen relationships with family, close friends, neighbors, and co-workers who can provide support.
- Find opportunities to work with others through community service, fellowship, recreation, and acts of kindness.
- Develop a plan of action to address underlying issues.
- Learn to manage sexual behavior.
- Consider accessing professional help to address addictive behaviors, emotional health, abuse, and other related issues.

Encourage Responsibility and Independence

We have the capacity and the responsibility to make choices about our lives. You can help your loved one accept responsibility to guide his life in positive ways.

However, there are limits to your influence. You can't choose for your loved one how he will respond to his attractions. But you can encourage him to carefully consider his choices and take responsibility for the consequences of his choices. Encourage him to move toward independence and self-reliance.

Foster Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth and development are powerful assets in resolving issues related to same-sex attraction. A spiritual growth plan may help your loved one achieve noticeable success in all areas of his life.

During this process of spiritual goal setting, remember that some individuals may be blocked in their spirituality by psychological issues. Some people transfer feelings and expectations from defective relationships with others onto their relationship with God or church leaders. Some have been raised in situations where religion was unconsciously used to promote guilt, shame, and compliance. And some will withdraw from God's Spirit through their own behavior. These people may need substantial healing through professional counseling before they will be able to rebuild their spiritual life.

Avoid Doing Harm

Certain things can be harmful to those who experience same-sex attraction. Please note the following:

- Do not encourage a heterosexual marriage as a solution to same-sex attraction. Entering a heterosexual relationship will not cause homosexual desires to go away and can lead to extreme distress for the individual and the spouse. Note that some people experience changes in their attractions over time. At some point in their life, a heterosexual marriage may be an appropriate option for some people.
- Do not assume that your loved one's same-sex attraction poses a danger to family members or others. Ask him about the nature of his attractions. You may ask directly whether he feels attracted to family members or to other people at church and whether he feels in danger of acting on those attractions. Most adult men with same-sex attraction

are *not* sexually attracted to boys. Most adult men who are pedophiles are heterosexual.

- Never tell others about the same-sex attraction without your loved one's knowledge and consent. Don't insist that he tell family members or church leaders before he is ready to do so and before others are ready to hear it.
- Do not provide counsel for their psychological or emotional issues. Unless you are a trained professional with experience working with same-sex attraction, you run the risk of giving incorrect counsel, stirring up issues that you cannot properly handle, and delaying their access to appropriate therapy.
- Do not blame, become angry, or demand to know "why." Remember, people do not choose same-sex attraction. Often, they don't understand why they feel or behave as they do. Those who have engaged in homosexual behavior probably cannot provide a logical reason for it. Emotionally charged responses from you will only damage trust and cause them to pull away.

Specific Advice for Parents, Spouses, Friends, and Church Leaders

PARENTS

People who experience same-sex attraction may feel conflicted about how to reconcile their feelings with their values and religious beliefs. They may also feel shame, worthlessness, or fear of rejection. Parents can play a key

role in helping their children face difficult and complex issues. As your child talks with you about his situation, acknowledge his courage in disclosing his issues with you and express your love and willingness to provide support.

Parents need to help their adult children assume responsibility for their own lives. Those who experience same-sex attraction sometimes fail to develop independence from parents, especially from mothers. Parents should help their children see themselves as independent and responsible adults. Independence includes living on their own, supporting themselves financially, making their own decisions, and being confident and assertive. Sometimes, parents encourage unhealthy co-dependence because the parents are emotionally needy. Avoid making decisions or handling situations for your child that he can handle.

If you are unsure how to implement these ideas, or find them confusing or anxiety producing, you may want to seek counseling for yourself.

SPOUSES

As a spouse, you need to focus on your own healing related to your partner's same-sex attraction and on whatever issues you may have brought with you into the marriage. Although his attractions are not your fault or responsibility, they can nevertheless present a great opportunity for you to grow. This allows your partner to focus on working through his or her same-sex attraction and related issues.

Sometimes, out of fear, doubt, or anxiety, spouses can become critical, demanding, or overbearing toward their same-sex attracted partners. While such feelings are understandable, they may get in the way of the partners' ability to face their issues and slow their progress.

FRIENDS

Friends may be in a good position to help their same-sex attracted friend take responsibility for their actions and their futures. Friends are usually not connected with family dynamics that may be causing pain or difficulty for those with same-sex attraction, which allows the friends greater opportunities to both support and guide.

Your opportunity to have a positive influence on your friend's life will be determined by the amount of trust you create through demonstrating love. Your friend will feel your love as you offer consistent support and encouragement, as you accept him with all his weaknesses and difficulties, and as you express compassion in his worst moments.

Be aware that some men who experience same-sex attraction have a strong propensity to create dependencies on friends—particularly on friends of the same sex. If you sense that your friend relies too heavily on your opinion, looks to you too much for help or support, or seems unable to make choices on his own, this may indicate an unhealthy dependency. This may also be the case if you find yourself feeling drained by the relationship or feeling responsible for his wellbeing or safety. If you notice this happening, discuss it openly

with your friend and encourage him to speak with a therapist about it.

CHURCH LEADERS

Create an environment and culture in your congregation where everyone feels welcomed and loved. Discuss the topic of same-sex attraction in appropriate ways in various settings at church so people see that the topic isn't taboo. Seek to remove shame and combat stereotypes and myths.

Those who experience same-sex attraction are far more likely to approach you if they trust you and feel your love. They will feel your love as you offer consistent support and encouragement, as you accept them with all their weaknesses and difficulties, and as you express compassion in their worst moments.

People who experience same-sex attraction may feel conflicted about how to reconcile their feelings with their values and religious beliefs. They may also feel shame, worthlessness, or fear of rejection. Acknowledge their courage in disclosing their issues with you and express your love and willingness to provide emotional and spiritual support. Reassure them that God loves them.

Help them understand their identity as children of God. Help them recognize the spiritual strengths they have already developed. Help them develop or maintain spiritual patterns of living.

They may need to be reminded of God's grace, especially when they make mistakes. Help them understand that unworthy actions do not diminish their individual worth.

Help them learn to measure success by following God's path.

As you provide counsel, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Avoid offering over-simplified solutions, such as the idea that increased faith, prayer, fasting, or marriage will eliminate same-sex attractions.
- Help them be accountable for their actions and their personal growth. Help them set goals and actively follow up on those goals. Reinforce their good choices and behaviors that move them toward growth and greater responsibility.
- When needed, help them find counseling with a therapist who has specific training. If the church is paying some of the cost, ask the member to pay a portion to encourage a sense of investment and ownership.
- Help them get more connected to other members of the congregation.

Tips and Suggestions on How to Help

No two people with same-sex attraction are the same. Learning about his background and experiences can increase your understanding of him and empower you to minister to his deeper needs. For him, it is an opportunity to discuss these experiences with a compassionate and trusted ally.

He will be most willing to tell you about his problems and needs when he trusts you and feels your love. He

will be more likely to disclose if he senses that you truly want to help and can help. When he discloses to you, take time to be sure you accurately understand him. You can do this by repeating back what you have heard and asking if you understand it correctly. Then it is crucial that you give him a compassionate and truthful response regarding your ability to provide what is needed. If you agree to help with a specific need, it is paramount that you follow through.

If you sense that he is hesitant to state his needs, ask him directly about ways you can be supportive. Be sensitive to not push him beyond his comfort zone, as it may result in him feeling shame or embarrassment and not wanting to speak with you more about his issues.

As you help him with these issues, you may need to handle questions differently, depending on your relationship with him.

- *Church leaders* can usually ask these questions directly if they have gained the person's trust.
- *Parents of minor children* may approach their children directly if they have a reasonably open and trusting relationship with them. If they tend to withhold or if the relationship is conflictual, forcing the conversation may result in further distancing from them. In many cases, children can benefit from therapy, if they are willing. Much can be done to help willing children and teenagers build their confidence and self-esteem and come to understand their interests and attractions.

- *Spouses* have a right and a need to understand what their same-sex attracted partner is dealing with. However, it is important that the spouse has support—and preferably their own individual counseling—before they investigate these topics too deeply. Some of what they might learn could be triggering or traumatizing. Specific, unnecessary details may not be helpful for them to know, even as they often feel the need to know everything. Experience suggests that spouses do far better if they seek therapy when they learn details about their partner’s same-sex attractions, behaviors, and history. And it is vital that their therapist has specialized training in these issues.
- *Other family members and friends* should approach these topics gently and with permission of the individual. Depending on the depth of your relationship, it may not be important, or appropriate, for you to know much about some of the topics below.

TOPICS TO DISCUSS

Below are topics you may want to discuss with your loved one to better understand his situation and be in a better position to help.

- The nature of his thoughts and attractions. How long he has felt this way.
- Difficult experiences he has had in his life, including sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional abuse.

- His feelings about himself as a man and as a child of God. The nature of his personal connection to God.
- His relationships with other men and with women. With whom he feels comfortable or uncomfortable, connected or detached.
- How his mind is involved in these issues. For example, you might ask how often he thinks about his attractions, how much he fantasizes about his desires, and whether he is obsessed with certain thoughts.
- If he has acted on his feelings and in what ways.
- Whether he has tried to stop unwanted behaviors and what the results have been. If he experiences sexual addiction, he may need an addiction recovery program as well as psychotherapy.
- The current state of his life, including friendships, finances, and career. If there are any problems with his living situation.
- How his situation has impacted family members. Who else knows about his situation and what their responses have been.
- What support he has from other people.
- If he experiences psychological or emotional difficulties such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, obsessive or negative thinking, flashbacks of traumatic events, or feeling disconnected from life and from other people. These problems can indicate a need for professional counseling.

- If he has hope for the future. How he envisions himself resolving his immediate conflicts and addressing problems and behaviors. In his long-term future, how he imagines himself managing his life, feeling fulfilled, and maintaining a relationship with God.
- What spiritual and relational goals he has. Whether he wants to continue participating in the church congregation. Whether he wants to pursue same-sex romantic relationships or opposite-sex relationships.

Spirituality

This chapter addresses the importance of spirituality in your efforts to respond to same-sex attraction. It discusses basic gospel principles such as faith, repentance, and forgiveness. It then discusses other religious subjects that relate to your ability to succeed in resolving your issues.

The Need for Spirituality

Spirituality can play a major role in your ability to resolve issues related to same-sex attraction. Our strength to succeed comes from God rather than a method. We need to have faith in God, not in specific outcomes in our lives. Commitment to and faith in God is the key to applying His healing power in your life.

Faith in God

Do you believe that God can save you? If He is powerful to save you, can He help you in your life? With faith, God can heal you not only spiritually, but also physically, mentally, and emotionally. No matter what our situation, His gifts and powers are sufficient to address them all. God gives us weakness to make us humble, but He also gives us His grace to make us whole. If we humble ourselves before God, and have faith in Him, then He can turn our weaknesses into strengths. The very source of our troubles can be changed into strength and a source of power. God says that His grace is sufficient for all of us, regardless of our challenges. There is nothing two people can't do if one of them is God.

Equally Yoked Together

God 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 you are in the yoke with God, it means that He is pulling right along with you. And, in fact, when you don’t have the strength to pull, He will make up the difference. What a comforting assurance! All you have to do is your best.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

The purpose of Christ’s Atonement is to correct or overcome the consequences of life. Jesus Christ came into the world to be crucified for the sins of all mankind. It is through Him that we can be sanctified and saved. 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. Because of Jesus’s Atonement, all mankind will be resurrected. Christ made this sacrifice for us freely because He loves us. The Atonement of Jesus Christ applies to each of us as we try to improve and grow.

In addition to the sins we commit, Jesus’s Atonement can also compensate for things that are committed against us—the wounds we suffer because of another’s sins or misdeeds. Thus, His 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 of Jesus Christ is not sufficient.

To gain a greater understanding of Christ's Atonement and a deeper appreciation for it, you may wish to read two small books by Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ* and *Following Christ*.⁴⁷

Repentance

Faith naturally leads to repentance. Repentance is a Greek word that denotes a change of mind or a fresh view about God, about oneself, and about the world. If we repent, we turn our hearts and will to God and renounce the sin to which we are naturally inclined.

Repentance involves much more than changing outward behavior. Many people develop strong willpower and self-discipline and can overcome bad habits or weaknesses of the flesh, yet give little thought to the Savior or even turn away from Him. Improvements in behavior alone, even when positive, do not constitute true repentance. Real repentance is built on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we sincerely desire to put away sin, we must first turn to Him who is the Author of our salvation and rely on His power to change our hearts.

⁴⁷ Also see *The Continuous Atonement*, by Brad Wilcox and *Weakness Is Not Sin: The Liberating Distinction That Awakens Our Strengths*, by Wendy Ulrich.

THE STEPS OF REPENTANCE

The following are the basic steps of repentance:

1. *Recognize your sins.* You don't need to repent of same-sex attractions over which you have no control, but you do need to repent of any inappropriate sexual behavior.
2. *Feel sorrow for your sins.* Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a realization that our actions have offended God. This sorrow can be a motivation for change.
3. *Forsake your sins.* Lay aside your sins and worldly desires. They will hold you back. Show God that you are willing to repent of your sins and keep his commandments.
4. *Confess your sins.* This is discussed in the next section below.
5. *Make restitution.* As much as possible, you must correct any mistakes that you have made.
6. *Forgive others.* This is discussed below.
7. *Keep the commandments of God.* True repentance means that you not only ask for forgiveness of past sins, but that you are willing to give them up in the present and the future.

CONFESSION

Although God already knows our sins, we need to own up to them. Admitting problems and accepting responsibility for them is a necessary step in solving

them. Sexual sins thrive in the darkness of secrecy and denial. To become free of them, you must bring the sins to light. Confession shows humility towards God. It shows you know your actions were wrong and you are willing to do all you can to make up for them.

All sins should be confessed to God, and serious sins should be confessed to your religious leader. You may be embarrassed to talk with your church leader about homosexual behavior. But remember you are not the only sinner in your congregation, and your leader has likely heard far worse tales than those you will tell him. Although church leaders are loving individuals who sincerely want to do what is right, remember they are also imperfect human beings who have their own opinions and perspectives that come from their experiences in life. Be tolerant and understanding toward them just as you hope for compassion and understanding from them.

FORGIVENESS

Ask to be Forgiven. When we repent of our sins, God will forgive us and even forget the sins we have committed. When you have done all that you can to repent of your sins, you can receive peace. If you find peace of conscience, you can know that God has accepted your repentance.

Forgive Others. You must also forgive others who may have done injustices to you. Withholding forgiveness can be a hindrance to your healing. Regardless of the hurt you feel, release them from the penalty you would impose on them and leave it in God's hands. "But if ye

forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15). Forgiving others frees us from anger and disappointment. Rather than blaming others, ask yourself what you learned from the experience. Ultimately, that is the more important eternal question.

Forgiveness and Trust. If you are guilty of wrongdoing, it may take time to reestablish trust with your spouse, parents, or friends. 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 they don’t close the account but allow you to build the account balance back up by showing time and time again that you are worthy of their trust. To do that, you may need to offer generous explanations about your actions and whereabouts as you work to re-establish higher levels of trust. Trusting and forgiving are not the same thing. It is always appropriate to forgive but it may not be appropriate for others to trust you again right away. We can’t earn forgiveness, but we can reestablish trust by radical transparency and keeping our commitments.

Satan’s Influence

Satan is anxious to deceive even the most spiritually sensitive among us. Evil is real and very powerful. But 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. Satan has power over us only as we permit him. Satan

can certainly tempt us and deceive us, but he has no authority over us unless we give him that power. Don't befriend Satan or his lies; steer a course that is comfortably within the safety zone.

The Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost can help you understand things you could not otherwise understand. God's Spirit can provide insight about how to resolve your problems.

You may feel an inner struggle at times. One part of you may feel drawn to respond to your same-sex feelings, while another part reminds you of the moral principles you have long believed and points your heart toward God. In those moments, you choose which voice to follow.

There are two influences at work in every person. One is the spirit of evil, which seeks to confuse, enslave, and destroy. The other is the Spirit of the Lord, which lifts, inspires, strengthens, and saves. When a person strives to keep the commandments of God, he receives power to resist temptation. When he yields to the adversary, he gradually becomes weaker and may eventually feel unable to stand against the forces that trouble him.

Listen carefully and learn to recognize the difference between the influence of Satan and the influence of God. The whisperings of Satan may feel familiar or natural, yet they lead away from peace and truth. They may offer momentary relief but never bring lasting joy. In contrast, the quiet impressions of the Holy Ghost lift, encourage, and inspire hope. They always point toward the truths of

the gospel and lead you toward eternal happiness. Learning to discern these influences requires patience and effort, but it is worth every moment because the Holy Ghost can teach you things that are essential for your spiritual growth and salvation.

There is Always Hope

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 good will overcome evil—God will overcome Satan. We are saved by hope, and God is our hope (see Romans 8:24 and 1 Timothy 1:1).

Hope is a great incentive to repent. If you have made wrong choices and find yourself in a vicious habit, remember that there is a way out.

We all struggle to rise above our carnal nature. Stephen E. Robinson explained, "That our disposition is *good* is proven by the fact that when we occasionally act otherwise, we feel bad about it, repent, and return to our previous heading toward righteousness. Like a compass needle that may swing this way or that but always comes again to point north, so are the believers who may make this or that temporary misstep but always correct their course and return to their original heading. That is a clear disposition to do good. 'The mighty change' is a change of heart, a change of desires, and a change of disposition

concerning our goals. It is not a complete victory of the Fall or over our carnal natures all at once.”⁴⁸

Peace of mind comes from living your life in harmony with truth. You cannot be content when you live differently from what you believe. C. S. Lewis wrote, “the right direction leads not only to peace but to knowledge. When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right. This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping....You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either.”⁴⁹

God Can Change Us

God changes people from the inside out, while the world tries to change people from the outside in. The world attempts to shape individuals by altering their surroundings, but Christ transforms individuals first, and they in turn change their surroundings. The world

⁴⁸ Robinson, Stephen E. *Following Christ: The Parable of the Divers and More Good News*, Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, UT, 1995, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*, MacMillian Publishing Co., New York, 1952, p. 87.

focuses on modifying behavior, but Christ has the power to change human nature itself.

Submitting to God

Do you accept life on God's terms, or do you insist that things be on your terms? We need to rise above the natural man and submit to God's will. Being submissive and humble means that we surrender ourselves to God's terms. Half promises only result in half successes.

People who willingly place their lives in God's hands discover that He can shape their lives far more fully than they ever could on their own. He deepens their joy, broadens their vision, enlightens their minds, strengthens their bodies, lifts their spirits, multiplies their blessings, opens new opportunities, brings comfort to their souls, surrounds them with needed friends, and fills their lives with peace.

Greg explained, "I believe that we have a loving Heavenly Father who is deeply concerned for our welfare, and when we ask Him to help us with a problem, He helps. The help can sometimes be frustrating, because we must often wait for the help to come in His way rather than ours; and often the process to achieve the desired goal can be lengthy. I believe that the waiting period is often to help us develop and exercise faith and...almost always provide some learning experience."

Studying the Scriptures

Study the scriptures daily. It can be one of the most helpful things you can do, not only to find the answers

you need, but to maintain a level of spirituality to help you overcome temptations and keep working on your plan of action. Take the scriptures personally. For example, think of John 3:16 as follows: “For God so loved *me* that he gave his only begotten Son, that if *I* believe in him *I* will not perish, but have everlasting life.” Or substitute your own name. “For God so loved *Kyle* that he gave his only begotten Son, that if *Kyle* believes in him *Kyle* will not perish, but have everlasting life.” The scriptures apply to you personally. The promises in them are meant for you individually. Christ did not just die for the sins of the world; He died for *your* sins.

God Considers Us Individually

Stephen E. 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).”⁵⁰

Stephen E. Robinson also teaches a parable of the divers. In this story, a particular diver won even though other

⁵⁰ Robinson, Stephen E. *Following Christ: The Parable of the Divers and More Good News*, Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, UT, 1995, p. 34.)\

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 we experience in life, we may feel—like the diver—that our scores are less than perfect, but God will bless us for the difficulty we had to go through. We will be blessed for making righteous choices in difficult situations. I recommend that you read the entire parable in the book *Following Christ* to understand this important concept. It can help you understand how to stop judging others—and yourself—by your limited perspective.

Each person has a unique combination of strengths and challenges. These differences do not make one person better or worse than another. What matters most is how we choose to use the gifts we have been given and how we respond to our personal trials. A person blessed with many gifts is not necessarily better in the sight of God, and a person with fewer gifts is not any less worthy of eternal potential. The Lord taught this truth in the parable of the talents, where the servant who increased two talents received the very same commendation as the servant who increased five.

Plan of Salvation

Some of life's most challenging questions seem to be those that begin with the word why. "Why is there so much sorrow in the world?" "Why is my life so hard?" These are the deep questions of mortality and satisfying answers only come only when we understand God's plan for us. We are God's children. This mortal life is a test for us to prove ourselves. Since we all make mistakes that would prevent us from returning to our Heavenly Father,

Jesus agreed to pay the penalty for them if we will repent. He also made it possible for everyone to be saved from physical death and to be resurrected.

We can be anchored in life if we keep an eternal perspective of who we are, why we are here on earth, and where we can go after this mortal life.

Service

A good way to overcome your own 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 you learn how to love—a key element in your healing. When you reach out to help someone else, your own problems don't seem so great. When you volunteer to help other people, you feel better emotionally and physically. Helping others causes you to focus outside yourself.

Endure Faithfully to the End

Stephen E. 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. . . .”⁵¹

God does not always answer our prayers by taking away the challenge. But He will stand by you as you follow Him.

⁵¹ Robinson, Stephen E. *Following Christ: The Parable of the Divers and More Good News*, Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, UT, 1995, p. 65.

Adversity

When faced with adversity and 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 problems.

Information in this chapter was summarized from the booklet *Learning Through Life's Trials*⁵² with permission from the author.

Why There Must Be Adversity

God's plan is that there is opposition in life. 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. Lowell Bennion explained, "Living the gospel of Jesus Christ does not necessarily bring with it physical health, freedom from accident and misfortune,

⁵² Richman, Larry L. *Learning Through Life's Trials*, Century Publishing, Salt Lake City, UT, 2024. Also see *The Uses of Adversity*, by Carlfred Broderick and <https://rusch.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/09/the-uses-of-adversity.pdf>.

freedom from pain and suffering, prosperity and long life.”⁵³

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.

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 deserve it.

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

⁵³ Bennion, Lowell. *Teachings of the New Testament*, Deseret Sunday School Union Board, Salt Lake City, 1953, pp. 178–80.

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.”⁵⁴

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

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. Some things are the result of our actions and others simply happen because of the world we live in.

It can be helpful to think of our responsibility for the hard things in life as existing on a spectrum. At one end is sin, where we carry full responsibility because our own choices have brought painful consequences. At the other end is adversity, where we may have no responsibility at all. Some trials come to us through no fault of our own. The story of Job reminds us that adversity can come even when a person is faithful and innocent.

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

⁵⁴ Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Avon Books, New York, 1981, p. 94.

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 judgments. 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.

Much suffering in the world is the direct result of sin and evil deeds. However, many of the problems we face in life are a natural result of the world we live in. For the most part, God allows nature to run its course, and, in this imperfect world, bad things sometimes happen.

Jesus's Atonement Heals All Suffering

We often think of Jesus Christ's Atonement only in terms of relief from sin and guilt. But His Atonement is more. He suffered pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind—and even death—so He could understand our problems and know how to support us in our trials. Regardless of the source of suffering, Jesus's Atonement can heal the effects of all pain. When suffering is our fault, we can be cleansed through repentance. But Christ's Atonement can also compensate for the pain and suffering caused by the willful actions of others.

The Benefits of Adversity

If a tree grows with much water but little wind, it develops shallow roots, and when the wind comes it falls over. People can also be shallow. Adversity can help you develop strong roots. Trials and adversity refine us and help us develop character and strength.

How to Deal with Adversity

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

RECOGNIZE THAT GOD LOVES YOU

God knows you personally. He knows your needs and he loves you more than you know. You can face adversity much easier when you understand who you are and who God is.

RECOGNIZE THAT OTHERS LOVE YOU

Family and friends also love you. Rely on them. There are also angels in heaven ready to provide help.

TRUST THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL

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?”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Fronk, Camille. “Lessons from the Potter and the Clay,” Devotional Address at Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 7 Mar. 1995, pp. 8–9.

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.”⁵⁶

Dr. Peck explains that “it 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.”⁵⁷

REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE HAS CHALLENGES

When we consider the challenges that other people have, ours may not seem so difficult. A lady in my church congregation fought a battle with cancer. Although she

⁵⁶ Peck, M. Scott. *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1978, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 16. Also see 1 Peter 3:17-18.

endured pains and heartache that few people understood, she remained cheerful and optimistic. She lost her hair from radiation treatments and after spinal surgery wore 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 cheered 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." Through her suffering, she learned more about her nature. An important mystery of life is to discover who we are, who God is, and who we are together.

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.”⁵⁸

As you experience 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 or you can choose to grieve, let the emotions surface, feel the pain, then give it to God.

LET GOD CARRY YOUR BURDENS

Sometimes, God does not answer our prayers by removing our trials, but by helping us to bear the burden. God can ease your burdens and make them light.

DON'T EXPECT QUICK SOLUTIONS

We live in a day of instant gratification. We want fast food and instant solutions 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. But God expects this life to be a challenge for us. That helps us grow. It is expected that we will suffer some amount of anxiety, depression, disappointment, and even some failure. It is through these struggles that we grow and progress.

⁵⁸ Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Avon Books, New York, 1981, p. 64.

MAINTAIN BALANCE

Learn to keep things in balance. If you are asked to make a cake for a birthday party, you could spend all day making it perfect, but you should evaluate what it is worth, considering all your other responsibilities, and spend the appropriate amount of time on it. Learn to balance your time and energy among the many things that are important. If you spend excessive amounts of time with your male friends, for example, you may be ignoring the more important, eternal relationships found in your family.

KNOW THAT THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

When I was in high school, my father and I volunteered many hours in community service by delivering food to the poor. When I got married and began raising a family, I had to reduce the hours of community service I could volunteer. My father, who is retired, spends many hours a week visiting people in a nursing home. I look forward to doing that when I retire, but I can't do that now. 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” 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 decides 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.”⁵⁹

Jon Kabat-Zinn, the great mindfulness teacher said, “as long as you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong with you, no matter what is wrong.”⁶⁰

SERVE OTHERS

We heal ourselves of pain when we reach out to help others. Service to others is a 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

⁵⁹ Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Avon Books, New York, 1981, pp. 138–39.

⁶⁰ Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.

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."⁶¹

OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT

Thomas Edison had spent ten years and all his money developing the nickel alkaline storage battery when a sudden fire swept through his film plant. Chemicals ignited, and within minutes the building and its flammable materials were engulfed in flames. Fire crews from eight towns could not control the blaze. Edison was 67 years old, and his daughter feared the disaster would break his spirit. Instead, he ran toward her and said, "Go get your mother and her friends. They will never see another fire like this." By five thirty the next morning, while the fire was still smoldering, he gathered his employees and said, "We are rebuilding." He assigned one man to lease machine shops and another to secure a

⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 110-11.

wrecking crane. Then he added, almost casually, “Does anyone know where we can get some money?”

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?

When you feel discouraged, admit your weaknesses to God and positively work at solving the problem at hand. The following scriptures may provide encouragement: 2 Corinthians 4:8–9; Joshua 1:9; Proverbs 3:5–6; Romans 5:3–5.

Conclusion

In God, we can find comfort in the face of adversity. 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.

Organizations and Resources

The organizations listed below provide helpful information and support. The more you learn, the more you are exposed to ideas that may help you. Since many of these organizations are experiential or peer-led, you may want to consider working with a licensed therapist as well.

Brothers Road (BrothersRoad.org). An international, multi-faith, peer-support fellowship that supports each other in exploring and fulfilling their needs for same-sex affection, community, and brotherhood in platonic and affirming ways that align with their values, faith, and life goals. Provides programs for men and women.

Century Publishing, LLC (CenturyPubl.com). Publishes books on same-sex attraction and related issues.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (ChurchofJesusChrist.org). Provides an extensive website with practical advice about same-sex attraction.

Courage (CourageRC.org). An organization for men and women who experience same-sex attractions and who are striving to develop a life of interior chastity in union with Christ. They are inspired by the Gospel call to holiness and the Catholic Church's beautiful teachings about the goodness and inherent purpose of human sexuality. Through their apostolate, people who experience same-sex attraction receive pastoral support in the form of spiritual guidance, community prayer

support, and fellowship. Members are committed to the Five Goals of Courage.

Exchange Ministries (ExchangeMinistries.org). A non-denominational Christian ministry in Orlando, Florida. They provide support groups for individuals, family/parents, and spouses who love God and desire His identity and Word to be the defining factor of all things.

Exodus Latin America (ExodusLatinoAmerica.org). A Spanish interdenominational Christian ministry that offers encouragement and education in addressing the issue of homosexuality from a Biblical perspective. *Note that this organization is not affiliated with Exodus International which was discontinued.*

Fight the New Drug (FightTheNewDrug.org). A grassroots, youth-oriented, non-religious, non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the harmful effects of pornography. This youth-led movement focuses on science and the demonstrable effects of pornography on the brain, relationships, and society. They offer a free program for youth struggling with pornography.

First Stone Ministries (FirstStone.org). A Christian ministry that offers hope to individuals experiences sexual and relational sin, and those who love them, through effective, compassionate, and biblically steadfast ministry. They specialize in ministering to those with unwanted same-sex attraction, sexual behaviors, and identities.

Harvest USA (HarvestUSA.org). A resource to the local church, equipping individual congregations and the church at large to better care for and disciple those affected by sexual brokenness. They provide resources through blogs, videos, seminars, presentations, books, one-on-one discipleship, and support groups

Husband Material (HusbandMaterial.com). A global movement of men outgrowing pornography and becoming sexually, emotionally, and spiritually mature. Rather than focusing on behavior modification, they focus on changing brains, healing hearts, and saving relationships.

Identify Ministries (IdentifyMinistries.org). A non-profit Christian ministry providing Christian discipleship, training, and support for those impacted by sexual and relational issues.

Joe Dallas (JoeDallas.com). A ministry by Joe Dallas, an author, conference speaker, and ordained pastoral counselor. He directs a Biblical counseling ministry for those dealing with sexual and relational problems, and with their families.

Joel 2:25 (Joel225.org). A Christian community that engages and affirms men and women throughout the world who experience same-sex attraction, providing ongoing prayerful support that encourages relational healing, sexual sobriety, and spiritual growth. It has participants from over 65 countries and provides its website in several languages.

Journey Into Manhood (BrothersRoad.org/JIM). A peer-led experiential weekend where participants experience a compassionate yet challenging environment of self-discovery, inner healing, radical acceptance, and brotherly support. It is designed especially for men to address internal conflicts over their sexual thoughts, feelings, identity, values, and behaviors.

LDS365 Resources on Same-sex Attraction

(LDS365.com/resources-for-same-sex-attraction). A list of Latter-day Saint resources about same-sex attraction.

Living Hope Ministries (LiveHope.org). A

nondenominational ministry that provides a safe place for individuals seeking restoration and healing through weekly support group meetings, moderated online support forums, in-depth discipleship programs, and active partnerships with churches around the world.

New Life Ministries (NewLife.com). Offers

compassionate and empowering solutions to those who find themselves in life's difficult places and who are missing what God desires for their lives. Every Man's Battle is a weekend program to help men learn what sexual integrity means.

North Star International (NorthStarSaints.org). A faith-affirming resource for Latter-day Saints addressing sexual orientation and gender identity who desire to live in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the doctrine and values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They offer education, online communities, and conferences. Watch Voices, a video collection of personal stories of Christian individuals and

families who address gender dysphoria or transgender identity who are striving to find congruence and peace within the context of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PF Hope (HopeGroup.PortlandFellowship.com). Video teachings and testimonies created by the Portland Fellowship to provide hope and help.

Portland Fellowship (PortlandFellowship.com). A non-profit, interdenominational ministry that offers a message of freedom and hope found in Jesus Christ. They offer biblical instruction, Christ-centered accountability groups, personal testimonies, trained peer-to-peer support, and professional counseling referrals to assist individuals who desire to embrace their true identity in Christ.

Positive Approaches to Healthy Sexuality (PATH) (PathInfo.org). A non-profit ecumenical coalition of organizations that believe in traditional family values based upon time-honored Biblical principles. Their main goal is to promote healthy sexuality and traditional family values.

Pure Life Ministries (PureLifeMinistries.org). A Christian ministry that provides residential and over-the-phone counseling for men who experience sexual sin. This ministry also helps wives of men who experience sexual sin.

Reach Truth (RT.PortlandFellowship.com). An online program for individuals to find truth and grace in their sexual problems. Associated with the Portland Fellowship.

Restored Hope Network

(RestoredHopeNetwork.org/purepassion). A coalition of Christian ministries serving those who desire to overcome relational and sexual issues in their lives and those impacted by homosexuality. Pure Passion Media covers life stories out of sex trafficking, porn addiction, AIDS, former LGBT, parents or spouse experiences

ReStory Ministries (RestoryMinistries.org/restored24).

A faith-based organization that provides educational resources, training and consultations for churches and leaders, hope and tools for people who experience LGBTQ, and referrals for individuals and families looking for ongoing support.

Same-Sex Attraction (LDS365.com/same). Link to the official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about same-sex attraction.

SameSexAttraction.org (SameSexAttraction.org). An informational website created by people who believe that if you experience same-sex attraction, you have options on how to live your life—including identity and sexual behavior.

Sexaholics Anonymous (SA.org). A fellowship of men and women with a solution to the problems of lust, sex, and pornography addiction. The philosophy and program is based on the twelve steps and twelve traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Taking Back Ground (TBG.PortlandFellowship.com). An online discipleship program for men and women who experience unwanted same-sex attractions.

Transforming Congregations

(TransformingCongregations.org). A ministry of United Methodist Churches that equips UMC, GMC, Wesleyan, and Methodist pastors and leaders to help congregations experience restoration of their God-given identity as well as relational and sexual wholeness through leadership training, preaching, and discipleship resources.

True Freedom Trust (TrueFreedomTrust.co.uk). A UK-based teaching and pastoral support ministry that holds to the orthodox biblical view of sex, gender, and relationships. They provide pastoral care for those who experience same-sex temptations and gender incongruence. They hold conferences around the UK aimed at encouraging and equipping Christians to hold firm to biblical teaching and to trust in the God of all grace in the midst of temptations.

Where Grace Abounds (WhereGraceAbounds.org). A Christian ministry that guides and supports men and women who seek to understand sexuality and relationship and inspires people to know and personally appropriate God's plan for their sexuality and relationships. Provides help with sexual addiction, pornography, past sexual abuse, homosexuality, sexual identity, false intimacy, boundaries, and codependency.

Many people who experience same-sex attraction seek a way to live their lives in harmony with traditional religious values. As you decide how to respond to same-sex attractions, you can make choices congruent with your personal values, faith, and religious beliefs. This book presents practical solutions that may help.

If you believe that same-sex romantic and sexual relationships do not fit within God's plan for you, this book can help you explore questions and make life choices.

What is same-sex attraction? Understand more deeply your emotional needs and sexual feelings. Consider issues common among men who experience same-sex attraction.

How do you want to respond to your same-sex attractions? Learn how to strengthen self-understanding, explore sources of distress, reduce dissonance between values and desires, heal emotional wounds, build secure identity and relationships, control compulsive behaviors, and live congruently with your faith and values.

How can family, friends, and church leaders help? Learn how others can support people who experience the complex issues of same-sex attraction.

If you experience same-sex attraction, you have options about how to live your life—including identity and sexual behavior. This book presents options and practical solutions that have been experienced by thousands of people in their lives.

