

Same-Sex Attraction

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*Our hearts reach out to those who struggle with feelings of affinity for the same gender. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and our sisters. However, we cannot condone immoral practices on your part any more than we can condone immoral practices on the part of others.*¹

President Gordon B. Hinckley

1. Church leaders have consistently encouraged Latter-day Saints to demonstrate **compassion for those who struggle with homosexual attraction while at the same time adhering to the Lord's standards of morality.**
 - a. President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized forgiveness.²
 - b. Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote of kindness, compassion, and love.³
 - c. Elder Boyd K. Packer declared we reject only immoral behavior.⁴
 - d. President Gordon B. Hinckley expresses help and assistance with difficulties.⁵
2. The clear message from Church leaders is **that homosexual attractions can be diminished and that individuals can make changes in their lives.**
 - a. President Hinckley has spoken regarding those who have homosexual tendencies:

“They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. Most people have inclinations of one kind or another at various times. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church.”⁶

- b. Elder Oaks said: “The feelings or other characteristics that increase susceptibility to certain behavior may have some relationship to inheritance. But the relationship is probably very complex. The inherited element may be nothing more than an increased likelihood that an individual will acquire certain feelings if he or she encounters particular influences during the developmental years. But regardless of our different susceptibilities or vulnerabilities . . . we remain responsible for the exercise of our agency in the thoughts we entertain and the behavior we choose.”⁷
- c. In 1991, the First Presidency reiterated: The Lord’s law of moral conduct is abstinence outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual contact, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior, is sinful. Those who persist in such practice or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline.⁸

3. Altering Homosexual Orientation

- a. Clinical observations and scientific research **have not produced a clear picture of the origins of homosexuality.**⁹ Currently, most professionals believe the **origins of same-sex attraction to be the result of a complex interaction among biological, developmental, and environmental events.**¹⁰
- b. **Research does not also imply that these attractions cannot be altered or diminished.**

Robert L. Spitzer (Columbia University psychiatrist) survey of 200 persons¹¹ “Like most psychiatrists,” says Dr. Spitzer, “I thought that homosexual behavior could be resisted, but sexual orientation could not be changed. I now believe that’s untrue—some people can and do change.” Spitzer concluded that the changes occurred not just in behavior but in core features of sexual orientation.¹²

Christopher Rosik reviewed other studies that support this view and described factors that motivate such change.¹³

- c. The treatment of unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction has **a rich history of**

successes, comparable to other therapeutic challenges.¹⁴

- d. The underlying theoretical framework is similar: social, emotional, developmental, and biological variables affect gender identity, which in turn determines sexual orientation.
 - e. The work of the therapist is to help individuals understand their gender development. Subsequently, individuals are able to make choices consistent with their value systems.
4. Important Steps for Those Who Struggle with Homosexual Attraction¹⁵
- a. Developing intimacy through sharing with others
 - b. Acquiring increased understanding as an important foundation for transition
 - c. Developing a relationship with a loving God
 - d. Families and Friends: When a Loved One Struggles with Homosexual Attraction

The following guidelines may help:

- Moderate your response to the news of your loved one's homosexual struggles.
- Become informed about what the Church teaches and study reliable information about homosexuality.
- Kindly encourage the individual to seek counsel from his or her bishop.
Elder Boyd K. Packer said, "If you do not act on unworthy persuasions, you will neither be condemned nor be subjected to Church discipline."¹⁶
- Help your friend or family member secure other necessary sources of support.
- Avoid the temptation to try to take control or fix the situation.
- Keep the communication line open.
- Pray trustingly.
- Never give up on a loved one—never! Even when a loved one pursues a gay lifestyle for a time, the above counsel still has merit.
- The prophets have declared that
"Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."¹⁷ Elder Oaks wisely counseled, ". . . [Homosexual] thoughts and feelings . . . should be resisted and redirected, . . . and homosexual and lesbian behavior" eliminated."¹⁸

Such guidance should be clearly understood by family members and friends who reach out to those with homosexual difficulties. **Though homosexual attraction generally does not result from conscious choice, the divine gift of agency does provide choices in responding to such unwanted attraction. Gospel truths and ecclesiastical counsel combined with professional knowledge and intervention can be a powerful resource in helping individuals who struggle with homosexual attraction and can form a foundation for hope.**

NOTES

¹ Gordon B. Hinckley (1995, November), Stand strong against the wiles of the world, *Ensign*, 25(11), 98.

² Spencer W. Kimball (1969), *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft), 81–82.

³ Dallin H. Oaks (1995, October), Same-gender attraction, *Ensign*, 25(10), 7–14, 11.

⁴ Boyd K. Packer (2000, November), Ye are the temple of God, *Ensign*, 30(11), 72–74.

⁵ Gordon B. Hinckley (1998, November), What are people saying about us? *Ensign*, 28(11), 71.

⁶ Hinckley (1998), 71.

⁷ Oaks (1995), 9.

⁸ First Presidency Letter (1991, November 14), Standards of morality and fidelity.

⁹ N. Mitchell (1995, April 30) Genetics, sexuality linked, study says, *Standard Examiner*; D. Nimmons (1994, March), Sex and the brain, *Discover*, 15(3), 64–71; R. Segelken (1996, August 29), Psychologist argues for new theory of how sexual orientation develops, *Cornell Chronicle*; J. Nicolosi (1991), *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson); R. C. Friedman and J. I. Downey (2002), *Sexual orientation and psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹⁰ Friedman and Downey (2002).

¹¹ R. L. Spitzer (2003), Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32(5), 403–417.

¹² R. L. Spitzer (2001, May 23), Psychiatry and homosexuality, *Wall Street Journal*.

¹³ C. H. Rosik (2003), Motivational, ethical, and epistemological foundations in the treatment of unwanted homoerotic attraction, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 29(1), 13–21.

¹⁴ J. Satinover (1996), *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 185–186; B. Murray (2000), Sexual identity is far from fixed in women who aren't exclusively heterosexual, *Monitor on Psychology*, 31(3), 15; W. Throckmorton (2002), Initial empirical and clinical findings concerning the change process for ex-gays, *Professional*

Psychology: Research and Practice, 33(3), 242–248.

¹⁵ A. D. Byrd and Mark D. Chamberlain (1993), Dealing with issues of homosexuality: A qualitative study of six Mormons, *AMCAP Journal*, 19(1), 47–97.

¹⁶ Boyd K. Packer (2000).

¹⁷ First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles (1995, November), The family: A proclamation to the world, *Ensign*, 25(11), 102.

¹⁸ Oaks (1995, October), 9.