

Latter-day Saint Perspectives on Same-Gender Attraction—
An Anthology of Gospel Teachings and Personal Essays

Compiled by Ty Mansfield



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Chapter 6

Eternal Marriage: Principles, Possibilities, and Promises

Michael Goodman

Few things are as discouraging as being told there is an ideal we should embrace and yet believing we never can reach it, worlds without end. Good people stuck in that situation often react in various ways. For some, the incongruence creates a barrier to acceptance so high that they simply cannot bring themselves to believe in the ideal. Some of those who cannot believe turn away in anger. Others mourn, wishing they could believe. Others not only believe in the ideal but also know that it is real; and yet, feeling that they can never be part of that reality, they are left in despair and without hope. Yet hope is possible and ultimately essential.

Without hope, there is no way to overcome the despair and approach the ideal. Hope is the necessary ingredient that makes the ideal both possible and inevitable. An experience I had while serving as a mission president cemented this truth in my mind. I worked with dozens of missionaries who became so homesick they wanted to go home. Though none went home early, I learned much from helping them through their homesickness. One thing became clear early on. As long as they were hopeless—as long as they believed they would continue to feel gut-wrenching pain—they could not progress. It was almost always essential that they have hope for a better tomorrow to help them make the right choices today. A rare few had such a strong sense of duty and honor to commitment that even without hope their sheer

obedience pulled them through. These missionaries, however, were the exceptions.

I believe the need for greater hope is real for many Latter-day Saints who have feelings of same-gender attraction. There must be hope for a bright future. There must be hope that life can be filled with joy and fulfillment. Ultimately, there must be hope that the eternal joys of marriage, family, and all associated intimacies await faithful members who experience same-gender attraction.

From their youth, most Latter-day Saints have been taught the ideal of eternal marriage. Most start out expecting a future marriage filled with the kind of love and intimacy that, as they are taught, give meaning to life. For those with same-gender attraction, however, at some point that dream begins to fade.

In order for the doctrines and principles in this chapter to help, hope must somehow be rekindled. Ideally, there must be faith that all will work out and that life can be filled with joy, purpose, and fulfillment, whether we are married or single. For some, however, hope and faith may seem as impossible as eternal marriage itself. The prophet Alma gave a key that may unlock the door to that hope. He taught, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27).

Hope for Eternal Marriage

Ultimately (eternally), it is not possible to receive a fulness of joy without entering the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see D&C 131:1–4). This doctrine can seem hard when juxtaposed with the reality that, for a variety of reasons, many of Heavenly Father's children do not marry in this life. Often, through no fault of their own, this central part of the gospel plan isn't realized in mortality for these individuals. Elder Richard G. Scott said, "The Lord knows the intent of your heart. His prophets have stated that you [all of Heavenly Father's children] will have that blessing [eternal marriage] as you consistently live to qualify for it."¹ As we try to understand the doctrine of

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eternal marriage and develop a hope for it, we must not make the mistake of believing that we have to *wait on marriage* before happiness can begin in this life. Heavenly Father will not deny His faithful children a rich and fulfilling life based on things outside their control. This will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

As Alma taught, sometimes faith and hope have to start with simple desire. Desire can make hope and faith possible. There are many reasons to desire eternal marriage, both in this life and in the life to come. The Brethren have regularly tried to help members of the Church understand the joy that comes from eternal marriage. President Boyd K. Packer has taught: "In marriage all of the worthy yearnings of the human soul, all that is physical and emotional and spiritual, can be fulfilled. . . . Marriage is meant to be eternal."² Yes, marriage, eternal marriage, is worth desiring. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, "Marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive."³ Some sincerely try to find this kind of happiness in relationships contrary to the principles of revealed truth. No counterfeit relationship, however, can ever bring the true eternal joy that comes from a righteous eternal marriage.⁴

As the prophets have taught, there is reason to desire and hope for eternal marriage. It is important to understand that this ideal is ultimately within the reach of all of God's children who choose to be faithful to His gospel plan. None, including those who struggle with same-gender attraction, are excluded. The following statement from the pamphlet *God Loveth His Children*, published by the Church, declares this truth:

"While many Latter-day Saints, through individual effort, the exercise of faith, and reliance upon the enabling power of the Atonement, overcome same-gender attraction in mortality, others may not be free of this challenge in this life. However, the perfect plan of our Father in Heaven makes provision for individuals who seek to keep His commandments but who, through no fault of their own, do not have an eternal marriage in mortal life. *As we follow Heavenly Father's plan, our bodies, feelings, and desires will be perfected in the next life so that every*

one of God's children may find joy in a family consisting of a husband, a wife, and children." It further states: "All of Heavenly Father's children desire to love and be loved, including many adults who, for a variety of reasons, remain single. God assures His children, including those currently attracted to persons of the same gender, that their righteous desires will eventually be fully satisfied in God's own way and according to His timing."⁵

The possibility of having to wait until the next life to enjoy the full blessings of eternal marriage may seem of little help to those who desire the blessing of intimate companionship right now. But by more thoroughly understanding the doctrine of eternal marriage, we can receive power and help beyond what we might expect. The more we understand the real nature of eternal marriage, the more we desire it. This is true not only for those dealing with same-gender attraction but also for all of Heavenly Father's children, single or married. It is also true that the more we understand the importance of the doctrinal foundations of eternal marriage, the more we are willing to do whatever it takes not to lose the possibility of those blessings in the future. Therefore, with the assurance that all should hope for the promised blessings, let's try to lay a foundation.

Importance of Eternal Marriage

President Packer has taught that "true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior."⁶ There are few areas where understanding true doctrine is more important than in relation to marriage. The very definitions of marriage and family understood by mankind for millennia are no longer considered valid by many. In fact, the leading scholarly journal in the field of marriage and family recently changed its name from *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* to *The Journal of Marriage and Family* to indicate that there is no longer any universally accepted definition of *the* family. However, the institution of marriage is only changeable by man if it is a man-made institution to start with. Even though much of the world believes that marriage is man-made, those with a testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ know otherwise.

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Eternal marriage, as the name indicates, has no beginning and will have no end. Marriage on this earth, instituted by God, began with the creation of Adam and Eve. In the first chapter of the Bible, we read of the creation of man and woman (see Genesis 1:26–27). The first recorded commandment given to man and woman was to multiply and replenish the earth (see Genesis 1:28). This commandment presupposes Adam and Eve's marriage. In Genesis 2, after the symbolic account of Adam and Eve's creation, the scripture record declares, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). But this becoming one was more than just a "till death do you part" ritual. President Henry B. Eyring explained:

"The requirement that we be one is not for this life alone. It is to be without end. The first marriage was performed by God in the garden when Adam and Eve were immortal. He placed in men and women from the beginning a desire to be joined together as man and wife forever to dwell in families in a perfect, righteous union."⁷ Thus eternal marriage becomes the focal point of the creation of man from the beginning of sacred writ.

There is no shortage of statements by those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators pertaining to the divine origin and centrality of marriage and family in the gospel plan. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that marriage involves "an eternal principle ordained before the foundation of the world and instituted on this earth before death came into it."⁸ Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, "Marriage and the family unit are the central part of the plan of progression and exaltation. All things center in and around the family unit in the eternal perspective."⁹ President Brigham Young taught that marriage "lays the foundation for worlds, for angels, and for the Gods; for intelligent beings to be crowned with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. In fact, it is the thread which runs from the beginning to the end of the holy Gospel of Salvation."¹⁰ President Kimball taught that marriage and family are not only central to Heavenly Father's plan but that the "family is the great plan of life as conceived and organized by our Father in Heaven."¹¹

These statements and countless similar statements leave little ambiguity as to the importance of marriage in God's plan of happiness. However, though they hint at the reasons behind the centrality of marriage, they do not lay out a doctrinal foundation for it. Even though Church members may understand the significance of a given doctrine due to such overarching statements, they often struggle to find the intersection between knowing that the doctrine is important and finding the motivation and purpose necessary to implement that doctrine in their lives. One example of this phenomenon is the doctrine of chastity. We can quote Alma 39:5 (which teaches that violating the law of chastity is "most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost") in an attempt to teach members the seriousness of violating the law of chastity, but often it isn't until they understand the doctrinal foundations of the law that they find the strength and determination to live it. In a similar vein, it is one thing to be able to quote prophetic statements on the importance of marriage and another thing to understand the doctrinal foundations of marriage to the point that the doctrine dictates the path of life we choose to follow.

Doctrinal Foundations of Eternal Marriage

Eternal destiny. President Kimball's statement that family *is* the plan hints at a doctrinal truth that may elude some members of the Church. I believe that if you asked most members what the purpose of life is, they would respond that our purpose is to so live that we can joyfully return to be with God in heaven forever. There is ample scriptural evidence that this answer is right, at least partially (see 2 Nephi 2:25; Matthew 5:3, 10, 12; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22; Mosiah 2:41; Alma 11:37; Helaman 3:30; D&C 6:37; 20:24; 127:4; Moses 7:21). Sometimes the scriptures refer to this aspect of our eternal destiny as "everlasting life" (John 3:16; 3 Nephi 5:13; D&C 45:5). Although the term *everlasting life* is descriptive of the duration of our eternal destiny, it is less descriptive of the quality. A more descriptive term appears in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If you keep my commandments and

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endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:70). Both concepts, duration and quality, are brought together in Moses 1:39: “Behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” Though living forever is an important part of our destiny, it is important to make a distinction between immortality and eternal life. Satan and all who follow him are immortal inasmuch as they have no end; they will exist forever. However, they certainly won’t enjoy eternal life. They will not have resurrected bodies capable of celestial glory and the ability to become as God is.

God is married. We learn from Doctrine and Covenants 19:11 that *eternal* is another name for God. Therefore, eternal life is another way of saying God’s life, or the kind of life that God lives. God’s work and glory is to bring to pass not only our immortality but also our eternal life. Our eternal destiny is nothing less than becoming as God is now. This doctrine is clearly taught in the famous couplet by Lorenzo Snow: “As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be.”¹² If our eternal destiny is to become like our Father in Heaven, we need to gain an understanding of who He is and what He is like. How else can we live our life in accordance with His will and nature? As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, in order for us to have faith in God (not to mention in God’s plan), we need to have a correct idea of God’s “character, perfections, and attributes.”¹³

Obviously, even the entire scriptural canon cannot contain all there is to know about the character, perfection, and attributes of God, so this chapter certainly won’t try to detail them all. God’s character is made up of all that is beautiful, virtuous, and good in infinite measure. However, there is one aspect of who He is that must be understood above all else in relation to eternal marriage. That truth is that God Himself is a married being.¹⁴

The very definition of godhood, or exaltation, depends on the union of a man and woman, eternally married. Elder Erastus Snow taught, “There can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, nor

ever will be, a God in any other way.”¹⁵ We learn in the Doctrine and Covenants that “in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest [to be exalted like Heavenly Father], a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:1–4).

Eternal marriage is necessary for exaltation because there is no such thing as a single god. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19 teaches that those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and are faithful to it will “pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”

It is only through the union of man and woman, eternally married, that a “continuation of the seeds forever and ever” is possible. President Harold B. Lee, referencing the hymn “O My Father,” explained: “That great hymn ‘O My Father’ puts it correctly when Eliza R. Snow wrote, ‘In the heav’ns are parents single? No, the thought makes reason stare! Truth is reason; truth eternal tells me I’ve a mother there.’ Born of a Heavenly Mother, sired by a Heavenly Father, we knew Him, we were in His house.”¹⁶

God is our father. Though we know few details regarding Heavenly Father’s marriage, there can be few things more central to His nature. If you were to ask, “What does God do for a living; what is His life’s work?” the answer would have to be that he is a full-time husband and father. All that He does is intended for the welfare and eternal salvation of His children. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught: “The work of God is to bring to pass the eternal life of His children (see Moses 1:39), and all that this entails in the birth, nurturing, teaching, and sealing of our Heavenly Father’s children. Everything else is lower in priority.”¹⁷ Elder Dennis E. Simmons explained: “He [God] has already achieved godhood. Now His only objective is to help us—to enable us to return to Him and be like Him and live His kind of life eternally.”¹⁸

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This doctrine is at the foundation of our understanding of eternal marriage. The destiny of mankind is to become like Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother in an eternal covenant and creative union. This capacity is part of our premortal, mortal, and postmortal nature. The First Presidency of Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, and Charles W. Nibley taught, “Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so that undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God.”¹⁹

In an article on same-gender attraction, Elder Oaks taught that “the purpose of mortal life and the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for their destiny—to become like our heavenly parents.”²⁰

We are God's children. Through a comprehensive understanding of the nature of God, we are enabled to better understand our own nature and the privileges that come with it. This understanding is essential if we are to live up to the potential within us. President Packer taught that “we all live far below our privileges.”²¹ Part of the challenge is that at times we lack a correct understanding of our nature. The corresponding doctrine to God being our Father is that we are His children. Few doctrines are more apparent through a study of the scriptures. In the beginning, the Lord declared to Adam: “Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:68). God refers to Moses, and Moses refers to himself, as a son of God seven times in the book of Moses. In the same book, as the Lord introduces Himself to Enoch, He calls him “my son” (Moses 6:27). And in the book of Abraham, the Lord refers to Abraham as “my son” (Abraham 1:17).

President Marion G. Romney explained that this is “the most important knowledge available to mortals. Such knowledge is beyond the ken of the uninspired mind. Neither logic, science, philosophy, nor any other field of worldly learning has ever been, or ever will be, able

to find it out. . . . Fortunately for us, as has already been shown, it has been so revealed repeatedly from Adam until today.

“The aspirations, desires, and motivations of one who accepts, believes, and by the power of the Holy Spirit obtains a witness to the truth that he is a begotten son or daughter unto God differs from the aspirations of him who believes otherwise, as the growing vine differs from the severed branch (2 Timothy 3:7).”²²

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, hope is often the child of desire. President Romney taught that the knowledge that we are children of a God who loves us and gave His only begotten Son for us helps us to change our desires, aspirations, and motivations.

However, some who know this to be true still struggle. Once we gain a basic knowledge of our divine heritage, we must deepen our understanding of what it actually means in our daily life.²³ How often have members of the Church sung the words to the children’s hymn “I Am a Child of God” without really drinking deeply from its meaning? President Gordon B. Hinckley asked us if we really understand the significance of this doctrine:

“I challenge every one of you who can hear me to rise to the divinity within you. Do we really realize what it means to be a child of God, to have within us something of the divine nature? . . . We can either subdue the divine nature and hide it so that it finds no expression in our lives, or we can bring it to the front and let it shine through all that we do.”²⁴

A deep and abiding testimony that we are children of God will help us live up to our “infinite capacities to grow spiritually and become more like [God].”²⁵ It is a knowledge that protects as well as directs. Our spiritual security increases as we come to more deeply sense our identity as children of God. Sheri Dew taught that “the more clearly we understand our divine destiny, the more immune we become to Satan” and ultimately to Satan’s counterfeits to Heavenly Father’s plan.²⁶

Understanding our nature. Through understanding the nature of God and our relationship to Him, we come to understand that our nature is nothing less than His nature in embryo. Because God by nature is a

heterosexually creative being, we too must have the seeds of that same eternal nature within us. If our eternal destiny depends on our being eternally married to someone of the opposite sex, our deepest, most innate spiritual nature—buried within the human development and experience that LDS psychologist Allen Bergin calls our “mortal overlay”²⁷—must be in line with that destiny. As President Howard W. Hunter taught, “My spiritual reasoning tells me that because God is an exalted being, holy and good, that man’s supreme goal [and destiny] is to be like him.”²⁸ Being like Him means that our supreme goal and destiny is linked to our relationship with our future spouse. Elder Oaks taught that “attraction between man and woman was instilled by the Creator.”²⁹ This is true even if that attraction is temporarily hidden or absent.

Understanding this aspect of our nature helps us understand that we can never find real happiness in this life or in the next by living contrary to that nature. Jesus explained why those who allow their nature to become carnal can never find lasting happiness (see Alma 41:10–11). It is true that there can be momentary pleasure and even a sense of joy “for a season,” but that season always ends in pain and sorrow (3 Nephi 27:11). Alma taught that those who give into their carnal nature “are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11). God’s nature (and our true nature as His children) is the nature of happiness. This is why Helaman taught that those who were living contrary to God’s nature and commandments could never truly be happy. He explained that they seek “for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head” (Helaman 13:38). Hence, any attempt to live contrary to our divine nature will unavoidably fail to bring the eternal happiness we seek.

Implications for Those Struggling with Same-Gender Attraction

It’s not easy. Understanding our true nature does not make everything easy when our current fallen nature seems to be telling us that

we are different from what the scriptures and prophets tell us we are. Many of Heavenly Father's children for one reason or another do not feel an attraction to members of the opposite sex. This chapter does not discuss what we know about the reasons for this. But by truly understanding what our eternal nature and destiny is, we can begin to live, or continue our efforts to live our life in such a way as to make our eternal destiny a reality. The following discussion contains principles that can assist those who seek to live their lives in accordance with Heavenly Father's plan for them.

Do not label yourself. One of the sophistries often used to justify inappropriate behavior connected with same-gender attraction is that you shouldn't deny your true nature. In other words, some would claim that if you are attracted to those of the same-gender, you are going against your true nature by not granting romantic or sexual expression to those feelings. However, as explained above, our *true* nature can never be homosexual—it is to become like God. But for reasons beyond our current understanding and often through circumstances outside of our control, a God-instilled attraction to members of the opposite sex may be temporarily absent from our life. The Lord has not given us a full understanding of why this is so. It likely involves social, psychological, and biological issues. Though they may wish it were otherwise, some people do feel attracted to persons of the same gender. The answer is not to deny this reality but to see it for what it is: a temporary condition or part of one's nature in mortality that will eventually be fully understood and resolved.

Understanding this truth does not make dealing with the challenge of same-gender attraction easy, but it helps those struggling with it to avoid the mistake of labeling or defining themselves in a way that is characteristic of a permanent, eternal state of being. Elder Oaks said:

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

implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual *behavior*.

“Feelings are another matter. Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of ‘nature and nurture.’ All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior.”³⁰

As we refuse to accept the world’s labels, we are subsequently free to choose what will define us. Speaking of those who refuse to give in to such labeling, one author wrote, “They are those who, recognizing we are not named by what tempts us, eschew the label ‘gay’ to take upon them the name of Christ instead.”³¹

Have hope for the future. As stated earlier, one of the most important things any person can do is to nurture hope. In an interview with Elder Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman of the Seventy, Elder Wickman explained: “The good news for somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is this: 1) It is that ‘I’m not stuck with it forever.’ It’s just now. Admittedly, for each one of us, it’s hard to look beyond the ‘now’ sometimes. But nonetheless, if you see mortality as now, it’s only during this season. 2) If I can keep myself worthy here, if I can be true to gospel commandments, if I can keep covenants that I have made, the blessings of exaltation and eternal life that Heavenly Father holds out to all of His children apply to me. Every blessing—including eternal marriage—is and will be mine in due course.”

He also stated: “What we look forward to, and the great promise of the gospel, is that whatever our inclinations are here, whatever our shortcomings are here, whatever the hindrances to our enjoying a fullness of joy here, we have the Lord’s assurance for every one of us that those in due course will be removed. We just need to remain faithful.”³²

Even if, as with Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), same-gender attraction is not immediately removed or ever removed in

this lifetime, it is important to continue hoping for all that Heavenly Father has promised us. We must understand that it is within our realm of control, our agency, to choose what we will do and who we will be.

Agency is the key. Agency is one of the most essential characteristics of premortal, mortal, and postmortal life. Since the beginning, Satan has sought to destroy the agency of man, but our Father in Heaven has never allowed him to succeed. A third of the hosts of heaven were lost over this battle in the premortal realm. Surely we must understand that Heavenly Father wouldn't allow anything to rob us of our agency now.

Elder Oaks taught: "Satan would like us to believe that we are not responsible in this life. That is the result he tried to achieve by his contest in the pre-existence. A person who insists that he is not responsible for the exercise of his free agency because he was 'born that way' is trying to ignore the outcome of the War in Heaven."³³ The scriptures teach that "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). Understanding this principle enables us to realize that even in the challenge of same-gender attraction, we still have our agency and must use that agency to choose the path that will ultimately lead us back to our Heavenly Father and to ultimate happiness.

Agency and marriage. God would have us use our agency to help bring to pass our eternal life as well as that of our brothers and sisters. But how can I use my agency in relation to eternal marriage when I face this challenge? What is my responsibility when it comes to eternal marriage? First and foremost, it must be understood that getting married, eternally or otherwise, is not a method for overcoming same-gender attraction. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, "Marriage is not an all-purpose solution. Same-gender attractions run deep, and trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them."³⁴

But the time may come when a person feels ready to begin dating members of the opposite sex. The decision as to when a person is

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ready for such a move is deeply personal and likely to involve personal revelation.

The closer we can come to living the ideal, the better off we will be. This does not mean we seek unrighteous alternatives to marriage. It means that we live our lives as close to the ideal as we can. We live the gospel of Jesus Christ to the fullest. We develop and enjoy healthy relationships with people of both genders. We value and seek to strengthen our commitments to marriage and families, including our birth families. We learn all we can about marriage and family from the words of the living prophets and apostles. We invite the Atonement of Jesus Christ to help remake us in the image of our Redeemer. Elder Scott counseled us to come as close to the ideal as possible because that will result in the greatest happiness:

“Throughout your life on earth, seek diligently to fulfill the fundamental purposes of this life *through the ideal family*. While you may not have yet reached that ideal, do all you can through obedience and faith in the Lord to consistently draw as close to it as you are able. Let nothing dissuade you from that objective. If it requires fundamental changes in your personal life, make them. When you have the required age and maturity, obtain all of the ordinances of the temple you can receive. If for the present, that does not include sealing in the temple to a righteous companion, live for it. Pray for it. Exercise faith that you will obtain it. Never do anything that would make you unworthy of it. If you have lost the vision of eternal marriage, rekindle it. If your dream requires patience, give it. . . . Don't become overanxious. Do the best you can. We cannot say whether that blessing will be obtained on this side of the veil or beyond it, but the Lord will keep His promises. In His infinite wisdom, He will make possible all you qualify in worthiness to receive. Do not be discouraged. Living a pattern of life as close as possible to the ideal will provide much happiness, great satisfaction, and impressive growth while here on earth regardless of your current life circumstances.”³⁵

Overcoming loneliness. Those who are currently not ready for marriage are not destined to a life of loneliness even though some loneliness

is likely a part of everyone's life, even those who are married. The same counsel the Brethren give to all of us regarding overcoming loneliness applies equally well to those struggling with same-gender attraction. Counsel given by President Hinckley to single women has strong application here. He taught that we should not wait for marriage to make us happy:

“Do not give up hope. And do not give up trying. But do give up being obsessed with it. The chances are that if you forget about it and become anxiously engaged in other activities, the prospects will brighten immeasurably.

“I believe that for most of us the best medicine for loneliness is work, service in behalf of others. I do not minimize your problems, but I do not hesitate to say that there are many others whose problems are more serious than are yours. Reach out to serve them, to help them, to encourage them.”³⁶

Elder Oaks taught similar principles when he said: “If you are just marking time waiting for a marriage prospect, stop waiting. You may never have the opportunity for a suitable marriage in this life, so stop waiting and start moving. Prepare yourself for life—even a single life—by education, experience, and planning. Don't wait for happiness to be thrust upon you. Seek it out in service and learning. Make a life for yourself. And trust in the Lord. Your dedication of a lifetime should follow King Benjamin's advice to be ‘calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come’ (Mosiah 4:11).”³⁷

Each of us is able to find meaning in our lives as we choose to live according to the gospel that Jesus Christ gave us. As the Savior taught, the best way to find ourselves is to lose ourselves in love and service to others (see Matthew 10:39).

A broader definition of intimacy. Each of us longs for the type of intimacy that gives meaning and purpose to life. Those who experience same-gender attraction but who are committed to the gospel will choose not to take part in sexual intimacy until they are married to someone of the opposite sex. However, every other aspect of human

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intimacy is available and worthy of our cultivation in our relationships with both men and women. Dr. Charles Beckert has identified ten different kinds of intimacy available to us all. Only one of them involves sexual intimacy. The other facets of intimacy include:

- Emotional intimacy: being on the same wavelength and feeling close
- Intellectual intimacy: sharing thoughts and ideas
- Aesthetic intimacy: sharing the beauties of the world
- Creative intimacy: sharing acts of creating together
- Recreational intimacy: playing together
- Work intimacy: sharing common tasks in closeness
- Conflict intimacy: facing and struggling with challenges and differences
- Crisis intimacy: coping together with problems and pain
- Spiritual intimacy: experiencing the “uniting of spirits”³⁸

Even physical intimacy of a nonsexual nature is an important and beautiful part of life that all can appropriately enjoy. Sexual intimacy is important and sacred, but each of us, married or single, is capable of greater intimacy with friends and loved ones. In truth, sexual intimacy without the other aspects of human intimacy is devoid of true beauty and meaning. Outside of marriage, sexual intimacy can be nothing but selfish and degrading. The day may come when sexual intimacy is a part of our life, but we need not await that day before we experience the many forms of closeness and intimacy that cast away the shadows of loneliness.

Learning from personal experience. The reality of mortal life is that we all have many experiences we would not necessarily choose for ourselves. Each of us has personal challenges, our own “thorn in the flesh” that we have to cope with. This does not mean we are broken. Though each of us is fallen and subject to the fall of Adam, we can approach wholeness now through a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ.

Alma promised that “now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma

34:31). Through this knowledge, we can seek to learn from our experiences as we move forward in life. We can pray to the Father that He will help us see what we can learn and how we can grow—not despite our trials but through our trials. He can whisper peace to our troubled souls and teach us how to experience peace and fulfillment now.

Conclusion

No sacrifice is too great when exaltation and eternal life are the goal. Through living righteously, through striving to lose ourselves in service to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters, everyone, including those who struggle with same-gender attraction, is able to live richly and experience joy in this life and a fulness in the life to come. A thorough understanding of eternal marriage is one of the keys by which we unlock the vision and ability to live our life to the fullest and ultimately overcome every challenge we face, including challenges with same-gender attraction.



An Unlikely Gift

Jason G. Lockhart

Jason Lockhart (pseudonym) lives in the Pacific Northwest with his wife and children. He was married three months after returning from his mission to South America and has now been married for nine very happy years. He graduated from BYU in education and has enjoyed working in schools for most of her career.

When I was nineteen, after a long and entertaining day together, my girlfriend (now my wife) gave me a very interesting gift. We were sitting in my room when she looked at me and said, “I have something for you . . . but I’m worried about giving it to you because it’s kind of