

Same-Gender Attraction

Dallin H. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, 7 ff.

God created us male and female. What we call gender was an essential characteristic of our existence prior to our birth.

Every Latter-day Saint knows that God has forbidden all sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage. Most are also aware of the Savior's teaching that it is sinful for a man to look upon and lust after a woman (see Matt. 5:28; D&C 42:23; D&C 63:16).

Attraction between man and woman was instilled by the Creator to ensure the perpetuation of mortal life and to draw husband and wife together in the family setting he prescribed for the accomplishment of his purposes, including the raising of children. In contrast, deviations from God's commandments in the use of procreative powers are grave sins. President Joseph F. Smith taught:

"Sexual union is lawful in wedlock, and if participated in with right intent is honorable and sanctifying. But without the bonds of marriage, sexual indulgence is a debasing sin, abominable in the sight of Deity."¹

Some Latter-day Saints face the confusion and pain that result when a man or a woman engages in sexual behavior with a person of the same sex, or even when a person has erotic feelings that could lead toward such behavior. How should Church leaders, parents, and other members of the Church react when faced with the religious, emotional, and family challenges that accompany such behavior or feelings? What do we say to a young person who reports that he or she is attracted toward or has erotic thoughts or feelings about persons of the same sex? How should we respond when a person announces that he is a homosexual or she is a lesbian and that scientific evidence "proves" he or she was "born that way"? How do we react when persons who do not share our beliefs accuse us of being intolerant or unmerciful when we insist that erotic feelings toward a person of the same sex are irregular and that any sexual behavior of that nature is sinful?

Gospel Doctrines

Our attitudes toward these questions are dictated by gospel doctrines we know to be true.

1. God created us "male and female" (D&C 20:18; Moses 2:27; Gen. 1:27). What we call gender was an essential characteristic of our existence prior to our birth.²
2. 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.
3. Our eternal destiny — exaltation in the celestial kingdom — is made possible only through the atonement of Jesus Christ (through which we became and can remain "innocent before God" [D&C 93:38]) and is only available to a man and a woman who have entered into and been faithful to the covenants of an eternal marriage in a temple of God (see D&C 131:1-4; D&C 132).
4. Through the merciful plan of our Father in Heaven, persons who desire to do what is right but through no fault of their own are unable to have an eternal marriage in mortal life will have an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in a period following mortality, if they keep the commandments of God and are true to their baptismal and other covenants.³
5. In addition to the cleansing effect of the Atonement, God has given us agency — the power to choose between good (the path of life) and evil (the path of spiritual death and destruction [see 2 Ne. 2:27; Moses 4:3]). Although the conditions of mortality can limit our freedom (such as by restricting our mobility or our power to act on certain options), when we have reached the age or condition of accountability (see Moro. 8:5-12; D&C 68:27; D&C 101:78) no mortal or spiritual power can deprive us of our agency.

¹ *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939), p. 309.

² Statement of the First Presidency, 31 Jan. 1912; printed in *Improvement Era*, Mar. 1912, p. 417; see also *Millennial Star*, 24 Aug. 1922, p. 539.

³ Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star*, 31 Aug. 1899, p. 547; discussed in Dallin H. Oaks, *Pure in Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), pp. 61-62.

6. To accomplish one of the purposes of mortal life, it is essential that we be tested against opposition to see if we will keep the commandments of God (see 2 Ne. 2:11; Abr. 3:25-26). To provide that opposition, Satan and his followers are permitted to tempt us to use our agency and our freedom to choose evil and to commit sin.

7. Because Satan desires that “all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Ne. 2:27), his most strenuous efforts are directed at encouraging those choices and actions that will thwart God’s plan for his children. He seeks to undermine the principle of individual accountability, to persuade us to misuse our sacred powers of procreation, to discourage marriage and childbearing by worthy men and women, and to confuse what it means to be male or female.

8. In all of this, the devil, who has no body, seeks to persuade mortals to corrupt their bodies by “choos[ing] eternal death, according to the will of the flesh ... , which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring [them] down to hell, that he may reign over [them] in his own kingdom” (2 Ne. 2:29).

9. The First Presidency has declared that “there is a distinction between [1] immoral thoughts and feelings and [2] participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior.”⁴ Although immoral thoughts are less serious than immoral behavior, such thoughts also need to be resisted and repented of because we know that “our thoughts will also condemn us” (Alma 12:14). Immoral thoughts (and the less serious feelings that lead to them) can bring about behavior that is sinful.

10. Because of God’s great love for his children, even the worst sinners (or almost all of them) will ultimately be rewarded with assignment to a kingdom of glory.⁵ Persons who have lived good lives and received most of the ordinances of salvation but have failed to qualify for exaltation through eternal marriage will be saved in a lesser place in the celestial kingdom where there is no eternal increase (see D&C 131:1-4).

11. In the midst of the challenges and choices of mortal life, we are all under the Savior’s commandment to “love one another” (John 15:12, 17). As the First Presidency said in a recent message:

“We are asked to be kinder with one another, more gentle and forgiving. We are asked to be slower to anger and more prompt to help. We are asked to extend the hand of friendship and resist the hand of retribution. We are called upon to be true disciples of Christ, to love one another with genuine compassion, for that is the way Christ loved us.”⁶

Kindness, compassion, and love are powerful instruments in strengthening us to carry heavy burdens imposed without any fault of our own and to do what we know to be right.

Application of Doctrines and Responsibilities

These doctrines, commandments, and responsibilities guide us in answering the questions posed earlier in this article.

Our doctrines obviously condemn those who engage in so-called “gay bashing” — physical or verbal attacks on persons thought to be involved in homosexual or lesbian behavior.

We should extend compassion to persons who suffer from ill health, including those who are infected with HIV or who are ill with AIDS (who may or may not have acquired their condition from sexual relations). We should encourage such persons to participate in the activities of the Church.

Applying the First Presidency’s distinction to the question of same-sex relationships, we should distinguish between (1) homosexual (or lesbian) “thoughts and feelings” (which should be resisted and redirected), and (2) “homosexual behavior” (which is a serious sin).

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.

⁴ Letter of the First Presidency, 14 Nov. 1991.

⁵ See D&C 76; discussed in Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” *Ensign*, May 1995, pp. 86-87.

⁶ “An Easter Greeting from the First Presidency,” *Church News*, 15 Apr. 1995, p. 1.

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.

Different persons have different physical characteristics and different susceptibilities to the various physical and emotional pressures we may encounter in our childhood and adult environments. We did not choose these personal susceptibilities either, but we do choose and will be accountable for the attitudes, priorities, behavior, and “lifestyle” we engraft upon them.

Essential to our doctrinal position on these matters is the difference between our freedom and our agency. Our freedom can be limited by various conditions of mortality, but God’s gift of agency cannot be limited by outside forces, because it is the basis for our accountability to him. The contrast between freedom and agency can be illustrated in the context of a hypothetical progression from feelings to thoughts to behavior to addiction. This progression can be seen on a variety of matters, such as gambling and the use of tobacco and alcohol.

Just as some people have different feelings than others, some people seem to be unusually susceptible to particular actions, reactions, or addictions. Perhaps such susceptibilities are inborn or acquired without personal choice or fault, like the unnamed ailment the Apostle Paul called “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7). One person may have feelings that draw him toward gambling, but unlike those who only dabble, he becomes a compulsive gambler. Another person may have a taste for tobacco and a susceptibility to its addiction. Still another may have an unusual attraction to alcohol and the vulnerability to be readily propelled into alcoholism. Other examples may include a hot temper, a contentious manner, a covetous attitude, and so on.

In each case (and in other examples that could be given) 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, which represent only variations on our mortal freedom (in mortality we are only “free according to the flesh” [2 Ne. 2:27]), we remain responsible for the exercise of our agency in the thoughts we entertain and the behavior we choose. I discussed this contrast in a talk I gave at Brigham Young University several years ago:

“Most of us are born with [or develop] thorns in the flesh, some more visible, some more serious than others. We all seem to have susceptibilities to one disorder or another, but whatever our susceptibilities, we have the will and the power to control our thoughts and our actions. This must be so. God has said that he holds us accountable for what we do and what we think, so our thoughts and actions must be controllable by our agency. Once we have reached the age or condition of accountability, the claim ‘I was born that way’ does not excuse actions or thoughts that fail to conform to the commandments of God. We need to learn how to live so that a weakness that is mortal will not prevent us from achieving the goal that is eternal.

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

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

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

“Whatever our susceptibilities or tendencies [feelings], they cannot subject us to eternal consequences unless we exercise our free agency to do or think the things forbidden by the commandments of God. For example, a susceptibility to alcoholism impairs its victim’s freedom to partake without addiction, but his free agency allows him to abstain and thus escape the physical debilitation of alcohol and the spiritual deterioration of addiction.

“... Beware the argument that because a person has strong drives toward a particular act, he has no power of choice and therefore no responsibility for his actions. This contention runs counter to the most fundamental premises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“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. We are responsible, and if we argue otherwise, our efforts become part of the propaganda effort of the Adversary.

“Individual responsibility is a law of life. It applies in the law of man and the law of God. Society holds people responsible to control their impulses so we can live in a civilized society. God holds his children responsible to control their impulses in order that they can keep his commandments and realize their eternal destiny. The law does not excuse the short-tempered man who surrenders to his impulse to pull a trigger on his tormentor, or the greedy man who surrenders to his impulse to steal, or the pedophile who surrenders to his impulse to satisfy his sexual urges with children....

“There is much we do not know about the extent of freedom we have in view of the various thorns in the flesh that afflict us in mortality. But this much we do know; we all have our free agency and God holds us accountable for the way we use it in thought and deed. That is fundamental.”⁷

The Insights of Science

In contrast to our doctrinal approach, many persons approach the problems of same-sex attraction solely from the standpoint of current science. While I am not qualified as a scientist, with the aid of scientific literature and with the advice of qualified scientists and practitioners, I will attempt to refute the claim of some that scientific discoveries demonstrate that avowed homosexuals and lesbians were “born that way.”

We live in a time of accelerating scientific discoveries about the human body. We know that our inheritance explains many of our physical characteristics. At the same time, we also know that our behavior is profoundly influenced by psychosocial factors such as parental and sibling relationships (especially during the formative years) and the culture in which we live. The debate over whether, or the extent to which, specific behavior is attributable to “nature” or to “nurture” is centuries old. Its application to the subject of same-sex feelings and behaviors is only one manifestation of a highly complex subject on which scientific knowledge is still in its infancy.

Some scientists deny that behavior is genetically influenced.⁸ Others are advocates of evidence or theories suggesting that “there is substantial evidence for genetic influence on sexual orientation.”⁹

We are, of course, aware of evidence that inheritance explains susceptibilities to certain diseases like some cancers and some other illnesses like diabetes mellitus. There are also theories and some evidence that inheritance is a factor in susceptibilities to various behavior-related disorders like aggression, alcoholism, and obesity. It is easy to hypothesize that inheritance plays a role in sexual orientation. However, it is important to remember, as conceded by two advocates of this approach, that “the concept of substantial heritability should not be confused with the concept of inevitable heritability. ... Most mechanisms probably involve interactions between constitutional predispositions and environmental events.”¹⁰

Wherever they fall along the spectrum between outright rejection and total acceptance of biological determinism of sexual orientation, most scientists concede that the current evidence is insufficient and that firm conclusions must await many additional scientific studies.

⁷ “Free Agency and Freedom,” *Brigham Young University 1987-88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: BYU Publications, 1988), pp. 46-47; the edited version printed here is found in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), pp. 13-15.

⁸ R. C. Lewontin and others, *Not in Our Genes* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); R. Hubbard and E. Wald, *Exploding the Gene Myth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

⁹ R. C. Friedman and J. Downey, “Neurobiology and Sexual Orientation: Current Relationships,” *Journal of Neuropsychiatry* 5 (1993): 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

A study of fifty-six pairs of identical male twins in which one twin classified himself as “gay” reported that 52 percent of the co-twins also classified themselves as gay.¹¹ A similar study of female identical twins yielded approximately the same proportion of co-twins who classified themselves as gay (thirty-four of seventy-one pairs, 48 percent).¹² If these studies show some inherited influence on whatever causes a man or woman to classify himself or herself as homosexual or lesbian, it is clear that this influence is not determinative. As a prominent scientist observed, “Even the identical twin of a gay man has a 50 percent or more chance of being heterosexual — even though he has the exact same genes and is reared by the same parents.”¹³ We should also note that the results of these studies (and others described below) are based on the subjects’ self-classifications, a shaky foundation for scientific conclusions when “there is still no universally accepted definition of homosexuality among clinicians and behavioral scientists — let alone a consensus regarding its origins.”¹⁴

In any emerging area of knowledge, a new source of evidence is most welcome. In July 1993, Dr. Dean Hamer made worldwide headlines when he announced that he had found “a statistically significant correlation between the inheritance of genetic markers [an identifiable strip of DNA] on chromosomal region Xq28 and sexual orientation in a selected group of ... homosexual men and their relatives over age 18.” In other words, “it appears that Xq28 contains a gene that contributes to homosexual orientation in males.”¹⁵ Putting the most positive interpretation on his discovery, Dr. Hamer’s subsequent book concludes:

“We can make only **educated guesses** about the importance of Xq28 in the population at large. On the high side, the region couldn’t possibly influence more than 67 percent of gay men, the proportion ‘linked’ to this region in our highly selected group of gay siblings. On the low side, if much of homosexuality is caused by environmental factors, or by a large number of interacting genes, Xq28 could account for as little as a few percent of the variation in male sexual orientation. The median range, taken from our linkage data and from the available twin and family studies, suggests that Xq28 plays some role in about 5 to 30 percent of gay men. The broad range of these estimates is proof that much more work remains to be done.”¹⁶

“Some role in about 5 to 30 percent” of self-classified “gay” men surely falls far short of justifying the claim that science has shown that “homosexuality” is “caused by” genetic inheritance. One eminent scientist identified two of the uncertainties:

“What evidence exists thus far of innate biological traits underlying homosexuality is flawed. ... Confirmation of genetic research purporting to show that homosexuality is heritable makes clear neither what is inherited nor how it influences sexual orientation.”¹⁷

In their impressive reappraisal of biologic theories of human sexual orientation, Drs. Byne and Parsons of Columbia University’s Department of Psychiatry offer these important cautions and suggestions:

“It is imperative that clinicians and behavioral scientists begin to appreciate the complexities of sexual orientation and resist the urge to search for simplistic explanations, either psychosocial or biologic.

“Conspicuously absent from most theorizing on the origins of sexual orientation is an active role of the individual in constructing his or her identity. ... We propose an interactional model in which genes or hormones do not specify sexual orientation per se, but instead bias particular personality traits and

¹¹ J. M. Bailey and R. C. Pillard, “A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48 (1991): 1089-96.

¹² J. M. Bailey, R. C. Pillard, and others, “Heritable Factors Influence Sexual Orientation in Women,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 217-23.

¹³ D. Hamer and P. Copeland, *The Science of Desire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 218.

¹⁴ W. Byne and B. Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 228.

¹⁵ Dean Hamer and others, “A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation,” *Science* 261(16 July 1993): 321-27.

¹⁶ *The Science of Desire*, pp. 145-46.

¹⁷ W. Byne, “The Biological Evidence Challenged,” *Scientific American*, May 1994, pp. 50, 55.

thereby influence the manner in which an individual and his or her environment interact as sexual orientation and other personality characteristics unfold developmentally.”¹⁸

This observation, but one of many suggestions from scientists, is particularly persuasive because it takes account of the vital element of individual choice that we know to be a true principle of our mortal condition.

The Responsibilities of Church Officers and Members

In their 14 November 1991 letter concerning the importance of the law of chastity, the First Presidency declared: “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.”

Consistent with that direction, Church officers are responsible to call transgressors to repentance and to remind them of the principle the prophet Samuel taught the wicked Nephites: “Ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head” (Hel. 13:38).

Persons cannot continue to engage in serious sin and remain members of the Church. And discipline can be given for encouraging sin by others. There is no Church discipline for improper thoughts or feelings (though there is encouragement to improve them), but there are consequences for behavior. In the same sermon in which he taught that men should not be “cast out,” the Savior commanded his servants that “ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily ... ; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy ... ye shall forbid him” (3 Ne. 18:28-29). The Savior also commanded, “But if he repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people” (3 Ne. 18:31; see also Mosiah 26:36; Alma 5:56-61). Consequently, if transgressors do not respond to calls to repentance, the shepherds of the Church flock must take disciplinary action in fulfillment of their God-given responsibilities.

At the same time, we should always distinguish between sinful acts and inappropriate feelings or potentially dangerous susceptibilities. We should reach out lovingly to those who are struggling to resist temptation. The First Presidency did this in their 14 November 1991 letter. After reaffirming the sinful nature of “fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior,” the Presidency added:

“Individuals and their families desiring help with these matters should seek counsel from their bishop, branch president, stake or district president. We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues. Many will respond to Christlike love and inspired counsel as they receive an invitation to come back and apply the atoning and healing power of the Savior. (See Isa. 53:4-5; Mosiah 4:2-3.)”

Similarly, in a conference address on this same subject, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “I desire now to say with emphasis that our concern for the bitter fruit of sin is coupled with Christlike sympathy for its victims, innocent or culpable. We advocate the example of the Lord, who condemned the sin, yet loved the sinner. We should reach out with kindness and comfort to the afflicted, ministering to their needs and assisting them with their problems.”¹⁹

Despite such invitations and assurances, the Church and its members continue to experience misunderstandings about our positions on these matters. Last fall in an interview with a television reporter, one of our Church officials was asked, “What is being done in the Church to try to stop the atmosphere of hate towards homosexuals?” Nine years ago, during a television interview on this subject, I was questioned about reports that the Church taught or implied “that these people are somehow pariahs ... and these people hate themselves and that this is an attitude brought forth by the Church.”

More significantly, we also receive such questions from faithful members.

A recent letter is illustrative:

¹⁸ Byne and Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation,” pp. 236-37.

¹⁹ Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reverence and Morality,” *Ensign*, May 1987, p. 47.

“Another concern we have is the way in which our sons and daughters are classified as people who practice deviant and lascivious behavior. Perhaps some do, but most do not. These young men and women want only to survive, have a spiritual life, and stay close to their families and the Church. It is especially damaging when these negative references are spoken from the pulpit. We believe such talks only create more depression and a tremendous amount of guilt, shame, and lack of self-worth, which they have endured throughout their entire lives. There is sometimes a real lack of the pure love of Christ expressed to help them through their ordeals. We will all appreciate anything you can do to help with the plight of these much misunderstood children of our Father in Heaven. If some of the General Authorities could express more sensitivity to this problem, it would surely help to avoid suicides and schisms that are caused within families. Many simply cannot tolerate the fact that Church members judge them as ‘evil people,’ and they, therefore, find solace in gay-oriented lifestyles.”²⁰

These communications surely show the need for improvement in our communications with brothers and sisters who are struggling with problems — all types of problems. Each member of Christ’s church has a clear-cut doctrinal responsibility to show forth love and to extend help and understanding. Sinners, as well as those who are struggling to resist inappropriate feelings, are not people to be cast out but people to be loved and helped (see 3 Ne. 18:22-23, 30, 32). At the same time, Church leaders and members cannot avoid their responsibility to teach correct principles and righteous behavior (on all subjects), even if this causes discomfort to some.

Church leaders are sometimes asked whether there is any place in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for persons with homosexual or lesbian susceptibilities or feelings. Of course there is. The degree of difficulty and the pattern necessary to forgo behavior and to control thoughts will be different with different individuals, but the message of hope and the hand of fellowship offered by the Church is the same for all who strive.

I tried to describe the crucial distinctions in my answer to the television reporter who implied that the Church taught that “these people are somehow pariahs.” I said:

“The person that’s working [to resist] those tendencies ought not to feel himself to be a pariah. Now, quite a different thing is sexual relations outside of marriage. A person engaging in that kind of behavior should well feel guilt. They should well feel themselves estranged from God, who has given commandments against that kind of behavior. It’s not surprising to me that they would feel estranged from their church. What surprises me is that they would feel that the Church can revoke God’s commandments. . . . To the woman taken in adultery (which is a pretty good precedent for us), . . . [the Savior] was merciful and loving . . . , but he said, ‘Go thy way and sin no more.’ He loved the sinner; he condemned the sin. I think the Church does the same thing, imperfectly perhaps, but that’s what we teach our members: love the sinner, condemn the sin.”²¹

The struggles of those who are troubled by same-sex attraction are not unique. There are many kinds of temptations, sexual and otherwise. The duty to resist sin applies to all of them.

The most important help the Church can offer to persons who have surrendered to sin or to those who are struggling to resist it is to fulfill its divine mission to teach true doctrine and administer the divine ordinances of the restored gospel. The gospel applies on the same basis to everyone. Its central truth is our Savior’s atonement and resurrection, that we might have immortality and eternal life. To achieve that destiny, an eternal marriage is the divine and prescribed goal for every child of God, in this life or in the life to come. Nevertheless, this sacred goal must come about in the Lord’s way. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley has declared that “marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices.”²²

Through Christ and his church, those who struggle can obtain help. This help comes through fasting and prayer, through the truths of the gospel, through church attendance and service, through the counsel of inspired leaders, and, where necessary, through professional assistance with problems that require such help. Another important source of help is the strengthening influence of loving brothers and sisters. All

²⁰ Letter to Dallin H. Oaks, 3 Sept. 1994.

²¹ Television interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks, 3 Dec. 1986; answer not telecast; excerpts printed in “Apostle Reaffirms Church’s Position on Homosexuality,” *Church News*, 14 Feb. 1987, pp. 10, 12.

²² Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reverence and Morality,” p. 47.

should understand that persons (and their family members) struggling with the burden of same-sex attraction are in special need of the love and encouragement that is a clear responsibility of Church members, who have signified by covenant their willingness “to bear one another’s burdens” (Mosiah 18:8) “and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us the light and the strength to overcome the obstacles of mortality and to use our God-given agency to choose the behavior that will lead us to our divine destiny. We are 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 Cor. 10:13).

Conclusion

The differing perspectives of scientific evidence and religious doctrine can be likened to the difference between studying about an automobile by observing its operation and disassembling and analyzing its various parts or by reading the operator’s manual written by the manufacturer. Much can be learned by observation and analysis, but that method will yield only partial knowledge of the function and potential of a machine. The best and most complete knowledge about the operation and potential of a machine will be revealed by studying the manual written by its manufacturer. The operator’s manual for our bodies and souls is the scriptures, written by the God who created us and interpreted by his prophets. These are the best sources of knowledge about the purpose of life and the behavior and thoughts we should cultivate in order to live in happiness and to achieve our divine destiny.

All who struggle with the challenges of mortality can identify with the lament in the psalm of Nephi:

“O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

“I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Ne. 4:17-18).

To have the will and strength to resist sin, we must trust in God and pray for his help. Nephi rejoiced in the Lord, who had supported him and led him through his afflictions (see 2 Ne. 4:20). “Why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh?” Nephi asked (2 Ne. 4:27), adding a prayer that the Lord would redeem his soul and “make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin” (2 Ne. 4:31).

Nephi concludes with words that apply directly to those who seek to find their way through the difficulties discussed in this article:

“O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

“Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh” (2 Ne. 4:34-35).

He who has commanded us to be perfect has shed his blood to provide us the opportunity to achieve our divine destiny. His confidence in our ability to achieve eternal life is manifest in his incredible invitation: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27).