

Notice

Date: October 25, 2016

To: General Authorities; Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents; Members of Stake and Ward Councils

From: Priesthood and Family Executive Council (801-240-2134)

Subject: Ministering to People with Same-Sex Attraction

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The following updated resources regarding same-sex attraction are now available to individuals, families, and ward councils:

- “Same-Sex Attraction” entry in Gospel Topics on LDS.org (see enclosed)
- Church Teachings (see enclosed)
- Frequently Asked Questions (see enclosed)
- Mormonandgay.lds.org website, available in English
- Ministering Resources (ministering.lds.org), available in 10 languages to members of ward and stake councils through Leader and Clerk Resources on LDS.org

These resources may be reviewed in a stake or ward council meeting.

This notice is being translated and will be distributed to units identified as Albanian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Cambodian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Fijian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malagasy, Mongolian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Samoan, Spanish, Swedish, Tahitian, Thai, Tongan, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Distribution in these languages will begin over the next several weeks. 14413

Same-Sex Attraction

October 25, 2016

THE CHURCH OF
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From Gospel Topics at topics.lds.org:

Same-sex attraction refers to emotional, physical, or sexual attraction to a person of the same gender. The experience of same-sex attraction is not the same for everyone. Some people may feel exclusively attracted to the same gender, while others may feel attracted to both genders.

The Church distinguishes between same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. People who experience same-sex attraction or identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual can make and keep covenants with God and fully and worthily participate in the Church. Identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual or experiencing same-sex attraction is not a sin and does not prohibit one from participating in the Church, holding callings, or attending the temple.

Sexual purity is an essential part of God's plan for our happiness. Sexual relations are reserved for a man and woman who are married and promise complete loyalty to each other. Sexual relations between a man and woman who are not married, or between people of the same sex, violate one of our Father in Heaven's most important laws and get in the way of our eternal progress. People of any sexual orientation who violate the law of chastity can be reconciled with God through repentance. As followers of Christ, we resist immoral behavior and strive to become like Him. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the help of the Savior, who knows how to succor us when we are tempted (see 1 Corinthians 10:13; D&C 62:1). If we give in to sexual temptations and violate the law of chastity, we can repent, be forgiven, and participate in full fellowship in the Church.

We may not know precisely why some people feel attracted to others of the same sex, but for some it is a complex reality and part of the human experience. The Savior Jesus Christ has a perfect understanding of every challenge we experience here on earth, and we can turn to Him for comfort, joy, hope, and direction (see Alma 7:11–12). No matter what challenges we may face in life, we are all children of God, deserving of each other's kindness and compassion (Romans 8:16–17). When we create a supportive environment, we build charity and empathy for each other and benefit from our combined perspectives and faith.

The Church provides resources at mormonandgay.lds.org to help individuals and families live the fulness of the gospel and seek the Spirit while navigating this aspect of mortality.

Church Teachings

October 25, 2016

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From mormonandgay.lds.org.

God Loves All His Children

Nothing more fully demonstrates the depth and reach of God’s love than His willingness to sacrifice His Son that we, His children, might overcome death and be offered eternal life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Nothing better expresses the love of Jesus Christ than His willingness to give His life to atone for the sins of mankind, compensate for all suffering and injustice, and break the bands of death for all (see Alma 7:11–13). “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

In an October 2009 general conference address, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf described God’s love:

“God does not look on the outward appearance. I believe that He doesn’t care one bit if we live in a castle or a cottage, if we are handsome or homely, if we are famous or forgotten. Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God’s love encompasses us completely.

“He loves us because He is filled with an infinite measure of holy, pure, and indescribable love. We are important to God not because of our résumé but because we are His children. He loves every one of us” (“The Love of God,” Oct. 2009 general conference).

God loves all of us. He loves those of different faiths and those without any faith. He loves those who suffer. He loves the rich and poor alike. He loves people of every race and culture, the married or single, and those who experience same-sex attraction or identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. And God expects us to follow His example.

We Are Commanded to Love God and One Another

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37–39).

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

We show our love for God by keeping His commandments (see John 14:15) and by loving one another (see John 13:34). If you have a family member or friend who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as gay, love them. President Henry B. Eyring observed:

“If you want to stay close to someone who has been dear to you, but from whom you are separated, you know how to do it. You would find a way to speak to them, you would listen to

them, and you would discover ways to do things for each other. The more often that happened, the longer it went on, the deeper would be the bond of affection. If much time passed without the speaking, the listening, and the doing, the bond would weaken. God is perfect and omnipotent, and you and I are mortal. But he is our Father, he loves us, and he offers the same opportunity to draw closer to him as would a loving friend. And you will do it in much the same way: speaking, listening, and doing” (“To Draw Closer to God,” Apr. 1991 general conference).

You show your love for God by loving and serving others. “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

What does it mean to love one another? Love cares. Love listens. Love includes. Love inspires. Love is at the heart of what makes us human, for we are children of God, and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). At the Last Supper, the Savior reiterated, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

The commandment to love one another includes those who don’t see the world the same way we do. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained:

“In so many relationships and circumstances in life, we must live with differences. Where vital, our side of these differences should not be denied or abandoned, but as followers of Christ we should live peacefully with others who do not share our values or accept the teachings upon which they are based. The Father’s plan of salvation, which we know by prophetic revelation, places us in a mortal circumstance where we are to keep His commandments. That includes loving our neighbors of different cultures and beliefs as He has loved us. As a Book of Mormon prophet taught, we must press forward, having ‘a love of God and of all men’ (2 Nephi 31:20)” (“Loving Others and Living with Differences,” Oct. 2014 general conference).

Divine love does not excuse sin—“I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance”—but is anxious to forgive—“nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (D&C 1:31–32). In like manner, we should yield no ground in living and defending the commandments of God, but to mirror fully the love of God, we must also love one another so openly and completely that no one can feel abandoned or alone or hopeless.

The Savior Has a Perfect Understanding of All Our Difficulties

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

As mortals, our understanding is limited. We can declare with Nephi that we “know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, [we] do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

As we seek answers and direction for our personal journey, we can trust God and the power inherent in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins of the world, He also experienced every pain and affliction any human being might experience:

“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).

Feelings of Same-Sex Attraction Are Not a Sin and We Can Choose How to Respond

The Church does not take a position on the cause of same-sex attraction. In 2006, Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated:

“The Church does not have a position on the causes of any of these susceptibilities or inclinations, including those related to same-gender attraction” (2006 interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: “Same-Gender Attraction”).

Feelings of same-sex attraction are not a sin. Elder M. Russell Ballard stated:

“Let us be clear: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that ‘the experience of same-sex attraction is a complex reality for many people. The attraction itself is not a sin, but acting on it is. Even though individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them. With love and understanding, the Church reaches out to all God’s children, including [those with same-sex attraction]’” (“The Lord Needs You Now!” *Ensign*, Sept. 2015, 29).

While same-sex attraction is not a sin, it can be a challenge. While one may not have chosen to have these feelings, he or she can commit to keep God’s commandments. The parent of a child who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as gay should choose to love and embrace that child. As a community of Church members, we should choose to create a welcoming community.

“And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

People Who Live God’s Laws Can Fully Participate in the Church

“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

God promises that if we obey His laws we will have eternal joy, and He always keeps His promises. Clearly people who experience same-sex attraction or identify as gay can make and keep promises to God. They can walk in His light. They can fully participate in the Church.

“If members feel same-gender attraction but do not engage in any homosexual behavior, leaders should support and encourage them in their resolve to live the law of chastity and to control unrighteous thoughts. These members may receive Church callings. If they are worthy and qualified in every other way, they may also hold temple recommends and receive temple ordinances” (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.6).

President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

“We love them as sons and daughters of God. 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. If they violate the law of chastity and the moral standards of the Church, then they are subject to the discipline of the Church, just as others are” (“What Are People Asking about Us?” Oct. 1998 general conference).

Whatever a person’s circumstances, he or she can contribute to the Lord’s cause in the present and can anticipate that his or her faithfulness will yield the same blessings, here and hereafter, that are promised by God to anyone who is similarly faithful. Elder D. Todd Christofferson has observed:

“Everyone has gifts; everyone has talents; everyone can contribute to the unfolding of the divine plan in each generation. Much that is good, much that is essential—even sometimes all that is necessary for now—can be achieved in less than ideal circumstances. So many of you are doing your very best. And when you who bear the heaviest burdens of mortality stand up in defense of God’s plan to exalt His children, we are all ready to march. With confidence we testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ has anticipated, and in the end will compensate all deprivation and loss for those who turn to Him. No one is predestined to receive less than all that the Father has for His children” (“Why Marriage, Why Family,” Apr. 2015 general conference).

The Law of Chastity Applies to All of God’s Children

Sexual purity is an essential part of God’s plan for our happiness. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared:

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World”).

Sexual relations between a man and woman who are not married, or between people of the same sex, are sinful and violate one of our Father in Heaven’s most important laws and get in the way of our eternal progress.

“The Lord’s law of chastity is abstinence from sexual relations outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. Sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Adultery, fornication, homosexual or lesbian relations, and every other unholy, unnatural, or impure practice are sinful” (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.5).

People of any sexual orientation who violate the law of chastity can be reconciled with God through repentance.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out. But he that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive” (Doctrine and Covenants 42:24–25).

Frequently Asked Questions

October 25, 2016

THE CHURCH OF
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From mormonandgay.lds.org.

Why Use the Term “Same-Sex Attraction”? Why Not Just Say “Gay”?

Same-sex attraction (SSA) refers to emotional, physical, romantic, or sexual attraction to a person of the same gender. If you experience same-sex attraction, you may or may not choose to use a sexual orientation label to describe yourself. Either way, same-sex attraction is a technical term describing the experience without imposing a label. This website uses this term to be inclusive of people who are not comfortable using a label, not to deny the existence of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity.

Why Does the Website Not Discuss Gender Dysphoria or Transgender Issues?

Many of the general principles shared on this website (for example, the importance of inclusion and kindness) apply to Latter-day Saints who experience gender dysphoria or identify as transgender. However, same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria are very different. For example, those who experience gender dysphoria may or may not also experience same-sex attraction and the majority of those who experience same-sex attraction do not desire to change their gender. From a psychological and ministerial perspective, the two are different.

Are You Asking Yourself If You Are Gay?

If you're asking yourself whether you're gay, you've probably experienced same-sex attraction and are wondering how to interpret these feelings. Sexual desires are complex and shaped by many factors. While a romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction can signal a sexual orientation, you should not automatically assume that it does. Sexual desire can be fluid and changeable. If you are questioning, you should not feel pressured or rushed to reach conclusions about your sexuality.

Words mean different things to different people, and the definition of a word can change throughout our lives. What does the word *gay* mean to you? Is it a feeling? an identity? a lifestyle? The usage of the word *gay* has been changing as society and culture change. Identifying as gay may mean you experience same-sex attraction but choose not to act on these feelings. Or maybe this label describes how you express yourself emotionally, physically, sexually, or politically. If you're wondering what someone means when they say, "I'm gay," just ask them.

Should I Come Out?

For some people, keeping feelings of same-sex attraction private can result in shame or a negative internal dialogue. Sharing those feelings with a trusted confidant can be liberating and healing. Some, however, wish they had waited longer or at least limited the number of people to whom they disclosed their feelings, so this decision shouldn't be based on yielding to pressure to "come out" publicly or openly identify as gay. If you decide to disclose feelings of same-sex attraction, prayerfully consider whom you would like to tell about it and how to share this aspect of your mortal experience.

If you decide to share your experiences of feeling same-sex attraction or to openly identify as gay, you should be supported and treated with kindness and respect, both at home and in church. We all need to be patient with each other as we figure things out.

As Church members, we all have a responsibility to create a supportive and loving environment for all our brothers and sisters. Such a support network makes it much easier to live the gospel and to seek the Spirit while navigating any aspect of mortality.

How Can I Talk to My Parents or Bishop about Same-Sex Attraction?

If you feel comfortable talking with a parent, another family member, or a Church leader, consider sharing your feelings with them. Help them understand what you're going through so they can show love and support. If they don't understand what this experience is like, ask them to read through the articles on this website. This may not be an easy conversation to start, but it's important to get a dialogue going. Be patient with the people around you, and remember you are all learning together. If those you love have difficulty understanding or being supportive, they may need your help. Treat your parents and leaders with the same kindness and respect you hope they will show to you. This website is designed to help everyone better understand same-sex attraction from a gospel perspective.

If I'm Faithful Enough, Will My Attractions Go Away?

The intensity of same-sex attraction is not a measure of your faithfulness. Many people pray for years and do all they can to be obedient, yet find they are still attracted to the same sex. Same-sex attraction is experienced along a spectrum of intensity and is not the same for everyone. Some are attracted to both genders, and others are attracted exclusively to the same gender. For some, feelings of same-sex attraction, or at least the intensity of those feelings, may diminish over time. In any case, a change in attraction should not be expected or demanded as an outcome by parents or leaders.

The intensity of your attractions may not be in your control; however, you can choose how to respond. Asking the Lord what you can learn from this experience and how this can become a strength to you can focus your faith on an outcome you can control. Turning your life over to God is an important act of faith that brings great blessings now and even greater blessings in the world to come.

Will the Church Ever Change Its Doctrine and Sanction Same-Sex Marriages?

Central to God's plan, the doctrine of marriage between a man and woman is an integral teaching of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and will not change:

“As a doctrinal principle, based on the scriptures, the Church affirms that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

“Sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, are sinful and undermine the divinely created institution of the family. The Church accordingly affirms defining marriage as the legal and lawful union between a man and a woman” (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.10).