

“Before You Knew Him/Her, I Loved Him/Her First”

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Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the power of the gospel plan as it relates to the challenges of life, including the struggles of those who experience same-gender or same-sex attraction. I am not an expert or authority in the psychology or sociality of these tendencies or addictions as they are commonly referred to, nor am I a spokesman for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I am aware of the struggles and heartaches of those whose lives are afflicted by these influences and am grateful for this invitation to speak to you who deal directly with those who suffer from such problems and who strive to help the families and friends directly affected by those challenges. This effort has caused me to seek enlightenment and understanding. I hope and pray the thoughts I share with you today may be done under the influence of the Holy Ghost so that we may all be edified together.

The scriptures define homosexuality as “sexual immorality.” The Lord told Moses “it is abomination.” (Leviticus 18:22) It is just one of the many evils and temptations surrounding us.

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: “It is a wicked, wicked world in which we live.... Challenges of pornography, gender confusion, immorality, child abuse, drug addiction, and all the rest are everywhere. There is no way to escape from their influence. Some are led by curiosity into temptation, then into experimentation, and some become trapped in addiction. They lose hope. The adversary harvests his crop and binds them down.... The angels of the devil convince some that they are born to a life from which they cannot escape and are compelled to live in sin. The most wicked of lies is that they cannot change and repent and that they will not be forgiven” (Boyd K. Packer, “I Will Remember Your Sins No More,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 25)

After Adam and Eve were placed in the world in which we all now live, “Satan came among them . . . and men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual and devilish” (Moses 5:13).

God, through his infinite love and power, provided a Savior who would atone for our sins and who would live an exemplary life for us to follow. “He suffered

temptations, but gave no heed unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:22).

When Satan came tempting Moses saying: “Moses, son of man, worship me,” Moses looked upon Satan and said: “Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory that I should worship thee? For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man...”

It seems that we are brought back to the basic questions of life: “Who am I?” “Am I the son of man?” That is, “am I only concerned with what man can do?” “Am I without identity beyond the present sphere?” Until we come to know, as did Moses, that we are sons and daughters of God, sent to the earth in the similitude, or likeness of His Only Begotten, we are likely to limit ourselves to the temporary state of mortality and disregard the eternal nature of our identity and destiny. We need not experience a personal “mountain top” visitation as did Moses to know that we are indeed sons/daughters of God. We can know by the still, small voice which reminds us that there is a power beyond our own which created us and gave us life and being. We can read, pray, ponder, and come to know that there is a God in Heaven with whom we are connected by divine familial ties. We can experience the love of parents and brothers and sisters which helps us to understand the supernal love of our Heavenly Father.

“Why am I here?” This question may plague all of us at times when we find ourselves caught up in situations which seem beyond our comprehension. “Why me?” Moses gives us the answer in his record of his visit with God. “I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; . . .” Each of us is here to fulfill the work required to obtain eternal life and the happiness and joy associated with it. Brigham Young said that we were here to prepare to qualify for eternal life and happiness.

People usually want to do the best they can to live or do things as well as possible. Several years ago, one of my young daughters was getting ready to go to school. I noticed that she was sad, even crying. I asked her what was wrong. She responded, “my Primary teacher asked

us to try to live one day this week without making any mistakes and we would know how it feels to be perfect. This was going to be my day, but I've already made a mistake, so now I'll have to wait until tomorrow."

I reminded her that Jesus said we could repent, start over when we find we've made a mistake, and He would forgive us. We could then be happy again. At this, she smiled and asked, "You mean I can start over now?" "Yes," I said. She then left cheerfully for school. I went on my way to work. During the day, I wondered how our Shelley was doing.

When I returned home, I asked Shelley how her day had gone. She told me she had a wonderful day. "I had to start over a lot, but I had a wonderful day." Yes, you and I have a work to do during which we may well make mistakes, even when we try to perform that work perfectly. But we are not left alone to accomplish that work. We have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who is engaged in the work with us. He lived a perfect life and provided Himself a sacrifice to pay for the errors we make when we repent and strive to begin again.

"Where am I going?" Unless the first two questions above are answered in a way that gives us a vision of the eternal relationships we have with God and each other, we may never gain the eternal perspective necessary to see that life and our individual identity go on forever with purpose and clarity. We are going to an eternal home which is the consequence of our prior actions and endeavors and the loving forgiveness of our Heavenly Father. This means, of course, that what we do here is significant to the point that we must take life seriously and seek after the Way, Jesus Christ, that leads us to the intended goal.

In her book *Born That Way?*, Erin Eldridge writes: "Christ is the way to overcome any behavior or desire that can be spiritually or physically damaging, whether it is compulsive use of food, drugs, work, or sexual activity, as well as other weaknesses and unrighteous desires. He is also the path to freedom from the effects of abuse and other traumatic events.... We must remember who we truly are." To that I would add, "and we must keep focused upon our eternal objective."

Not long ago, a young man shared with me his feelings about his sister who has been living in a lesbian relationship for several years, and the rather difficult impact her choices have had upon his extended family and upon his own children. He said as hard as it is, "I don't like to define my sister as a lesbian. I know her in so many other ways that are good and kind. That term alone does not define her as a person."

It is important for all of us to remember the strength and power we have as sons and daughters of God. It is vital that we recognize that same attribute in the lives of those who have been misled and have strayed from the path of righteousness. It is necessary to help them recognize this attribute of divine origin in themselves and to receive hope and strength from this truth.

With any addiction or transgression, the first step to overcoming the problem rests in the desire of the individual to want to resolve his or her situation, addiction, or transgression—to gain a desire to repent and turn their lives to Christ.

Christ said, "...will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?" (3 Nephi 9:13). "Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved" (3 Nephi 9:22).

It is encouraging to know that the Savior does not leave us alone to deal with our temptations. From 1 Cor. 10:13, we read: "There hath no temptation taken (Greek: seized upon) 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."

This teaching of the Savior reminds us that we are each in control of ourselves; we each have agency to act and to choose the course we will take. However, He has promised us that He will assist us through each of our challenges when we turn to Him.

Some may consider addictions simply as bad habits that can be conquered by willpower alone, but many become so dependent on a particular behavior or substance that they may no longer see how to abstain from it. They may lose perspective and sense of other priorities in their lives.

Elder Packer has said, "Addiction has the capacity to disconnect the human will and nullify moral agency. It can rob one of the power to decide" ("Revelation in a Changing World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 14).

When a person becomes addicted to a behavior which is contrary to the Lord's plan of happiness, he or she can become self-abusive and derisive. Under these circumstances, the individual can become so distraught and discouraged that blame for the wrong doing is directed toward God. If wrong doing or the urge to do wrong is God's fault, then all personal responsibility may

be removed and the ability and even desire to discern between good and evil actions becomes clouded.

Our Father in Heaven can discern our thoughts and thus is able to warn us or alert us to that which would lead us away from Him and from the marvelous blessings He desires to give to us. Although giving in to a temptation may seem to bring temporary satisfaction, true happiness cannot be attained nor true joy experienced through wrong doing. We must act in faith. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them (the children of Israel brought out of Egypt): but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4: 2).

In the recent dedication of the Sacramento Temple, Elder Richard Hinckley spoke about the only true pathway to eternal life which is through the temple. He told the story of the Donner Party and the tragic circumstances of their journey across the high Sierra Mountain trail. The party had delayed the last leg of their journey by one day to regroup and recoup at what is known today as Donner Lake. Had they continued on and not stopped at the lake they would have been clear of the mountain pass prior to the snow storm that took most of their lives.

One survivor from that party was twelve-year-old Virginia Reed who wrote to her cousin in Illinois shortly after her rescue from the snowbound encampment: “Never take no cutoff[f]s and hur[r]y along as fast as you can” (Quoted by George R. Stewart, *Ordeal by Hunger: The Story of the Donner Party*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960, p. 361).

There is only one way—the Lord’s way—that leads to true and everlasting happiness. There “ain’t no cut offs,” no short cuts.

We may not understand the underlying causes of same-sex attraction, anymore than we can understand any other addiction or urge or action which is unacceptable to our Lord. We do understand that there are eternal principles which govern consequences of personal behavior. Obedience to those principles—faith and repentance—results in happiness now and eternal joy hereafter.

To repent or correct a wrong means to return to the ways of God. This implies that the individual was at one time right before the Lord, and therefore can become right with Him again. This is where the atonement of Jesus Christ comes forward with all its power. His love for us is so great that it can lead us carefully, step by step, back into His presence. That first step begins with the desire to make a change.

“But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a

particle of faith, yea, 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.... Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye will give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold if it is a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves — It must needs be that this is good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea it beginneth to be delicious to me.... Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.... Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away” (Alma 32:27-32).

A noted French philosopher named Bainville made the following statement: “We must want the consequences of what we want.” I have pondered this statement many times over the years. It has led me to consider each decision or desire by asking myself, “What will the consequences of this decision/desire be?” Several times, I have been able to keep from making a mistake in judgment by considering the consequences which would inevitably follow such a decision.

Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, one is greatly blessed, even beyond that which we fully understand. Through Jesus’ atonement and the principles of faith, repentance, and forgiveness, we weak mortals can have hope for the future, regardless of the challenges we face and the course our life takes.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught: “Not all problems are overcome and not all needed relationships are fixed in mortality. The work of salvation goes on beyond the veil of death, and we should not be too apprehensive about incompleteness within the limits of mortality” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Powerful Ideas,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 25).

Faithful parents have hope for children who go astray. The following statements from Church leaders offer great hope and comfort:

Elder James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has said: “There are some great spiritual promises which may help faithful parents in this Church. Children of eternal sealings may have visited upon them the divine promises made to their valiant forebears who nobly kept their covenants. Covenants remembered by parents will be remembered by God. The children may thus become the beneficiaries and inheritors of these great covenants and promises. This is because they are the children of the covenant. God bless the struggling,

sacrificing, honorable parents of this world. May He especially honor the covenants kept by faithful parents among our people and watch over these children of the covenant” (James E. Faust, *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 32-35).

Elder Boyd K. Packer has taught: “The measure of our success as parents, however, will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible. It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons or daughters. They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should. It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled” (Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 66).

I was at an airport recently, waiting for the arrival of my grandson. A friend I had not seen for some time came along and we had the opportunity to visit with each other for a little while. The conversation turned to our families and I listened with interest as he told me about each of his children whom I had not seen for several years. I learned that two of his sons were involved in relationships with other men and were living “that” lifestyle. He was very open with me about his sons and seemed happy. That prompted me to ask him how he was able to cope with this challenge in such a positive way.

He shared with me (and has allowed me to share this with you) that he had been heartbroken and had struggled for several years with the choices his sons had made. He had tried without success to persuade them to turn from their way of life but had experienced no success. One day as he was praying and pondering about this difficult challenge in his life, he said he felt a still, small voice say, “Remember, I loved them first. Trust Me.”

From that time forward, he has been able to maintain a relationship with his sons that enables him to see them as sons of God and as his own sons. He has focused upon their many good qualities and attributes. He does not discuss with them their social behavior and lifestyle. He tries to focus his interest on their professional goals and other facets of their lives. He has let them know he does

not condone their actions; but neither does he condemn them as individuals. He has promised each of them that he will always be ready and available to help them return to actions which will make them right with the Lord and bring them the true happiness they seek in their lives. He has found hope in the invitation to “trust in the Lord,” and comfort in the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith which were quoted by Elder Orson F. Whitney in a General Conference address in 1929: “The Prophet Joseph Smith declared— and he never taught more comforting doctrine— that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or in the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice, they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God” (in *Conference Report*, Apr. 1929, 110).

I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Redeemer. He will not fail us nor our children. As we encourage those who have gone astray, let us remind them about who they are, why they are here, and where they are going. We can assure them that they are of divine origin—sons and daughters of God. Each has a work to do here in the earth that has to do with their divine origins and destiny of which gender is an essential part. As they follow Christ with faith and obedience, they will arrive at their desired eternal destination with happiness and joy. We can and must TRUST in Him.

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