

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:28-30

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INTRODUCTION

The First Presidency has issued the following statement on standards of morality and fidelity: "We call upon members to renew their commitment to live the Lord's standard of moral conduct. Parents should teach their children the sacred nature of procreative powers and instill in them a desire to be chaste in thought and deed. A correct understanding of the divinely appointed roles of men and women will fortify all against sinful practices. Our only real safety, physically and spiritually lies in keeping the Lord's commandments.

The Lord's law of moral conduct is abstinence outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage. Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual contact, including fornication, adultery and homosexual and lesbian behavior, is sinful. Those who persist in such practices or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline.

"We remind you of scriptures that make clear the relationship between one's thoughts and actions (see Matthew 15:19; Mosiah 4:29-30; Alma 12:14; 3 Nephi 12:28; D&C 121:45). There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior. However, such thoughts and feelings, regardless of their causes can and should be overcome and sinful behavior should be eliminated. This can be achieved through faith in God, sincere repentance, and persistent effort. The help of others may be needed. We commend and encourage those who are overcoming inappropriate thoughts and feelings. We plead with those involved in such behavior to forsake it. We love them and pray for them. We are confident that through repentance and obtaining needed help, they can experience the peace that comes from conforming their lives to God's teachings.

"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 Isaiah 53:4-5; Mosiah 4:2-3)" (First Presidency letter, 14 Nov. 1991).

This booklet will help Church leaders assist members, both men and women, who are troubled by homosexual problems. Participation in such behavior is of particular concern because it violates the commandments of God, is contrary to the purpose of human sexuality, distorts loving relationships and deprives people of the blessings that can be found in family life and in saving ordinances of the gospel.

Reading this booklet will help leaders understand the nature of homosexual problems and the steps they can take to assist those who want to bring their life into harmony with the teachings of the Savior.

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUAL PROBLEMS

Homosexual problems include erotic thoughts, feelings, and behavior directed toward persons of the same sex. These problems should not be confused with appropriate expressions of love and respect between members of the same sex.

Some people who seek help for homosexual problems may have concluded that experiences from their youth, such as perceived problems with a parent or some other older person, contributed to their inappropriate feelings. Some may believe that they have not consciously chosen to have such feelings in the first place.

No general agreement exists about the causes of such problems. It is important for you as a Church leader to help members understand that regardless of the causes, these problems can be controlled and eventually overcome. Members can be helped to gain self-mastery, adhere to gospel standards of sexual purity and develop meaningful, appropriate relationships with members of both sexes.

HELPING MEMBERS OVERCOME HOMOSEXUAL PROBLEMS

The guidance of the Spirit will be your most important resource in helping members. Prayerfully consider the impressions that come to you and the suggestions that follow. As much as possible, use the scriptures and the words of the living prophets in your efforts to help.

When members with homosexual problems come to you for help, they may feel guilty and in despair, having been unable to change their lives. You can instill hope in them. Help them to know that you and their Heavenly Father love them and that they can be healed from their afflictions through the atonement of the Savior. Help them to accept responsibility for their thoughts and feelings and to apply gospel principles that will enable them to change their behavior.

In most cases, these members need a better understanding of faith in Jesus Christ, the process of repentance, and the purpose of life on this earth. They need to understand the importance of praying,, fasting, searching the scriptures, honoring their covenants, and obeying all of the commandments of God.

Through his atoning sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ made repentance and forgiveness possible. Those who repent of their sins are cleansed and healed by the power of God. Help members understand the atoning and healing power of the Savior in their lives by reading with them and discussing Isaiah 53:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Mosiah 4:2-3; Moroni 10:32-33; and other relevant scriptures. Also read and discuss this statement by President Ezra Taft Benson: "The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1985 p.5; or Ensign Nov. 1985 p.6).

In order to change homosexual behavior, a person must understand the seriousness of the transgression feel deeply repentant and have a firm commitment to change. These same elements will help a person overcome homosexual thoughts and feelings, which, although less serious, lead to deviant behavior.

To help members understand that the Lord will forgive their sins if they are fully repentant, read with them and discuss Ezekiel 33:14-16; Enos 1:1-8; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42-43; and other relevant scriptures. Also read and discuss this statement by President Ezra Taft Benson: "God's gifts are sufficient to help us overcome every sin and weakness if we will but turn to Him for help" ("A Mighty Change of Heart," Ensign, Oct. 1989, p.5).

Help the troubled members to realize that these promises will become realities as they turn to the Savior and strive to cleanse their lives of all unrighteousness. As they do so, they will be healed through the grace and power of Christ.

Consider having the members read Spencer W. Kimball's book The Miracle of Forgiveness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969).

A member with homosexual problems often anticipates rejection from Church leaders. Therefore, the member needs to know that you genuinely want to help and that you can be trusted. It is particularly important that the member feel these things during the first interview. Be compassionate and encouraging as well as firm. Meet with the member regularly, especially during the early stages of repentance.

Ask the person whether family members, especially the spouse or parents are aware of the problem. Ask how they have responded. If a good relationship exists and the family is a primary support system, discuss the possibility of including them in efforts to help. The family's support may be very important to the person's success.

Listen carefully to what the person says. Ask questions that will help you understand the person's feelings and intentions as well as the nature and seriousness of the problem. For example, you could ask: What difficulties are you having? How long have they existed? How deeply involved are you in homosexual thoughts, feelings, or behavior? What effect are these problems having in your life? What do you think can be done to improve the situation? How have you tried to overcome these problems? Answers to such questions will help you discern how to help.

It is essential that you keep confidential the information given to you by the member. Breaches of confidence may cause the member to lose trust in you, and rumors may cause others in the ward or community to react negatively toward the member, making repentance and change more difficult.

Be careful not to label the person as "homosexual" or "gay". Such labels can undermine the person's belief that change is possible and may communicate the mistaken notion that a man or a woman is born with homosexual identity that cannot be changed. It is more appropriate to speak of homosexual thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

If the person is deeply depressed or is talking of suicide, you should immediately contact a professional therapist for help (see p.5, "Obtaining Professional Assistance").

A person may be troubled by homosexual thoughts and feelings even though there has been no homosexual behavior or such behavior has been eliminated. These thoughts and feelings need to be overcome. Members of the Church are commanded to control their sexual thoughts and desires. They are expected to obey the Lord's law of sexual purity.

You can help members understand the importance of controlling their thoughts and feelings by reading with them and discussing Romans 12:2; Mosiah 4:29-30; Alma 12:14; Doctrine and Covenants 121:45; and other relevant scriptures.

Self-mastery in all aspects of one's life requires physical and emotional energy. A man or woman who has a healthy life-style will more likely have the energy and self-discipline needed to change. If the person does not already have a program of regular self-improvement including exercise, a healthy diet, and setting and achieving goals, encourage him or her to establish such a program.

Help the troubled member recognize and overcome common rationalizations such as the following: "I am not responsible for my behavior because I was born this way." Although some struggle with unwanted homosexual thoughts and feelings, there is no conclusive evidence that anyone is born with a homosexual orientation.

Many people face difficult challenges. Whatever the causes of problems, each person is ultimately responsible for how he or she deals with life's challenges. (see Boyd K. Packer, "Covenants," in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, pp.107-10; or Ensign Nov. 1990 pp.84-86.)

"I cannot change my sexual orientation." Change is possible. There are those who have ceased their homosexual behavior and overcome such thoughts and feelings. God has promised to help those who earnestly strive to live his commandments: "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).

Pornography and masturbation almost always accompany homosexual transgressions. These deviant practices must be overcome before homosexual problems can be resolved.

Pornography is very dangerous and addictive. It includes all forms of entertainment that are vulgar, immoral, or perverse in any way. It may be present in movies, videocassettes, concerts, books, magazines, and other types of media. Viewing or reading pornography arouses sexual fantasies and urges that lead to deviant behavior.

Although masturbation is accepted by many in the world this practice has been condemned by the Lord (see "President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality," Ensign, Nov. 1980, p.97). Indulgence in this practice intensifies sexual urges, making it difficult for the person to overcome homosexual problems.

Overcoming the addiction to pornography and masturbation is seldom easy. The more frequently a person engages in these practices, the more difficult they are to overcome.

You can help a person identify the sequence of events that leads to either of these practices. Encourage the person to interrupt the sequence at the earliest possible stage by substituting desirable thoughts and activities. Fasting, praying, listening to inspirational music, and avoiding location where previous transgressions occurred are all helpful.

Overcoming these deviant practices may take time. There may be relapses. Focus on the progress the person making. Continue to provide encouragement and support until the problems are conquered.

People who are trying to overcome personal problems will be strengthened by good relationships with others. Encourage members who are repenting of homosexual transgressions to live righteously and develop appropriate relationships.

Many people try to repent while clinging to unhealthy relationships with others who have similar problems. Members who are repenting must free themselves from these relationships.

Marriage should not be viewed as a way to resolve homosexual problems. The lives of others should not be damaged by entering a marriage where such concerns exist. Encouraging members to cultivate heterosexual feelings as a way to resolve homosexual problems generally leads them to frustration and discouragement. However, some people have reported that once they are freed from homosexual problems, heterosexual feelings have gradually emerged.

While the bishop is responsible for helping a member to repent, others may assist as well. The bishop should obtain permission from the member before disclosing confidential information to others. The family is a person's first line of support and should help when possible. The bishop may ask ward members to provide needed friendship and support, but he should not break confidences or create circumstances in which the repentant member or other members could be exposed to temptation.

OBTAINING PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

In addition to the inspired guidance and assistance of Church leaders, members often need professional help from qualified therapists who understand and honor gospel principles. When adequate professional help is not available in the ward or stake, and LDS Social Services agency may provide consultation, therapy, or referral to therapists in the community. To obtain information about these services, contact your local LDS Social Services office or write to LDS Social Services, 50 East North Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150.

HELPING THE SPOUSE AND FAMILY MEMBERS

It is important to understand and help the spouse and family of those who have homosexual problems. Sometimes family members may be hesitant to ask for help because they fear rejection, misunderstanding, or blame. There are some instances when a spouse or family member may need help through professional therapy.

If a person with homosexual problems chooses not to change, family members may have difficulty maintaining feelings of love and acceptance toward the person. Encourage them to continue loving the person and hoping that he or she may repent. For specific suggestions on how family members can help, see Elder Richard G. Scott's address entitled "To Help a Loved One in Need," Ensign May 1988, pages 60-61.

If the troubled person has sexually abused a child, child abuse reporting laws may apply, and the child may need professional therapy. Please refer to the booklet "Child Abuse: Helps for Ecclesiastical Leaders (32248) or additional guidelines.

To protect the well-being of a spouse future offspring, and other family members, encourage those who have engaged in homosexual behavior to obtain testing for the AIDS virus and to seek competent medical help. (see "First Presidency statement on AIDS," Ensign, July 1988, p.79.)

Be careful not to blame family members for choices made by a person with homosexual problems. Parents are especially inclined to blame themselves for the problems of a son or daughter. The following statement by President Spencer W. Kimball may help to console and encourage family members:

"I have sometimes seen children of good families rebel, resist, stray, sin, and even actually fight God. In this they bring sorrow to their parents, who have done their best to set in movement a current and to teach and live as examples. But I have repeatedly seen many of these same children, after years of wandering, mellow, realize what they have been missing, repent, and add great contribution to the spiritual life of their community. The reason I believe this can take place is that, despite all the adverse winds to which these people have been subjected, they have been influenced still more, and much more than they realized by the current of life in the homes in which they were reared..."

"...Righteous parents who strive to develop wholesome influences for their children will be held blameless at the last day, and ... they will succeed in saving most of their children, if not all" (in Conference Report, Oct.1974, p.160; or Ensign, Nov.1974, pp.111-112).

CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND ACTIVITY

Stake presidents and bishops should use their inspired judgment in deciding when to convene a Church disciplinary council for a member who has committed a homosexual transgression. The purposes of Church discipline and instructions for convening disciplinary councils are explained in the General Handbook of Instructions, section 10.

Activity and service in the Church are privileges as well as responsibilities. When people have repented and are worthy, bishops may extend appropriate Church callings to them. Bishops should make certain that men and women who are called to work with youth are above reproach in living the Lord's law of sexual purity.

FOSTERING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Spouses, family members, and friends of those with homosexual problems may come to you for counsel about how to prevent problems in the lives of other family members. Teach them that each person can be fortified against sinful practices by obtaining a testimony of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ; understanding his or her relationship to God; and obeying gospel principals. Each person also needs to understand the divinely appointed relationship between men and women.

A secure family environment helps children develop healthy sexual attitudes. Love, effective communication, and appropriate expressions of affection among family members are vital. Each person also needs the security that comes from spending individual, quality time with parents, friends, and role models.

CONCLUSION

There is hope for those who desire to be free of homosexual problems. Though the process of repentance is often long and difficult, members can overcome these problems by turning to the Lord, following the inspired guidance of his servants, and committing themselves to a program of change. Repentance leads to healing, peace of conscience, and joy. Added strength and comfort come through service in the Church. In some cases, heterosexual feelings emerge leading to happy, eternal marriage relationships.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," in Conference report, Oct.1985, pp.4-6; or Ensign, Nov.1985, pp.5-7.

Spencer W. Kimball, The Miracle of Forgiveness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969).

Spencer W. Kimball, "President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality," Ensign, Nov.1980, pp.94-98.

Boyd K. Packer, "Covenants," in Conference Report, Oct.1990, pp. 107-10; or Ensign, Nov.1990 pp.84-86.

Richard G. Scott, "To Help a Loved One in Need," in Conference Report, Apr.1988 pp.69-71; or Ensign May 1988, pp.60-61.

For the Strength of Youth (34285).