

# Not Ashamed

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Viewing Same-Gender Attraction as a Blessing

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**SUBJECT: SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH PAPER**

Accompanying this letter is my research paper, *Not Ashamed: Viewing Same-Gender Attraction as a Blessing*. I have written this paper to fulfill one of the requirements for English 312. In addition, I plan to use the research and ideas gathered for other BYU classes as well as a hopeful way to help others who experience same-gender attraction understand and realize that homosexuality isn't a burden—it can be a blessing.

**Topic Chosen.** I am majoring in Theatre Education. I became interested in my topic as a direct result of my own experiences with same-gender attraction—and seeing the sadness that it can bring into the lives of others when not dealt with correctly. I chose this topic because I hope it will be beneficial to those who experience same-gender attraction to feel as if they are not alone, that they are loved, and that they do have a place in this world.

**Future.** My plans are to publish this paper on many support group websites, blogs, Facebook pages and other means of electronic communication. I also am hopeful to submit this paper to a BYU symposium.

The documentation style of my major is MLA which I will be using for this paper.

I hope you enjoy reading this paper as much as I did writing it!

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Foree

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## **ABSTRACT**

In our society, particularly in the LDS religion, homosexuality is viewed as something negative; a trial or curse that must be “overcome” or “removed” from someone’s life. The paper will examine different aspects of the origin of homosexuality, how to control homosexual thoughts or behavior and how to become an example of resisting temptation and staying faithful in the LDS religion. The paper is mostly comprised of evidence and ideas found in books, articles, newspapers and Internet websites. Likewise, some of the theories are derived directly from the author’s own personal experiences and ideas. As a result of the findings, the author has tried to create a new way to view homosexuality within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The author found that experiencing same-gender attraction can be more of a blessing, rather than a trial if dealt with wisely.

# NOT ASHAMED: VIEWING SAME-GENDER ATTRACTION AS A BLESSING

## INTRODUCTION

*A young man hangs his head in shame.*

*“I am a walking abomination,” he tells himself, “I am broken. People don’t understand me. Why I am the only LDS person in the world who struggles with this? Why can I just be normal?”*

This young man experiences same-gender attraction. In other words, he is gay. However, because of his religious beliefs and upbringing, the people around him do not understand homosexuality. The young man himself believes that he is damned for all eternity—simply by being attracted to other men.

Brad Carmack, a BYU student studying Political Science wrote a compelling electronic book entitled, *Homosexuality: A Straight BYU Student’s Perspective*. Carmack states, “Within the church [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]...a very conservative estimate is that there are roughly 350,000 homosexually oriented members of the LDS church.” With such a high number, it is hard to dispute the fact that 2.5% of LDS members are gay. These startling statistics prove that homosexuality is something that is neither “rare nor insignificant” (Carmack 1) in the LDS faith. Ironically, although the young man in the fictional story above feels like he is alone, he is in fact, a key cog of a moving wheel driven to help others understand homosexuality.

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who also experiences same-gender attraction, the author of this paper intends to help persuade homosexual members of the Church to understand and realize that same-gender attraction is a spiritual gift—not a burden. Over the duration of the following pages, the author will shed new light on doctrinal issues and strive to provide concrete and sure evidence that will aid the homosexual member of Christ’s church. Furthermore, the text will also highlight ways a heterosexual member of the Church can give aid and appreciation to their homosexual acquaintances.

In essence, this paper is written to support the young man who hangs his head in shame. He needs to realize that it is up to the receiver of these homosexual feelings to choose whether to act on them, or to stay closer to the Spirit of the Lord. These tendencies, if dealt with wisely, can bring upon the receiver an added measure of the goodness of God. Those who experience homosexuality can learn to view their trial as a blessing through the understanding of the definition and origin of homosexuality, learning to control homosexual thoughts or behaviors, and becoming heroic in their battle with homosexuality.

## DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF HOMOSEXUALITY

**Can you define homosexuality?** From Sigmund Freud to Dr. Oz, hundreds of people have tried to determine the origins of homosexuality. Some scholars believe that homosexuality is caused by an overbearing mother and a distant father. Others suppose that homosexuality is a biological

trait that is inherited genetically. In addition, some religious members of Christian faiths and otherwise determine that homosexuality is a trial or burden given to some of God's children.

While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints defines homosexuality as simply "same gender attraction" we can read more information in their pamphlet written to gay members of the Church. In *God Loveth His Children*, the Church gives insightful advice and words of wisdom to any member who may experience these feelings. They adamantly reinforce the idea that while some men or women may finally overcome their homosexual desires in their lives, some "may not be free of this challenge in this life" (4).

Obviously, the rest of the world does not identify someone who experiences homosexual feelings as someone who experiences same-gender attraction. They simply define them as: gay. The word "gay" has many different connotations and labels. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has tried to steer clear from the connotation of the word gay. In recent years, however, the LDS church has realized that the word gay is becoming less of a detrimental description of a stereotype to a different way of life. The church has even used the word "gay" in some of their recent press releases and conferences (LDS Newsroom).

**Where does homosexuality come from?** Renowned LDS psychologist, A. Dean Byrd, who emphasizes helping men who experience same-gender attraction, gives his idea of where homosexuality originates. He says, "There has been a general scientific consensus that homosexual orientation is not biologically determined." In fact, the popular Christian opinion is that homosexuality is *not* biological—it is a choice brought upon by other factors such as home life, molestation, early interest in pornography, etc. Simply put, A. Dean Byrd believes that homosexuality is not biological at all. Instead, he believes that there is "tremendous gulf between those who stand on both sides of the issue" (4).

Interestingly enough, a biology professor at Brigham Young University has dramatically given strong evidence that he says proves homosexuality is a biological and genetic trait. The presentation began with hundreds in attendance and ended with a rapturous applause and standing ovation. He presented new ideas and challenged old ones. Providing images, scientific proof and otherwise Bradshaw declared that, "the existing evidence leads to the conclusion that homosexuality is a normal minority variation in humans; the *origins of which are biological*" (Bradshaw 53 emphasis added). If this is the case, some people's perspectives of gays and lesbians may have to change. If homosexuality is genetic, then this means it may be a physical and spiritual part of a person's life. But, where is the doctrine that supports the argument?

**Could homosexuality have existed in the pre-existence?** As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are most all familiar with the concept of the "pre-existence". Simply put, the pre-existence is where all of God's sons and daughters lived before they came to the Earth. There are members of the Mormon faith who believe it is in the



**Figure 1.** A spiraling galaxy hundreds of thousands of light years away seems to remind us of the pre-existence, the power of God and the mortality of man.

pre-existence where they gained their talents, personality and traits of their souls. Gay and lesbians across the world define themselves to be attracted to the same gender and they affirm that they were “born this way”. Is it possible that homosexuality was given to men and women, just as talents and personalities were, in the pre-existence? Jason Park, the author of *Understanding Male Homosexual Problems* seems to believe that this may be the case. In summation, he indicates that before we were born, we existed as spirits, and before that as unique intelligences. Each person was able to grow and expound on their own personality. He argues that it is because of this period of growth in the pre-existence there exists today millions of people with different likes, dislikes, dreams and expectations. Our personalities were not created at physical birth, but have been developing long before that. It is no wonder that every person has different likes, desires, dreams and moods (15). Mr. Park appears to be alluding to the idea that homosexuality is something that is either chosen or given in the pre-existence. Does that mean homosexuality will exist in the afterlife?

Professor Belnap, a religion professor at Brigham Young University believes otherwise. He says that the idea of homosexuality being a spiritual trait is most likely taken out of context. The idea that our spirits (which may include intrinsic sexual desires) comes from Alma 34:34 where we read, “for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.” Belnap states, “While I can certainly see how one may understand the verse to be referring to one’s physical spirit, verse 35 goes to say: ‘for behold if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the **spirit of the devil**, and he doth seal you his; therefore the **Spirit of the Lord** hath withdrawn from you’” (Belnap). The idea that our spirits will be exactly the same as they are now, could be a misinterpretation of this classic scripture. We see that there are two spirits that can be a part of our afterlife experience: the spirit of the devil or the spirit of the Lord. Belnap seems to argue that it is not our earthly spirit that is taken with us into the next life, but rather, our willingness to either obey the promptings of the Adversary or to heed the council and commandments of the Lord.

Both men present valid and thought-provoking arguments. Whoever is right or wrong does not matter. What matters is the ability for the receiver of homosexuality to determine for him or



**Figure 2.** Many men and women who experience same-gender attraction wage an internal battle between their feelings and the doctrine they have learned—leading to conflicting feelings. They yearn for answers from religion.

herself if homosexuality is an integrate part of their life or not. Regardless of the origin or end of homosexuality, one thing is certain: it is a part of life; a trial or blessing given to God’s children.

### **WHY DOES GOD GIVE MEN TRIALS?**

*A young man silently writes in his journal. “If only I knew why God made me this way. This is making my life so hard; so difficult. Why does God give such hard trials to bear? Why am*

*I the only LDS person who deals with this?!”*

Many men and women who experience feelings of attraction to their same gender ask themselves these questions. Even LDS scholars have tried to find out reasons why some of God’s children are gay or lesbian. One scholar says, “There are aspects of human sexuality that we do not fully understand, including why some of God’s children have attraction for those of their own gender” (Guide 1). President Dieter F. Uctdorf of the LDS church agrees with this idea. He said in a Sunday meeting, “Many questions . . . related to same-gender attractions, must await a future answer, even in the next life. Until then, the truth is, God loves all his children” (Stack 1). Although we may not fully understand nor comprehend the reason why, we can find some comfort in the Word of God. These faithful members of the LDS faith have consistently scoured the Bible, Book of Mormon and other standard scripture of the Mormon religion to find out the most obscure answer to a most difficult question: Why me?

It’s an age-old question that has eluded the children of God for centuries. Of course, we all know the old dogmas, “Bad things happen to good people” or, “God is no respecter of persons” and “The rain falls of the wicked and the righteous”. Simply put: life is hard. For some reason, God has given some of His elect children the trial of same-gender attraction. We may not know all the reasons why, but we do have a slight understanding of God’s purposes.

In Exodus 4:11 we find an interesting passage that can help alleviate the burden of trying to understand God’s will in giving His children trials. The following verse highlights a simple lesson that we must all learn in order to accept the choices that God makes. The scripture is referring to when the Lord spoke to Moses in the burning bush. We read, “And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?” At first glance, one may simply see that God is the Creator of all things. However, as we take a closer look, we can gain a high understanding of this essential principle. For example, the Lord says that He has created mute people, deaf people, blind people, etc. Why would the Lord create or give such a debilitating trial to anyone? In order to find an answer to the elusive question, we must go to the Book of Mormon for guidance.

Jacob, a prophet from the early years of the Book of Mormon states, “Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do *these things*” (Jacob 4:7 emphasis added). What are these “things” that Jacob mentions? Prior to this verse, Jacob gives a list of sorts. The things that he mentions are: faith in Jesus Christ, searching the scriptures, performing miracles and understanding the mysteries of God. Again, the reason for “why” seems elusive. However, we can see from the scripture above that God gives men weaknesses (trials) in order for His children to understand the great power they have. In other words, God gives men trials in order for them to come back to Him and live their lives in such a way that they can be called worthy sons or daughters of their Heavenly King.

## **CONTROLLING HOMOSEXUAL THOUGHTS OR BEHAVIOR**

*The young man smiles at his reflection in the mirror. He says, “Alright. I’m attracted to guys.*

*Now, what?"*

In any given day, depending on the circumstances, a person can make either hundreds or thousands of different choices. These choices can range from the most vital: getting out of bed, or to something simpler: what socks should I wear? Regardless of the weight of the decision to be made, our lives are governed by choice. We choose what to eat, what to wear, what to say, how to act, and how to live our lives. In LDS theology, this concept can be described as agency. Agency is the ability that God gave His children to choose for themselves. Men and women who live on earth can either choose to do what is right or what is wrong. Agency is given to every person regardless of race, religion, physical make-up or sexual attraction. It is up to the receiver of agency to decide what to do with the power to choose.

**Choosing the better part.** Although a man or woman “does not choose to have homosexual attractions, he does choose how to respond to them and his ability to resolve his homosexual [attractions] will be determined by the control he decides to take over his life” (Park 33). That is what it all comes down to: taking control of your life. Some men and women adamantly proclaim that their lives are horrible and cursed because of their homosexual attractions. Others state that their lives are blessed and protected because of their homosexual attractions. What is the difference? Attitude and choice. You can choose the better part once you understand that you have a choice. Homosexuality does not define you; your choices do.

Choices played a vital role in the life of Erin Eldridge. She lived the lesbian lifestyle for many years. Coupled with drugs and drinking, her life fell into disrepair. She did not feel close to God, nor did she feel close to others. She felt trapped and she felt unclean—all because of the choices that she had made. However, as she made the choice to learn how to control her homosexual thoughts and desires, she began to choose the better part.

**The natural self and the true self.** Erin discovered that there are two parts to every person: The natural self and the true self. The natural self can seek for a life filled with choices that appear to provide happiness and joy. In the end, however, the natural self can become an enemy and you may find that your life has deviated from the course of the gospel of Christ. However, the true self is something completely different. In the following statement from her book *Born That Way?*, Erin describes how she understands the true self. She says, “The true self seeks a sense of belonging, unconditional love, safety, fulfillment and intimacy. Heavenly Father does not intend for us to be deprived of the fulfillment of legitimate needs” (Eldridge 90). While most gay men and women also yearn for the feelings of belonging, love, safety and intimacy, the key component of her statement is that our Heavenly Father does not intend for them to be deprived of those needs. In some way that is fitting in the plan of our Father in Heaven, the true self will be given the opportunity to be fulfilled.

**Throw away labels.** In order to learn how to control homosexual thoughts or behaviors, some have found it beneficial to throw away the “gay”, “straight” or even “Mormon” label. In every society, there exists labels and stereotypes. Gays are labeled as men who wear pink, talk with a lisp, and dress extremely well. Straight guys are labeled as men who like sports, have large muscles, eat too much, etc. Conversely, the Mormon stereotype is someone who has more than one wife, believes that Joe Smith is like God, and who do not believe in Jesus Christ. As

incorrect as these labels and stereotypes are, they are unfortunately believed by millions of people across the world. If someone wants to overcome a stereotype or a label, they first have to throw away that cultural distinction.

Rick Isenee, author of *Reclaiming Your Life: The Gay Man's Guide to Love, Self-Acceptance, and Trust*, says this about labels: "When you label yourself as being dumb or lazy or too dependent, you box yourself in. Identifying behaviors instead of labeling yourself will help you recognize underlying feelings. Understanding your feelings will help you identify your *shoulds* and make new choices" (161). Isenee understands and realizes that in order for someone to "shake" off a certain label or stereotype; they must understand that the label is first inhibiting them. To fully gain a sure grasp on controlling homosexual behavior, one must throw away the stereotypical gay label and label themselves as a child of God—willing to do what He asks.

Erin Eldridge knows all too well the defining aspect a label, or word, can have. She used to identify herself as "gay" or "lesbian". After deciding that a rampant and promiscuous homosexual lifestyle was not her life plan, she knew that something had to change. She realized that she needed to define herself the way God sees her and not as the world saw her. Her touching story highlights this process and allows her perspective to shed more light on learning how to throw away labels. She said,

"I finally stopped calling myself a "homosexual" or an "alcoholic." Instead of identifying with my weaknesses, I began identifying with my Strength. I no longer depend on homosexual relationships or on alcohol. I depend on Jesus Christ. I have made a covenant, and I renew it every week, that I will not be known through any name other than Christ's. The second sacramental covenant, "always remember him," helped me redirect my thoughts. I began turning my attention away from sin and towards Christ. When thoughts entered my mind I knew shouldn't be there, I would replace them with the Spirit through prayer or scripture study. As I continued to turn my thoughts toward heaven, my heart started to follow (Eldridge 117).

In order to begin the process of controlling homosexual thoughts or behavior, one needs to make a clear distinction between the natural self and the true self. Additionally, learning how to define yourself in the way that God sees you—rather than how the world sees you—will have a greater impact on what choices you decide to make. Granted, learning how to rely on the Lord through such a debilitating challenge as same-gender attraction can be hard, but it can be done.

## **COME OUT OF SHAME**

Shame is defined as a painful emotion resulting from an awareness of inadequacy or guilt. Some men and women who experience same-gender attraction feel shame each day of their lives. Some feel as if they are broken or diseased. They harbor the traditional views of homosexuality that were thrown upon their shoulders by members of the older generation; parents, grandparents and ecclesiastical leaders. Now, our world is changing. Instead of homosexuality seen as an encumbering disease (*du mas*), it can be seen as a blessing. Just because someone feels attracted to someone of their own gender does not make them less of a person, less worthy or less in the eyes of God.

**Religion brings shame.** In most Christian religions, homosexuality is seen as something to be ashamed of. Being gay is not natural, not biological and therefore is a sin. Gershan Kauffman, a prominent Jewish psychologist, makes an interesting argument about how the role of religion plays in shame. He says, “What most religions consider natural is heterosexual marriage; anything else is judged unnatural. If we are unnatural, we are unworthy of belonging. If we are unnatural, we oppose Nature’s way and Nature’s God. To be unnatural, therefore, is to be abhorrent and shameful, completely outside the natural world and the divine order of things” (Kauffman 89). In essence, most religious sects are creating a great divide that is impossible to cross for any member who may experience same-gender attraction. However, that is not the case with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**LDS stance on homosexuality is changing.** It is no secret that life is different than it was 30 years ago. In the 1970s, the hippies were in full swing, sex was rampant, and illegal drugs were slowly emerging into the mainstream of society. In addition, gay rights activists such as Harvey Milk were taking center stage. He courageously led a group of men and women to march in the streets of San Francisco in order to have basic rights in the work force. His idea of equality was attacked on all sides—mainly from religion. For example, Spencer W. Kimball of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called homosexuality a disease. He stated, “We know such a disease is curable...” He then goes on to call people who experience homosexual desires as social “deviants” (Kimball 13).

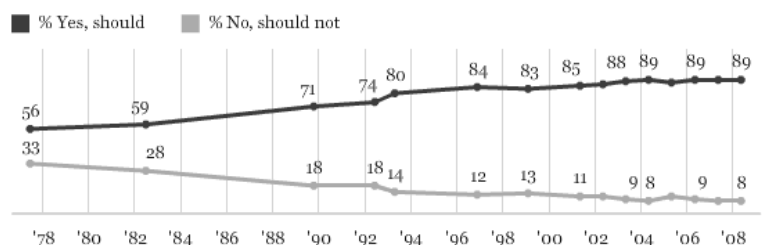
Thankfully, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has changed its ideas and viewpoints on homosexuality. It seems as if more light and knowledge have been given to Church leaders, allowing those stalwart members of the faith to feel accepted, loved, and appreciated. More recently, the Church has changed the text from its Church handbook regarding homosexuality. The following quote comes from the LDS Church Handbook. The lines in strikethrough are items that have been omitted.

“If members ~~have homosexual thoughts or feelings or~~ engage in homosexual behavior, Church leaders should help them have a clear understanding of faith in Jesus Christ, the process of repentance, and the purpose of life on earth. ~~Leaders also should help them accept responsibility for their thoughts and actions and apply gospel principles in their lives~~” (Instructions 199).

Rather than calling those who experience same-gender attraction diseased or wrong, Church leaders are specifically instructed to only give counsel to those who have actually engaged in homosexual behavior—as vague as that definition is. The reality is, is that the Church’s ideas of homosexuality are changing.

Just recently, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints completely backed a new law for Salt Lake City which would allow full employment and equal job rights for gay and lesbian people in the work force. Before the new law was passed, it was legal to fire someone or deny them rights, simply because of

*As you may know, there has been considerable discussion in the news regarding the rights of homosexual men and women. In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?*



GALLUP POLL

**Figure 3.** The graph above displays current public opinion whether or not gays and lesbians should have equal rights in the work force. As you can see, public opinion is drastically changing.

their sexual orientation. As society changes and accepts that gay and lesbian people are just the same as any other person, some Church stances and ideas will need to change as well. As the graphic demonstrates, most people do believe that homosexual people have the right to job opportunities and employment—just like everyone else. And the Church agrees, too.

As time goes on, more church members will have a better understanding of what causes homosexuality. Furthermore, more members will be able to accept their homosexual brothers and sisters just as they accept their heterosexual brothers and sisters in the church. This complete change of thought will take time, but will allow homosexual members to finally be heroic in their sexuality.

## BECOMING HEROIC IN YOUR HOMOSEXUALITY



**Figure 4.** You don't have to be a superhero to be a hero to another person. Learning how to stand up for yourself and show others your determination, faith, and love of the gospel will make you a hero.

*A churning, sickening feeling fills his stomach. As he grasps the sides of the pulpit, the young man defiantly declares, "I experience same-gender attraction, and I'm grateful for that. I'd like to bear my testimony of the power of..."*

Instead of thinking a hero is someone whose powers will be diminished with kryptonite, think of a hero as a role-model, teacher, or a good example.

Being heroic doesn't mean that you are required to save babies from burning buildings. It does, however, require that you be an example to others.

Being heroic in your homosexuality is just that—learning how to be an example to others in the LDS faith.

**Speak up.** Too often, men and women who experience these desires feel as if there is no place with them in the Church. They feel as if their chances of eternal life have been thwarted and that no one understands them. One easy way to help others understand homosexuality is to teach them about it. Being heroic in your homosexuality doesn't mean to wear a t-shirt that proudly proclaims your sexuality. It means that you can help others come closer to Christ as they see your example of faith, perseverance and dedication to His gospel. For example, a volunteer who struggled with homosexuality was part of a 4 year study done in the Salt Lake and Utah County areas. Speaking of a bleak future, one man said,

"All you see are the people who act out, you don't ever hear good stories. Who's going to tell their good story?—No way, they want to keep it quiet! If they've learned to deal with it or if they're happy, they don't go around telling everybody, they just want to put it behind them...you never see anyone stand at their mission reunion and say, 'I had struggles with homosexual feelings but I resisted them my entire mission'"(Byrd 54).

Rather than focusing on all the stories of men or women who have not resisted their feelings and who may have left the Church, members need to hear the heroic stories of those who have stayed in the Church. While the odds seem to be stacked against those who stay in the Church, the actual act of remaining true and faithful to covenants will help bring others closer to Christ by seeing a shining example of hope.

**Let your voice be heard—everywhere.** The Internet can be a powerful tool in becoming heroic in your homosexuality. Many male and female members of the Church who experience same-gender attraction have helped hundreds of others through Facebook pages, Online Support Groups, Blogs, YouTube videos and more. One of the greatest aspects of the Internet—and possibly the most frightening—is that you can be whoever you want to be. If you’re not comfortable sharing your true identity online or likewise, that’s your decision. However, you can no longer be silent in sharing your message of hope, love, and appreciation across the world. Your voice is a rare voice indeed, but it needs to be broadcast for all to hear—even your loved ones.

**Tell your loved ones.** One of the hardest parts of becoming heroic in your homosexuality is gathering the courage to tell your loved ones regarding your same-gender attraction. There are many people in the world who all have different ideas and viewpoints regarding homosexuality. In order to become heroic in your battle, you need to “come out” of the proverbial closet—as cliché as that sounds. When your loved ones see that you are the same person, but a hero, we can only hope that their opinion of you will grow and not lessen. Your loved ones will most likely go through a short time where they have to learn to accept this new idea, but as long as you remind them that you’re still the same person—with the same core beliefs and ideals, the process will be much simpler. However, there are those who may not fully understand your viewpoint on homosexuality.

## **UNDERSTANDING THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE SAME-GENDER ATTRACTION**

**Homosexuality is not a choice or a disease.** The most common misconception of those who experience same-gender attraction is that they “choose” to have these feelings. If this is the case, then millions of men and women willingly choose to subject themselves to bigotry, hate crimes, and bullying. Some people may think that these brave men and women choose to be homosexual “to fulfill all society’s stereotypes of what a homosexual is, and accept the consequences, including the risk for AIDS, legal discrimination, exclusion from normal society, denial of family and children, and general harassment” (Hersch 1). No one, in the right mind, would choose to go through the pain and suffering and heartache that a homosexual person goes through. It is not a choice.

Furthermore, there are some who still naively believe that homosexuality is a disease. This idea stems from religious leaders and scientists holding onto the ideas of the past in the 1970s. For example, in 1979 the American Psychiatric Association [labeled] homosexuality as a mental disorder under the general title of “Diseases” (Du Mas 22). However, homosexuality is no longer considered a mental or societal disease.

Lastly, if you know someone who experiences same-gender attraction, Rees et al has some words of advice—and warning—to those who know someone who has feelings for the same sex. He said that those who have same-gender attraction “need loved ones or trusted confidantes to whom they can explain their feelings and concerns... When families react with alarm and disapproval over such revelations, they close off opportunities for dialogue. It’s important not to be judgmental and to avoid blame, hostility, rejection or condescension” (22). Simply put, loved ones need to remember that they are part of Christ’s church. They need to remember that they make a covenant with Him every week that they will follow His council and teachings by remembering Him. If loved ones react with hatred or bigotry, their son, daughter or friend may choose to close all ties with family or friends—and the Church.

## CONCLUSION

Each person on this earth has different trials, challenges and blessings that they must learn to overcome or accept in order to continue progressing in life. With the correct mind frame and attitude, one can view the blessing of same-gender attraction to be a spiritual gift given to some of God’s children, rather than a burden. If one relies heavily upon the Lord during the rough times of life, they will learn to rely on Him for guidance, comfort and direction—a lesson that is hard for many to learn.

Once the origin and definition of homosexuality are understood and described in light of the restored gospel, one can use that information to begin their transformation from shame to slowly understanding that they are not alone, broken or diseased. Understanding is the first step, and controlling the attractions is the next.

Learning to control homosexual thoughts or behavior can be extremely difficult, but can be done. While many people may never lose the attraction to their gender, they can take the appropriate steps to learn how to throw away worldly labels and take upon them the name of Christ. As they surround themselves with people, ideas, and concepts that are in harmony with the teachings of the gospel, they will notice an increase of the Spirit of the Lord, which will aid them in understanding the blessing of same-gender attraction.

Remember, there are roughly 350,000 members of the church who experience same-gender attraction. Most of them are confused, hurt and lonely. If you feel confident in your blessing, the best advice this young author can give is to speak out. Let your voice be heard. Be a hero to someone who only sees the world’s opinion of homosexuality. You may not realize it yet, but there are so many men and women who are yearning for a good role model; someone they can trust and look up to. This author’s invitation to you is to *be that hero*. Be the type of person who people can come to and admire for your faithfulness and stalwart determination. As you do so, you will not only be blessing the lives of others, but in turn, your life will be blessed and you will become the person our Heavenly Father wants you to become. And, in time, you will finally learn to not be ashamed with your spiritual gift of same-gender attraction.

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