

**Oakland California Stake**  
**Joint Relief Society /Melchizedek Priesthood Presentations**  
**“Loving All Our Brothers and Sisters”**

August 30 and September 6, 2009

**Syllabus**

1. November 14, 1991 Letter from the First Presidency
2. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995)
3. Elder Lance Wickman, 2007 interview with Church Public Affairs
4. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Public Affairs – Same Gender Attraction*, (2007)  
<http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/public-issues/same-gender-attraction>
5. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”, *Ensign* (October 2007)
6. Talk titled “*Intimacy*” delivered by President Dean Criddle at the Saturday evening session of Oakland Stake Conference on September 15, 2007
7. Elder Dallin H. Oaks “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995)
8. Matt. 22:35-40
9. Elder Dallin H. Oaks “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995)
10. Mosiah 18:8-10
11. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction”, *Ensign* (October 2007)
12. *God Loveth His Children* (2007)
13. Matt. 5:46-47
14. Matt. 7:1-3

## **Item #1**

“We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues [of same gender attraction]. Many will respond to Christlike love . . .”

November 14, 1991 Letter from the First Presidency, Quoted in *God Loveth His Children* at page 12.

## Item #2

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

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995).

### **Item #3**

“There’s no denial that one’s gender orientation is certainly a core characteristic of any person.”

Elder Lance Wickman, 2007 interview with Church Public Affairs,  
<http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/v/index.jsp?vnextoid=27f71f1dd189f010VgnVCM100000176f620aRCRD&vnextchannel=726511154963d010VgnVCM1000004e94610aRCRD&vnextfmt=tab1>

## Item #4

“The Church does not have a position on the causes of any of these susceptibilities or inclinations, including those related to same-gender attraction. Those are scientific questions — whether nature or nurture — those are things the Church doesn’t have a position on.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Public Affairs – Same Gender Attraction*, (2007)  
<http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/public-issues/same-gender-attraction>.

## Item #5

“[I]f you are a parent of one with same-gender attraction, don’t assume you are the reason for those feelings. No one, including the one struggling, should try to shoulder blame. Nor should anyone place blame on another—including God. Walk by faith, and help your loved one deal the best he or she can with this challenge.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 2007).

## Item #6

# Intimacy

Oakland California Stake Conference  
Saturday Evening Session (Adults)  
September 15, 2007

President Dean E. Criddle

There is an old folk saying about “the elephant in the living room”. The saying refers to people coming together for polite conversation, but ignoring an obvious condition that overshadows everything else - but might seem too awkward for discussion in polite conversation. And so people just come to live with the “elephant in the living room”, rarely if ever discussing or even acknowledging that the condition is there at all.

This evening, I would like to visit with you about “an elephant in our living rooms”. This is an extremely delicate subject. But it is constant and pressing in our individual lives, in our family lives and in our associations at almost every level in Church, in the community and in the workplace. The subject is intimacy.

### Background

Each of us yearns for intimacy: emotional intimacy as well as physical intimacy. This is a fundamental characteristic of the human condition. I believe it is an essential feature of God’s plan of creation.

In literature, music and drama our popular culture mirrors back to us this yearning for intimacy that we recognize in ourselves. In fact, this is either the principal theme, or at least a significant sub-theme, in almost all art. Much of our popular literature, music and drama also correctly tells us that this yearning for intimacy brings with it not only potential for great pleasure and completeness, but also potential for great heartbreak, unhappiness and suffering.

This yearning for intimacy is “an elephant in the living room” because (at one level or another) it can color almost everything that takes place in our lives.

### Teenaged Youth

In God’s plan of creation, the level of desire for intimacy develops and shifts throughout our lives. The plan calls for this desire to explode in intensity as each person’s body chemistry changes, usually about ages 10 through 14. That certainly was my own experience as a young teenager.

I believe that a central message of the creation stories in the scriptures, as well as the temples, is that this desire for intimacy is good. But an equally central message of these creation stories is that this desire for intimacy can be (and regularly is) distorted into something that is not good.

Unfortunately, it seems that we rarely discuss these things in Church settings except in condemning terms. This is true not only of our discussions with the youth, but also of discussions among adults within the Church. Intimacy is “an elephant in our living rooms”. As a result, as the youth in our Wards and Branches begin to experience this yearning for intimacy, and as thoughts and images of intimacy come uninvited into their hearts and minds, our youth often feel ashamed – believing there must be something fundamentally wrong with themselves. They often tell themselves, “surely no one else but me is challenged with such thoughts.”

Of course that is not true at all. How sad if our faithful members feel unworthy or diminished when they are simply experiencing the natural course of God’s plan of creation at work in their own lives.

In a 1991 letter the First Presidency said this. “There is a distinction between immoral thoughts and feelings and participating in either immoral heterosexual or any homosexual behavior.”<sup>1</sup> In a pamphlet entitled “God Loveth His Children” released just last month, the leadership of the Church has added this:

“Everyone has temptations, but one of the purposes of mortality is to learn to overcome them. . . . These temptations, which are generally uninvited, may be powerful, but they never are so strong as to deprive us of our freedom of choice. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, ‘All of us have some feelings that we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior.’”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis supplied.)

Hopefully each of you received a copy of this pamphlet as you entered this session of Stake Conference this evening. If not, members of the High Council will be at the doors of this Chapel and will invite you to receive a copy as you leave.

### **Young Single Adults**

As Bishop of the Berkeley University Ward, I counseled with many young men and young women on this subject. Frequently struggling young men and young women would say: “Bishop, I can’t wait to be married and no longer be plagued by these uninvited thoughts.” I always responded that even the best of marriages will not eliminate this issue. While a loving and mutually giving marriage relationship can help address this yearning for intimacy, I would add that you should expect uninvited thoughts and desires to continue for the rest of your life. Whether married or unmarried, your challenge will remain the same: not to “entertain” those “uninvited” thoughts or to “engage” in behavior that violates your covenants.

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<sup>1</sup> November 14, 1991, quoted in “God Loveth His Children”(2007) at page 6.

<sup>2</sup> “God Loveth His Children”(2007) at page 6.

## Young Married Couples

The Church Handbook of Instructions gives precise words that Bishops and Branch Presidents are to use in performing civil marriage ceremonies. I have always thought that those words are well chosen, especially with this subject in mind. The officiator invites both the bride and the groom to promise “in the presence of God and these [two] witnesses” that you “will cleave unto her [or him] and none else”.<sup>3</sup> This language is drawn from the words of Jesus, who taught his disciples: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife.”<sup>4</sup> Cleave is an old English word meaning, among other things, to stick to something else like super glue. In this context, I believe “cleave” also is intended to mean to give and to receive emotional and physical intimacy. This part of the marriage covenant has both an affirmative component and a negative component.

We often focus on the negative component of this marriage covenant, to “cleave unto . . . none else”. It certainly is a grave breach of the marriage covenant and a betrayal of the spouse to share the deepest levels of emotional and physical intimacy with someone else. Without taking anything away from that important point, I would like to focus for a minute on the affirmative component of this marriage covenant. The promise is not simply to avoid cleaving to someone else. It also includes the affirmative covenant to cleave to the chosen spouse. I believe this is a covenant to be pro active in both giving and receiving emotional and physical intimacy – including a covenant to do our best to receive emotional and physical intimacies offered by our chosen spouse.

This can be a challenge. For example, intervening medical or psychological circumstances sometimes make it difficult or even impossible for husbands to be pro-active in sharing emotional and physical intimacy with their wives. Advertisements on television now regularly point to this and offer pharmaceutical aids. Similarly, biological or emotional circumstances sometimes make it challenging for wives to offer or to be willing to accept intimacies offered by their husbands. This can lead to emotional distance and difficulties in sharing other levels of intimacy between husband and wife as well.

Even when there are no specific or dramatic intervening biological or emotional circumstances, the challenges of daily life can and do create wedges between husbands and wives. Whether these wedges are large or small, they can and do make it difficult for spouses to be affirmative in “cleaving unto” each other. I believe this is an issue grappled with by every single couple who has been married for any period of time. It cuts a broad swath especially through the ranks of recently married couples in this Stake, leaving sadness, disappointment and sometimes bitterness and deep grief. This is an “elephant in the living rooms” of even the most committed, self-sacrificing and generous married couples.

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<sup>3</sup> Church Handbook of Instructions, Book I, Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics (2006), page 84.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 10:7. *See also* Matt. 19:5.

## Same Gender Attraction

When it comes to issues of emotional and physical intimacy, there is yet another “elephant in the living room”. During the formative teenage years, as the yearning for emotional and physical intimacy explodes in intensity, and as thoughts of intimacy come uninvited into our minds, for reasons I do not understand, some youth receive uninvited thoughts involving same gender attraction. For some, these uninvited thoughts of same gender attraction are mixed with thoughts and images of opposite gender attraction. For others, only thoughts and images involving same gender attraction arise. Like so many of their opposite gender attracted peers, these men and women also often feel ashamed – believing there must be something fundamentally wrong with themselves.

This elephant is not only in the living rooms of single men and women. It occupies a place in the living rooms of many married couples as well, when one or both spouses experience same gender attraction. Often this elephant is in the living rooms of the most faithful single and married brothers and sisters, people who are striving with all their might to do what is right and to be true to their covenants.

The recently released pamphlet “God Loveth His Children” gives this counsel to those who experience same gender attraction:

“Do not blame anyone – not yourself, not your parents, not God – for problems not fully understood.”<sup>5</sup>

“Even though same gender attractions may continue and may foster unresolved tensions, you will be strengthened by service in the Church and by interaction with other Church members who share beliefs and have made the same covenants you have made. Partaking of the sacrament, singing the hymns of Zion, and listening to uplifting talks all contribute to your spiritual growth. Neglecting these positive influences and withdrawing from the Church because of discouragement, perceived rejection, or a sense that you do not belong can only hurt your spirituality and your desire to control your emotions.”<sup>6</sup>

The pamphlet goes on to give this counsel to those who themselves do not experience same gender attraction:

“Some people with same-gender attraction have felt rejected because members of the Church did not always show love. No member of the Church should ever be intolerant. As you show love and kindness to others, you give them an opportunity to change their attitudes and follow Christ more fully.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Page 10.

<sup>6</sup> Pages 8 and 9.

<sup>7</sup> Page 9.

Those experiencing same gender attraction face special challenges there is no venue sanctioned by God to satisfy those uninvited but intense yearnings for intimacy. Of course, many members with only opposite gender attraction never have an opportunity to marry, and those members face similar challenges. But this does not diminish the loneliness and often despair felt by many who experience only same gender attraction.

Like the Church at large, the Oakland Stake includes a large number of members who experience same gender attraction. Some of these members are married and are struggling to find meaningful ways to “cleave unto” their spouses despite feeling either conflicting or no physical attraction to those spouses in the traditional sense. Others are single and are striving to be faithful to their beliefs and their covenants in the face of uninvited and intense yearnings for intimacy.

I believe that those who succeed in controlling uninvited impressions of same gender attraction are heroic. It is my pleasure to report that there are many such heroes in the Oakland Stake. More often than not, these heroes blend into our congregations with no one other than possibly the Bishop, Branch President or Stake President having any clue. Many of these people are among our most consistent and dependable members, responding in selfless ways when called upon to perform service and to accept assignments in the most difficult and time-consuming roles. Many serve faithfully in the Temple. Others serve as full-time missionaries. These people are heroic because they choose to be faithful to what they know to be true despite the intense and uninvited yearnings for intimacy which there is no immediate opportunity to satisfy – and without any clear understanding of why God would place them in this difficult position. As the “God Loveth His Children” pamphlet states: “Many questions, however, including some related to same-gender attractions, must await a future answer, even in the next life.”<sup>8</sup> To me, those who live their lives in this way are models of faith; they are truly heroic.

### **Conclusion**

The vision statement of the Oakland Stake declares that we are “a faith-based community of mutually supporting individuals and families.” This includes a vision that members of this Stake who are married will strive in affirmative ways to “cleave unto” their spouses, including by offering and accepting both emotional and spiritual intimacy. This also includes a vision that members of this Stake, whether single or married, will be mutually supportive and as each of us struggles to be faithful and true to our covenants despite often uninvited yearnings for intimacy.

May the Lord help us realize this vision I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Page 1.

## **Item #7**

“Surely if we are counseled as a body of Church membership to reach out with love and understanding to those ‘struggling with these issues,’ that obligation rests with particular intensity on parents who have children struggling with these issues ... even children who are engaged in sinful behavior associated with these issues.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995)

## Item #8

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, 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. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Matt. 22: 35-40.

## Item #9

“Each member of Christ’s church has a clear-cut doctrinal responsibility to show forth love and to extend help and understanding. Sinners, as well as those who are struggling to resist inappropriate feelings, are not people to be cast out but people to be loved and helped. (see 3 Ne. 18:22–23, 30, 32).”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Same Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 1995)

## Item #10

“And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life— Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?”

Mosiah 18:8-10

## Item #11

“Same-gender attractions run deep. . . [S]ome members exclude from their circle of fellowship those who are different. When our actions or words discourage someone from taking full advantage of Church membership, we fail them—and the Lord. The Church is made stronger as we include every member and strengthen one another in service and love (see D&C 84:110).”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* (October 2007)

## **Item #12**

“Some people with same-gender attraction have felt rejected because members of the Church did not always show love. No member of the Church would ever be intolerant. As you show love and kindness to others, you give them an opportunity to change their attitudes and follow Christ more fully.”

*God Loveth His Children* (2007) at page 9.

## **Item #13**

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?”

Matt. 5:46–47.

## **Item #14**

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

Matt. 7:1-3