

**GAY LATTER-DAY SAINT CROSSROADS:
My Journey, Your Journey, and a
Scripture-based Path Forward**

By Evan Smith

Edited by Marci McPhee

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Future updated versions will be posted at www.gayldscrossroads.org as pertinent events occur.*

(This book is available as a free PDF download at www.gayldscrossroads.org. That site also allows readers to navigate the various chapters and sections of this book online. Readers are invited to freely share this book and that website with others.)

Evan Smith believed the anti-gay messages he heard in church during his childhood, which contributed to some negative experiences on his mission in San Francisco. Later, as a bishop and then a counselor in a stake presidency, his heart softened as church members came to him seeking guidance about feeling attracted to others of the same gender. Evan's investigating and study became personal when his own son came out as gay.

In this navigable e-book, Evan tackles the issues with a lawyer's mind and a penetrating analysis of scriptures and church doctrine. He addresses such questions as these: "What insights apply from the end of polygamy and the race-based priesthood/temple ban?" "Why do I stay in the church?" and, most importantly, "What words are hurtful/helpful to **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ people** and their families?"

"Crossroads offers the reader poignant personal stories, asks engaging questions, and shines a much-needed light to help us - as LGTBQ individuals, as families, and as a church - see our way on this pioneer journey toward a better future."

-- **Carol Lynn Pearson**, author of *Goodbye, I Love You* and *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons Around Our Gay Loved Ones*, as well as *I'll Walk With You* (picture book based on her Primary song by the same name)

"Crossroads is a wonderful book from my friend, Evan Smith, an active Latter-day Saint and the father of a gay son, who shares valuable insights into how we can better meet the needs of LGBTQ Latter-day Saints. I encourage parents, local leaders, and our LGBTQ members to read this insightful and thoughtful book to better become the Body of Christ."

-- **Richard Ostler**, host of the podcast Listen, Learn and Love, founder of listenlearnandlove.org, and author of the book *Listen, Learn and Love: Embracing LGBTQ Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (to be released in September 2020)

"Evan Smith's book is honest, clear, broad in its reach, and extremely useful. It is very accessible, organized so that the reader can hop around and examine different aspects of the situation depending on the reader's particular interests. As an active church member, a former bishop, and the father of a gay son, Evan is acutely aware of the enormous hurt of LGBTQ church members and their families. He offers very thoughtful paths forward for changes in church policy and culture that are consistent with the foundational doctrines of the gospel and that would, in fact, expand the church's good influence. Very good stuff."

-- **Judy Dushku**, co-founder of the magazine *Exponent II*, former Boston Stake Relief Society President, founder of THRIVE Gulu in Uganda, former professor of government at Suffolk University, and mother of a gay son

"This book is a critically important study of how homosexuality is currently thought of in the LDS Church and how we might see it in a different light so as not to leave our LGBT members without a place in our theology. As the loving father of a gay son, Evan Smith has clearly given this topic significant thought over the years and clearly expresses his experience and thinking in a way that invites us to consider how we might do better as a church."

-- **Bryce Cook**, author of an influential essay available at www.mormonlgbtquestions.com, founding member of ALL (Arizona LDS LGBT) Friends & Family, and co-director of the annual "ALL Are Alike Unto God" Conference held every April in Mesa, Arizona

"Crossroads provides valuable insight into the tough challenges our LGBTQ siblings face as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is my hope that many members will read this book so they can better understand the LGBTQ experience and learn to minister to them effectively. I pray that readers will have an open heart and will ponder on ways to help our church be more inclusive. Our LGBTQ members are needed for us to learn how to love as the Savior loves."

-- **Christina Dee**, moderator of the Mormons Building Bridges Facebook group, and volunteer at the Utah Pride Center, Encircle, and Affirmation

Latter-day Saint singles to always maintain hope for marriage, not proactively abandon it. That distinction is important from a mental health perspective because it can mean that straight singles feel like they just have to wait for a spouse. But gay singles in the church tend to feel that a core part of them was created as a mistake that will need to be fixed after this life. I have personally observed that severe mental health damage can be caused by the church's teaching that the only "righteous" paths available for ~~LGBTQs~~LGBTQ people are marrying someone of the opposite sex or intentional lifelong celibacy.

[Side note: This is consistent with a peer-reviewed 2017 study at the University of Georgia on LGBTQ Latter-day Saints, which showed that over 73% of the participants reported trauma and multiple PTSD symptoms (89% reported at least one PTSD symptom) from repeated exposure to basic teachings of the church concerning sexuality, gender, marriage, and family. This stands in contrast to a baseline of 8% experiencing trauma / PTSD from those teachings. Trauma / PTSD was not self-diagnosed but shown through clinical methods derived from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder. The majority of respondents identified as active members with 31% holding current temple recommends.

(https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/simmons_brian_w_201712_phd.pdf;

<http://mormonsbuildingbridges.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20190928-U-of-U-MBB-Presentation-SIMMONS-FINAL.pptx>).

The following statistics also underscore how important it is for families and friends of LGBTQ youth to see their role as being supportive and accepting, not prescriptive and condemning:

- a) LGBTQ youth have a much higher suicide rate than the general population (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_among_LGBT_youth).*
- b) LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sex. (Pediatrics January 2009, VOLUME 123 / ISSUE 1).*
- c) LGBTQ youth who experienced someone trying to convince them to change their orientation were 2.5 times more likely to attempt suicide. (The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2019).*
- d) Families who accept LGBT family members reduce suicide rates of those LGBT family members by 50%. (Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing 23(4):205-13 · November 2010).*
- e) An LGBT youth who has **just one accepting adult** in their life reduces suicide rates by 40% for the LGBT youth. (The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2019).]*

What do I hope to achieve in writing this book?

Instead of writing about the happiness I feel in the church, I'm writing this book for some clearly different reasons. First, as *the father of a gay son*, I want to explain, and so hopefully do something productive with, the pain I feel from the church's teachings about gay sexual orientation. Rather than continue to let my hurt fester inside unexpressed, I'm trying to help increase understanding about why the church's position causes intense emotional turmoil for so many people. I want to try to be a voice for many people like me who are suffering. I'm not doing this because I care about what people think of me necessarily, but rather, because I honestly believe there are a significant number of church members who just don't understand (or who don't want to understand) why LGBTQ issues are such a "big deal."

like part of my making amends includes being more open about how I personally feel now, and apologizing for not being more open and honest before.

That's one reason why "crossroads" is used in the title of this book. Writing and sharing this book represents a crossroads for me in my life. Going public like this with my personal thoughts is something I hope helps provide healing for at least one LGBTQ individual who may have had a bad experience with a church leader before. I hope they read my apology here and feel hope that hearts can change as mine did.

I also hope this book can be a crossroads of sorts for straight church members who aren't too familiar with LGBTQ issues. I hope my thoughts serve as a touchpoint for them to learn enough so that they decide to be more loving toward our LGBTQ siblings. I sincerely hope the information, resources, and opinions shared here might serve as a crossroads for at least one more person to commit to becoming an LGBTQ ally.

And finally, the main reason to use the word "crossroads" for this project is because this book will explore the intersection between Latter-day Saint doctrine on gay sexual behavior, on the one hand, and the basic human dignity of (and compassion toward) **LGBTQs** LGBTQ people, on the other hand. A similar crossroads exists between personal well-being and doctrines on gender identity.

I will not spend much time discussing transgender doctrinal issues in this book as I don't have much personal experience with transgender church members. While the injustices our lesbian, gay and bisexual sisters and brothers face in the church are different from those faced by our transgender siblings, I believe that if the church's doctrine changes to permit same-sex couples to marry and still maintain full church privileges, then changes in our doctrines that cause harm to transgender church members will likely occur at or around the same time as well.

Until all such changes happen, the juncture between church doctrine and personal well-being will remain one that is fraught with tension that can cause intense pain for anyone in the church who is LGBTQ or who has a loved one who is LGBTQ. It forces difficult decisions to be made. So I think we all should take time to explore whether the crosses we see many of our LGBTQ siblings bearing on their roads in life are foisted upon them by the church, not by God.

Is it bad to recognize there is human error in the church?

I hope no fellow church members feel like I am attacking the church or its leaders by asking whether our doctrine opposing marriage equality comes from God. To the contrary, I love the church and am grateful for our leaders' efforts to do what they feel is best for the church as a whole. But also I don't think we should view anyone as an enemy to the church simply because they recognize that it's possible for human frailty to be reflected in church teachings. Multiple prophets in the Book of Mormon acknowledged that their writings could contain both the word of God and their own human mistakes:

Book of Mormon Title Page (by Moroni) – "And now, **if there are faults they are the mistakes of men**; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ."

James: I mean, do you have to, though?

Derek: But I just want you to know that when later generations tell a story... like how we read [the racist teachings of] Brigham Young up to Mark E. Peterson [and we now say those were] not from God. We throw them under the bus – and we should.”

Looking for ways to find hope for that sort of official shift in perspective to occur again, but in the context of full equality for LGBTQ people in the church, is the main purpose of this book.

I hope for a future where there are no longer any painful “crossroads” challenges for LGBTQ church members or their loved ones. I hope for a future where LGBTQ people and their supporters in the church no longer feel any friction between love of family and love of God or between basic human dignity and church teachings.

I hope the reader will remember that I hope for the best for the church. I hope you will remember that I am a lifelong committed member of the church who is just trying to help all our LGBTQ siblings feel truly loved, accepted, and appreciated. I hope you will remember that, rather than intending to hurt the church, I’m simply sincerely wondering if there are reasons to believe that future generations will look back on the way the church has treated its LGBTQ church members as something that was displeasing to God. And I think that’s a good question for all faithful church members to ask.

“I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. Growth comes of correction. Strength comes of repentance. Wise is the man who can acknowledge mistakes pointed out by others and change his course.” (Gordon B. Hinckley, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2001/07/words-of-the-prophet-the-spirit-of-optimism?lang=eng>, 1986)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_sexual_orientation#Denmark). There are 16.5 million Latter-day Saints in total, including all genders and orientations (according to the church's latest statistical report: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/2019-statistical-report>). That means that LGBTQ people outnumber all Latter-day Saints by nearly 10 to 1 at the most conservative estimate, 47 to 1 at the highest estimate.]

I struggle to think that God created so many people as LGBTQ just to condemn them or make them suffer under the doctrine of His relatively tiny church – in other words, I struggle that our doctrine provides so little hope for SO many of God's children who are LGBTQ. It hurts to see how church teachings on LGBTQ issues engender feelings of low self-esteem (and often suicidal thoughts) in **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ people** here in this life and a vision of the afterlife that is discouraging, to say the least. I know I fall into a category of ultimate privilege in the church, namely, being a straight, cisgender, white male. So my struggle is not nearly as painful as that experienced by many other church members. However, my pain is still real: it hurts to know that the church I love condemns my son for choosing to try to find companionship that is consistent with the way God created him.

To help you understand my own pain, I'll share in Chapter 9 more details about the experience we had in September 2019 with one of the General Authorities, which Cheryl mentioned in her post. It hurt to have an experience with a respected church leader that resulted in me feeling like I had to choose between being a disingenuously supportive father or being a less-than-ideal church member in his eyes. I choose the latter because I know, no matter what any church leader may say, that God does not want me to feel guilty about the joy I have over my son's well-being. As his father, I know Wes was born gay and I trust his judgment that if he married a woman, that union would not likely be long-lasting. I have seen how negative and depressing it is for Wes to believe he has to pursue a life where he will always have to proactively avoid falling in love ("It is not good that the man should be alone" – Genesis 2:18). I rejoice that he has chosen the path that is best for his mental health and that is most likely to result in him building a long-term, stable family for his future kids. That is not a selfish desire for him to have. But the General Authority we met with basically said none of that justified Wes' decision and that I shouldn't be happy Wes is "sinning." I don't believe the General Authority intended to cause me pain. And he apologized. But, nevertheless, his words were reflective of newly emphasized teachings from our highest church leaders (see Chapter 4), which are the true source of my current sense of near-hopelessness.

I have found a way to stay active and participate fully in the church by privately hoping and praying (again, if it is God's will) that change in church doctrine will come someday. So I don't want pain to be the sole focus of what I'm writing here. Rather, I want hope to be the focus. I can see a path for change that is consistent with existing doctrinal frameworks. I want to show that while teachings from prophets and apostles can sometimes seem to extinguish hope for change in certain areas, that change does still occur – ironically, often shortly after the loudest messages against change are delivered.

CHAPTER 2: HOW CAN WE LISTEN? WHAT WORDS HELP AND HURT?

*Chapter synopsis: I cannot speak for LGBTQ church members. All I can do is share my voice to try to support theirs. Their voices need to be heard more than any others. The church could do better at listening to them and making changes to address their “wants” (Mosiah 4:26). Specific ways that the voices of church members and leaders can hurt or help **LGBTQs**LGBTQ people and their families are listed.*

Am I a qualified voice for my son, other LGBTQ people, or other parents?

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge that I am an inadequate voice for LGBTQ people, primarily because I am not LGBTQ. Because of my gay son, I may be more familiar than the average church member with the challenges that LGBTQ individuals face in the church – but that does not qualify me to speak on behalf of LGBTQ people in general. Without question, the best voices to listen to on these matters are those expressed by LGBTQ individuals themselves. I hope to simply be an ally to them – someone who uses privilege to help create more awareness. I do not want to supplant their voices. I also acknowledge that, even among the voices of fellow LGBTQ advocates in the Latter-day Saint community, there are many people who are smarter, more eloquent, and more experienced in these matters than I am (several of whom I cite in this book). I encourage readers to check out the LGBTQ voices and ally resources I have listed at the end of this book.

[Side note: My inadequacy as a voice is especially true for our transgender siblings and their families in the church. I am not as familiar with the challenges they face given Wes does not experience gender dysphoria. So I will only touch briefly on a few transgender-related points in this book. I acknowledge the crucial need for more attention to be paid to the pain they feel from church teachings.]

I also know I’m not an authorized voice for all parents of LGBTQ children in the church. I know there are other parents in similar situations who feel differently than I do. That being said, I **also do** know my feelings are shared by many people in the church. Cheryl and I had dozens of church members, from both nearby and far away, privately contact us after her Facebook post saying they were grateful to her for sharing feelings that they felt too. Many (more than we ever would have thought) were closeted gay church members or parents of closeted gay kids in the church. Others were LGBTQ allies who had gay friends or family members, etc. So I feel compelled to at least try to share a bit more about our family’s story and my thoughts in case they similarly resonate with them or anyone else.

Shouldn’t LGBTQ voices dictate what is best for their own well-being in the church?

When it comes to what’s best for LGBTQ well-being, we need to do a better job in the church of listening to the opinions of LGBTQ people themselves. The scriptures teach that we should minister to people “according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26), not church leader’s assessment of their wants or needs. Straight church leaders declare what is best for all church members universally, even though what they decree causes direct psychological trauma for the vast majority of LGBTQ church members. That is the opposite of ministering to LGBTQ church members “according to their wants.” I often wonder why I have never heard of a broadcast meeting between leading

LGBTQ church members and our prophets and apostles, where the questions, desires, emotions, beliefs, and responses of both sides are aired publicly. We have similar face-to-face meetings with youth, young adults, and with the women's organizational leaders in the church, where questions are invited ahead of time for church leaders' responses. Why not have such meetings with LGBTQ church members too?

My favorite way to hear others' voices is in person. I have greatly enjoyed meeting LGBTQ church members at support group meetings (like those put on by Affirmation.org). I also enjoy hearing their voices on a daily basis through podcasts and in Facebook groups. Some favorite publicly accessible podcasts and groups where LGBTQ Latter-day Saint voices can be heard directly are:

- <https://affirmation.org/>
- <https://beyondtheblockpodcast.com/>
- <https://lattergaystories.org/>
- <https://www.listenlearnandlove.org/>
- <http://mormonsbuildingbridges.org/>
- <https://www.thepeculiar.org/>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/human-stories-with-jill-hazard-rowe/id1468623842>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/love-is-spoken-queer/id1491809605>

From a doctrinal perspective, the Beyond the Block podcast (linked above) has taught me the most about how a proper interpretation of scripture calls for full LGBTQ equality, and how church culture, policies, and dogma can deviate from what God teaches in the scriptures about loving and caring for the marginalized people in our communities. I recently had the following conversation with James Jones and Derek Knox, co-hosts of Beyond the Block podcast, in an “ask-me-anything” live session on Facebook. (See the Preface for a little more about Derek and James.)

Evan: “How do you respond to people who say the “needs” of the marginalized in the church (~~LGBTQs~~LGBTQ people) are best defined by the Brethren because they speak for the Lord (and the Lord knows what we all truly need best)?

*James: I would start with the fact that that's not what King Benjamin taught. In Mosiah 4:26 he explicitly counsels us to administer to people's relief both spiritually and temporally, according to *their* wants. You also gotta ask them whose needs were being filled when we spiritually dispossessed Black folks for 126 years. That answer will let you know if you should even continue the conversation.*

Derek: (1) First, it's not true that they "speak for the Lord" in any simplistic or robotic sense. On the contrary, the Lord can speak THROUGH them, but not everything they do or say is from the Lord. There are plenty of examples among prophets both ancient and modern. And usually in the Bible, when prophets make mistakes, OTHER people die. We should always have a mature perspective on prophets, knowing that they have biases, limitations, weaknesses, etc. We should hold them accountable and insist on transparency in their method. Part of that involves seeing the Church as one body with many members, and we ALL have a role to play to ensure that the body continues to live and grow. The Brethren are our servants, not our masters.

people according to their wants is because of a phenomenon called “survivorship bias.” That bias is aptly described as “the logical error of concentrating on the people or things that made it past some selection process and overlooking those that did not, typically because of their lack of visibility” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivorship_bias). An example of successfully avoiding survivorship bias happened in World War II, when statistician Abraham Wald recommended that planes be fortified against gunfire in the places where returning planes were unscathed, NOT in places where returning planes had bullet holes. His rationale was that the planes that were shot down must have been shot in the spots where surviving planes had no damage. In the church context, survivorship bias might be General Authorities most frequently preaching doctrines and establishing policies based on what has worked in their own lives, as people who have thrived in the church, rather than exploring with sincere and real intent whether the aspects of the church that have worked for them could be the very things that might unintentionally end up “shooting down” the faith of most of our LGBTQ siblings. Without LGBTQ individuals being heard in the highest levels of church leadership, any revelations the Lord may give to the church are likely to reflect elements of survivorship bias to one degree or another.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie echoed the sentiment that decisions by General Authorities, [even by prophets on doctrinal matters](#), may not be consistent with God’s will:

[“Prophets are men and they make mistakes. Sometimes they err in doctrine. This is one of the reasons the Lord has given us the Standard Works. They become the standards and rules that govern where doctrine and philosophy are concerned. If this were not so, we would believe one thing when one man was president of the Church and another thing in the days of his successors. Truth is eternal and does not vary. Sometimes even wise and good men fall short in the accurate presentation of what is truth. Sometimes a prophet gives personal views which are not endorsed and approved by the Lord. \(Personal letter to Eugene England, <http://www.eugeneengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/BRM-to-EE-Feb-80-Combined.pdf>, 1981\)](#)

“Though **General Authorities** are authorities in the sense of having power to administer church affairs, they may or **may not be authorities in the sense of doctrinal knowledge, the intricacies of church procedures or the receipt of the promptings of the Spirit.** A call to an administrative position of itself adds little knowledge or power of discernment to an individual, although every person called to a position in the Church does grow in grace, knowledge, and power by magnifying the calling given him.” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 284, https://archive.org/stream/MormonDoctrine1966/MormonDoctrine1966_djvu.txt ~~https://archive.org/stream/MormonDoctrine1966/MormonDoctrine1966_djvu.txt~~, 1966)

Derek offers a helpful analogy that might aid more church members in feeling comfortable about recognizing bias and imperfection in the revelations pronounced by our church leaders. (This is a summarized version Derek sent me of a concept he explored more fully on a podcast episode released on February 22, 2020 titled “And He Inviteth Them ALL” at

beyondtheblockpodcast.com.)

“Our insight into the mind and will of God can be characterized as one of three windows: fundamentalism, skepticism, and critical realism.

Imagine three windows.

The first is like a pane of perfectly clear glass: we can see into God’s mind without any distortion. As long as it’s sunny, we have a perfect view of what’s outside, and our perspective is exactly the same as reality. That’s fundamentalism.

The second window is like a mirror. There is no revelation of the outside, only our own reflections. Everything is a subconscious projection of ourselves. This is skepticism.

The third window, critical realism, is like a pane of glass that can be a little warped, and a little dirty, and we do see some of our own reflection in it. However, we do see some of the reality beyond it as well, and we do have access to some objective truth beyond the window, unlike in the skeptics’ window. I think this third window provides the BEST model of prophetic authority, because it explains how ALL of us receive revelation and insight for our own lives or for others. We are all staring at the middle window where we can see some of our own biases and prejudices reflected back, but we can also see the reality that is beyond those. Of the three windows, this is the only realistic approach to revelation.

This very much coheres with what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 13 about knowing and prophesying in part, and seeing through a glass darkly. It coheres with what most members experience in their own reception of personal revelation. It coheres with the record of prophets/apostles in the scriptures and in modern times. Basically, it provides MORE faith, durability, and explanatory power than the naive approach to prophetic authority [that our prophets are perfect and they never make mistakes].”

I hope our prophets and apostles sit down at some point publicly with people like Derek: faithful LGBTQ church members who can explain, and back up with scriptures, the need for change in the church. Meetings with leading LGBTQ church members need to happen beyond the local church leadership level – because bishops and stake presidents often do not relay the messages of LGBTQ church members up the chain of command. To help facilitate that sort of public meeting with the Brethren that could benefit all of us, I encourage everyone to listen to, and amplify as allies, the voices of any LGBTQ people we know in the church.

What words are hurtful vs. helpful to ~~LGBTQs~~LGBTQ people and their families?

As Cheryl and I have tried to become better LGBTQ allies by being more vocal about our desire for change in the church, a lot of people have interacted with us about our situation. Most of those interactions have been wonderful, while others have come from a well-intentioned but still

would that cause you dread? Think about that hopelessness for both mortality and eternity. While I recognize that straight singles do have a tough road to walk, their road is not church-prescribed despair that almost always results in poor mental health, which is the road gay people in the church are expected to walk (see Preface).

5. *Don't belittle the psychological harm that gay people in the church feel by comparing their suffering to other marginalized groups in the church.* I'll discuss this at length in Chapter 5. Various people have told me they expect **LGBTQs**LGBTQ people to stay in the church like some Black people did before they were formally granted full church privileges in 1978. Black people have indeed suffered (and continue to suffer) much from the church and society. But just because one marginalized group has suffered greatly doesn't mean that another marginalized group should also suffer greatly. Nor does the suffering of one marginalized group benefit the other.

While no one can rank suffering except God himself (Doctrine & Covenants 121:10), here are some interesting similarities and differences between gay and Black suffering in the church.

- In both cases, scriptural passages have been interpreted in discriminatory and harmful ways.
- Both gay sexual attraction and skin color are unchosen biological traits, whereas gay and lesbian people are discriminated against based on that plus a *choice* to engage in gay sexual behavior.
- Gay people can choose to stay celibate or marry an opposite sex person and thereby remain in the church with full privileges, which is something Black people never had the option of doing before 1978 – i.e., they could not ignore their skin color to receive the priesthood (for men) or temple blessings (for men and women). In other words, many gay people have been able to “hide” being queer, yet no Black person can “hide” being Black.
- Black church members could get married, have families and still be in the church before 1978. Gay church members cannot without denying their innate, God-created sexuality.
- Black people were told the priesthood/temple ban here on earth would not affect their ultimate status in heaven. So they could look forward to their mortal families being together forever. However, gays and lesbians can't enjoy uniform-orientation marriage and still be in the church, or hope for their mortal families to be together forever.
- Even before 1978, church doctrine gave Black church members hope for equality with non-Black people after this life. Some quotes can be found where church leaders taught that such equality would only come through a mandatory post-mortal change to their race, but it was not settled doctrine that Black people would have to *become* white to be *equal to* whites after this life. However, it *is* current, settled doctrine that for LGBTQ church members to experience the same joy as cisgender straight people in heaven, they will need to be in a heterosexual marriage after this life (i.e., they will need to repress or have altered for eternity the way they were born to love).

*analogy, I also made clear that I was **not** suggesting that gay sexual orientation is a mental illness (I debunk that myth in Chapter 7). Rather, I said I was just trying to help my friend understand better why the church's position against marriage equality in our doctrine causes a dilemma for me as the father of a gay son – because in both the hypothetical situation I drew for them and in my real-life situation, we, as parents, must come to realize that the only way for our children to be mentally healthy is for them to disobey church teachings of today.]*

7. *Don't suggest that a hope for change in church doctrine is a bad thing.* Few church messages have been more consistent than that “the Restoration of the Lord's gospel [is] an unfolding Restoration that continues today.” (Russell M. Nelson, Prophet, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-invites-sharing-gospel-restoration>, 2020). Never try to take away the hope for change in the church, because that hope is what allows them to both truly love themselves or their LGBTQ loved one and still believe in the church. As the parent of an LGBTQ child, as I'll describe further in Chapter 5, I think it is impossible for me to be both a loving parent and a believer in the church without hoping for change.

[Side note: For people who are tempted to condemn the prayers and personal revelations of fellow church members that conflict with current church practices, remember that in Acts chapter 10, the Gentile Cornelius knew of God's will that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles before the lead apostle Peter did.]

8. *Don't suggest that a parent of a gay child should always wish their child was still in the church.* Parents of a gay kid need to be allowed to be happy that their child isn't in the church while still being seen as “righteous” church members. That's because if parents are expected to remain sad about their kid leaving the church (again, leaving is often necessary for their kid's mental health), then they end up loving their gay kid in a discriminatory way as compared to how they love their straight kids. All of my children desire to have stable, fulfilling family lives. But one was born with a biological trait that makes it impossible to do so without violating church rules. Parents in the church need to be allowed to publicly say they're proud of their gay children who are pursuing or are in healthy marriages with same-gender partners without being judged. They shouldn't be made to feel bad just for unconditionally loving their child. They shouldn't be made to feel like they need to communicate to church members that they love their LGBTQ child “even though” they are no longer in the church.

[Side note: Consider how silly it would be for a parent to tell their left-handed child that they love them “even though” they write with their left hand, not their right hand. That's how I feel about being asked to consider Wes' potential future gay marriage any differently than how I consider my other kids' potential future straight marriages.]

9. *Don't say that they should just trust in God to work everything out after this life.* That line of thought has been shown to contribute greatly to suicidal ideation among LGBTQ church members (see Chapter 8). And, as I describe in Chapter 4, a trust-in-the-Lord approach doesn't work for gay church members under current doctrinal constructs anyway. There is no room in our present doctrine for the Lord to work things out for gay church members without heaven **ending up looking more instead seeming** like a special kind of hell to most of them.

10. *Don't judge someone just because they publicly disagree with the church's political positions on LGBTQ issues such as conversion therapy and religious liberty.* I'll discuss my views on those matters in Chapter 8. Please remember that the church allows us all to disagree when it comes to politics without losing any church privileges. And many folks view outside pressures as the only thing that might make most church members ready (or make church leaders pray as sincerely as is needed) for change in the church to come about. When you get upset over others' political support for full LGBTQ rights and protections, they may feel that you are indirectly criticizing them or their love for their child.

Here are some positive suggestions that, based on our experience, might be helpful:

1. *Acknowledge that the relevant doctrine causes harm.* You don't have to start disbelieving in the church to simply acknowledge and openly state a proven fact: that core church teachings on gender, marriage, sexuality, and family cause psychological damage to the vast majority of LGBTQ church members. (See the links to studies about PTSD, suicide and depression in point #5 of the above list of things to avoid.)
2. *Tell the families of gay kids in the church that you admire their unconditional love.* Tell them you are happy to see how they are keeping their family circle intact.
3. *Say you wish things were different in the church for LGBTQ people.* Again, you don't have to start disbelieving in the church to make such a statement. The Savior asked if the cup could pass from Him when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39), so suffering could be avoided – if it was His Father's will. So I think it's okay for us to similarly ask God if a change in the church can happen, so suffering can be avoided if possible.
4. *Support others' choices, even if they involve leaving (or supporting someone else in leaving) the church.* You are not best suited to know what is best for another's mental health and well-being. Please be supportive of their choices and of the decisions of their loved ones to support those choices. Failing to be supportive of others' choices is especially damaging when you try to counteract parents of gay children when the parents are not around and you have time with the child. Doing that will only cause friction between you and the child's parents and confusion for the child. So just support them in what they say is the best way for them to parent.
5. *Acknowledge that someone's choice to leave the church could be one that God actually wants for them.* There are many examples in the scriptures of God making exceptions to commandments given the uniqueness of certain circumstances. None of us, not even our highest church leaders, can know for sure that someone's personal revelation is false. It doesn't hurt church members to acknowledge that an LGBTQ person walking "alongside" the church's prescribed covenant path (as opposed to walking on top of that path, if doing so is hurtful for them) might be what God actually wants for that person. It also doesn't hurt to acknowledge that an LGBTQ person might be walking on their own covenant path. Actually, we all are, given the personal nature of our covenants with God. Remember, God doesn't require anyone to run faster than they have strength (Mosiah 4:27).

6. *Say you'll be there as a friend no matter what – even if they leave the church and get angry at it.* Tell LGBTQ people and their loved ones that there is nothing they could do to make you not be their friend. They need that kind of unconditional love to be expressed. Some people they love in the church might feel like they need to distance themselves from them, out of a misplaced sense of needing to avoid condoning sinful behavior. You can be an unconditional friend.
7. *Put that expression of friendship into action by continuing to socialize with them as normal.* LGBTQ people and their families can feel isolated because of their choices. Don't make that worse by not socializing with them anymore.
8. *Let them vent to you about their frustrations with church doctrine and the harshness in attitude of many church members.* You don't need to agree with everything they say, but it will help them feel less alone if you are committed to listening and truly trying to understand how they feel.
9. **•Call people out in church meetings when they make any statements that are hurtful to LGBTQ people or their families.** I know that finding productive ways to help people understand how their statements cause harm can be tricky. And I know from personal experience that doing so is especially difficult while serving in a leadership position in the church, because there's a desire to avoid looking like you endorse something that is not authorized by the church. But finding ways to publicly honor the pain that LGBTQ church members and their families are feeling – and asking people to accordingly be more loving – is extremely comforting. That is a crucial way that you can “comfort those who stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8-9). **And don't wait for parents or outspoken allies of LGBTQ people to speak up first. They can sometimes feel tired or fragile from their efforts and might need the added boost of seeing someone unexpected step in to defend their loved ones with them. If you're not sure of what to say, here are some statements you might store in your memory that could work in almost any situation:**
 - **“Let's try to remember that Jesus spent most of His time ministering to and loving the marginalized and outcast in His society. We should follow His example.”**
 - **“Our LGBTQ sisters and brothers in the church walk a road more difficult than most of us can comprehend. Let's keep our comments about them and their lives loving and respectful.”**
 - **“There are people in this room who are LGBTQ or have LGBTQ family members. Let's not speak as though they aren't among us.”**
 - **“Let's remember the warning in Alma 5:30-31 that says repentance is necessary for anyone who makes ‘a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions’.”**
 - **“Let's try to be the Good Samaritan when we see people who are beaten down by others, not a robber that helped do the damage.”**

CHAPTER 3: CAN A CHANGING CHURCH PROVIDE HOPE?

Chapter synopsis: Positive changes in the church's teachings on gay sexual orientation correspond with greater modern scientific understanding. Both unknowingly helped prepare me for Wes coming out as gay. But painful confusion still exists in the church about how exactly to go about loving and accepting gay people, and gay people still cannot marry (consistent with their sexual orientation anyway) and stay in the church.

How do historical church teachings influence my views?

In order to fully explain my current near-despair about church teachings relating to gay sexual orientation, I need to describe the evolution of my beliefs on the topic. I grew up in Murray, Utah, a wonderful but relatively conservative place. And I grew up in a relatively conservative era as well (the 1980s and 1990s). I remember using gay slurs regularly as a kid (and even in adulthood) in ways to derogatorily tease my friends. I remember playing a made-up game during recess in elementary school that someone started calling “smear the queer,” where the guy with the football was the “queer” and the rest of us would just try to chase him down to tackle and pummel him until he gave up the ball. There was no scoring – the whole aim of the game was to tackle the person whose turn it was to be the “queer” and see how much pain he could take before relenting. Now, I should clarify that, despite that horrific game, I wasn't raised to hate. I'm not even sure I knew what “queer” really meant at the time. I had an amazing upbringing in a loving home - my parents raised me to love and be kind to others. I never thought about actually hurting anyone just because they were gay. No one in my home or in the church ever even suggested that would be okay to do. So I wasn't hateful or violent toward **LGBTQs**[LGBTQ people](#), but I would definitely say I was ignorant. In hindsight I can say I was intolerant – unintentionally homophobic is probably a good way to describe how I was until my mid-30s.

I think that was in part due to the fact that I have believed in the church's teachings all my life. I haven't been perfect in following all of them all the time (I don't think anyone can be - although I have always had a temple recommend ever since I was old enough to get one). I always tried to be good, and repent to become better at following church teachings. So I accepted the church's views about gay sexual orientation instinctively, without hesitation. I don't remember knowing anyone personally who was openly gay until I was 19 years old and serving a two-year full-time mission for the church in San Francisco (from 1994-1996).

[Side note: Weekly Latter-day Saint church services are open to the public and held each Sunday in chapels. However, access to Latter-day Saint temples (which are much fewer in number than chapels, and are reserved for special ceremonies for church members and their ancestors) is only permitted for church members whom local leaders affirm have sufficient belief and are obeying church standards. Such church members are given cards that are called “temple recommends,” which they must show when they go to a temple to be allowed to enter.]

Growing up, my understanding of official church teachings was that being gay was an evil perversion, and that “same-sex attraction” was a choice and could be altered if someone really wanted to change. Other church teachings and practices during my childhood and youth that I wasn't aware of at the time (but that I have since learned about) included encouraging mixed-sexual orientation marriages as a cure for gay sexual orientation, and abusive

actually alter or “hard-wire” the expression of those genes. This can happen with a fetus in the womb (or, as some researchers suggest, with a child after birth. ~~When in, although much less evidence supports post-birth epigenetic changes:~~ <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/03/15/homosexuality-may-be-triggered-by-environment-after-birth/amp/>). In utero, brains of fetuses have different levels of exposure to, and different abilities to absorb, testosterone – resulting in interplay of other hormones and steroids (https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2015/10/homosexuality-may-be-caused-chemical-modifications-dna). ~~This~~ It is important to note that in epigenetics, the inherited genetic makeup of the fetus may play a significant role in whether environmental conditions alter DNA. Some inherited genetic makeups may be less affected by environmental conditions than others. So as with most physical traits, both parents play a role biologically in determining the sexual orientation with which their child is born.

All of this can result in a wide spectrum of sexual orientations with which people may be born. (just like there are wide spectrums among many other physical characteristics in biology, like eye color, handed-ness (right, ambidextrous, left), etc.). The spectrum of sexuality is often referred to as the Kinsey Scale: <https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/kinsey-scale.php>). That means that some people who feel gay, bisexual or straight sexual desires may feel them more strongly than others. Even identical twins may feel sexual attractions differently, even though they share the same DNA, because their DNA is expressed differently due to epigenetic factors. ~~Other epigenetic changes can happen due to environmental factors even after birth as well (i.e., due to different levels of exposure to hormones in utero, because of separate amniotic sacs or otherwise).~~

Modern science shows that a gay sexual orientation is an unchosen reality for many people. That reality is a biological one by definition, because sexual desires are of the body. I was amazed to learn that both the church and science were now in agreement that having a gay sexual orientation is an unchosen biological trait.

[Side notes:

1- A BYU microbiology professor, Dr. William Bradshaw, gave a fantastic lecture in 2010 explaining epigenetics and the biological origins and characteristics associated with gay sexual orientation: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=8IHw9DVI3hE> (the whole lecture is great, but, if you're rushed for time, skip to about the 30-minute mark and listen for 20 minutes to learn about how epigenetics influences sexual orientation). His conclusion is that having a gay sexual orientation is an unchosen biological characteristic. At the 55-minute mark of his presentation, he cites the church's position: "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" (<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>) – and then says: "I don't think I have tried to hide my conclusion about all of these things. It isn't nurture. It's nature." Dr. Bradshaw is a former mission president, former member of a stake presidency, and has written about the biology of gay sexual orientation elsewhere. He is also the host of a short video titled, "Embracing our Homosexual Children" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyRAueeJN1Y>).

2- Another good explanation of the genetic/epigenetic origins of sexual orientation is given in this lecture by Latter-day Saint scholar/historian, Dr. Gregory A. Prince: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gssnz1WZ3dU> (again, the whole lecture is great, but if you're in a rush, watch from the 14-minute mark through the 30-minute mark to just learn about epigenetics). This lecture is the best I have heard that summarizes in layman's terms the biological origins of gay

*(These paragraphs come from a public draft of a working article summarizing scientific findings from various sources; resources can be provided upon request:
https://docs.google.com/book/d/15RtVqRQ5KOeyc6i5BzbNSprMpbJCD6n99VfpKirv_F0/mobilebasic.)*

Now, notwithstanding the scientific findings explaining the origins of sexual orientation, a few individuals have told me that since some people have shown “fluidity” in their sexuality over time, sexual orientation can’t be just a purely biological thing. They argue that some choice in sexual desire is obviously present because of that demonstrated flexibility. I believe that is a faulty conclusion though. The sexual orientation spectrum is broad because the brains of developing babies absorb wide-ranging levels of hormones while in the womb. Brain development in utero puts most babies on the primarily straight or primarily gay ends of the spectrum. But some people seem to have developed in utero with hormonal absorption levels somewhere in the middle, so they are born with bisexual orientation. They still have an unchosen biological orientation – it just happens to allow for more natural flexibility. Stated differently:

“Some will argue that our ~~common-sense~~commonsense experiences are full of people who are “fluid” in their sexual orientations or change their sexualities...Change is widely used to argue against biological explanations. Critics will say that if behaviour changes, or is “fluid,” then surely it can’t have a biological basis? This is false because it is our biology that allows us to learn, respond to socialisation, and helps generate our culture. So showing evidence of change is not an argument against biology. There is indeed some fluidity in sexuality over time, predominantly among women. But there is no “bell shaped curve” to sexual orientation. **People may change the identity labels they use and who they have sex with but sexual attractions seem stable over time.**”

(<https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2015/jul/24/gay-genes-science-is-on-the-right-track-were-born-this-way-lets-deal-with-it>)

So a biological explanation for sexual orientation is not diminished just because we see someone in a gay relationship at one point and then later observe them to have a straight relationship instead. All that might mean is that they are biologically wired somewhere in the middle of the sexual orientation spectrum – i.e., their biological orientation doesn’t change; it just provides that particular person more fluidity in attractions. This is analogous to the way that an ambidextrous person may alternate between feeling comfortable using their right or left hand in different situations or over the course of their life.

Interestingly, as I continued my research, I also learned that same-sex sexual behavior is widespread in the animal kingdom, occurring in every major animal group.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexual_behavior_in_animals). I also didn’t know that the percentage of animals within many species that exhibit same-sex sexual behavior is about the same as the percentage of humans who are LGBTQ (between around 2-10% of the population, depending on the study and location:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_sexual_orientation#Denmark).

In any event, during the course of my research into all this scientific stuff, I started to realize I was very much behind the curve in understanding the biology behind, and scope of, gay sexual orientation in general.

Finally, I should note that I regret that I required scientific evidence explaining how gay sexual orientation is innate before I believed it could be. I wish I would have believed the testimonies of LGBTQ people, rather than being a Doubting Thomas and requiring evidence. Because straight people are the majority, or heterosexuality is seen as “normal,” there are far fewer studies that try to figure out why people are straight. I wish there ~~wasn't~~ was no need to have so many studies about why people are gay. I wish we all just loved each other better and understood gay sexual orientation as a helpful and normal occurrence (see Chapter 4 for a discussion about the benefits of gay sexual orientation in nature), not needing evidence to accept each other’s lived experiences and realities.

[Furthermore, as some LGBTQ rights commentators have noted, relying too much on scientific explanations for LGBTQ realities can actually hurt the cause of equality \(https://www.ted.com/talks/dr_lisa_diamond_why_the_born_this_way_argument_does_not_advance_lgbt_equality?language=en\). So while I think the scientifically validated middle-spectrum orientations with which some people are born can clearly explain the sexual fluidity that they exhibit over the course of their lives, I nevertheless still wish we all just simply believed each other, without requiring scientific evidence, when we say what our respective sexual orientations or gender identities are, whether LGBTQ or straight/cisgender.](https://www.ted.com/talks/dr_lisa_diamond_why_the_born_this_way_argument_does_not_advance_lgbt_equality?language=en)

*[Side note: I would love to see the primary question in studies on LGBTQ matters be why people are homophobic or transphobic. How do **they** become that way? What treatments might help them not be that way? Understanding that LGBTQ people are born with their respective sexual orientations and gender identities only gets us to the same starting point as what we see in other contexts where discrimination continues to be problematic: racism and misogyny. People of color are born with darker skin and women are born female. But that doesn't stop racists and misogynists from hurtfully discriminating against them. So understanding that people can be born LGBTQ is not enough to prevent discrimination against them either. We need to do more to understand what motivates homophobia and transphobia and enact policies, and engage in more teaching, to prevent it.]*

Is mixed-orientation marriage encouraged by the church?

Returning to my learnings on the church front, I also discovered that, for quite some time, church leaders had been discouraging gay people from marrying straight people as a cure for having a gay sexual orientation:

“**[M]arriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step** to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices” (Gordon B. Hinckley, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1987/05/reverence-and-morality> , 1987)

“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.” *Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems. Suggestions for Ecclesiastical Leaders*, 1992, p. 4.

(<http://www.qrd.org/qrd/religion/judeochristian/protestantism/mormon/mormon-homosexuality>)

That was different from what I had heard before, and constituted a change in church policy. For decades before the above statement by President Hinckley was made, the church had regularly been

promoting mixed-orientation marriages as a cure for someone having a gay sexual orientation. That is, before 1987, informal church policy was for local leaders to advise gay men to marry women.

Some more recent and clear statements by general church leaders saying the church no longer supports mixed-orientation marriage as a cure are as follows:

“We don’t counsel people that heterosexual marriage is a panacea. You’ll see in some of these experiences that are related on this site that it has been a successful experience in a few cases, or some have expressed the success they have found in marriage and in raising a family, and in the joy and all that has filled out and blessed their lives as a consequence. But that we know is not always true. And it’s not always successful. Sometimes it’s been even disastrous. We think it’s something that a person can evaluate, and they can discuss, and both with priesthood leaders and family and others, and make decisions. But we simply don’t take a uniform position on saying, ‘Yes, always,’ or ‘No, always.’” (D. Todd Christofferson, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/leaders?lang=eng>)

“[Church leaders] **definitely do not recommend marriage as a solution for same-gender feelings**. No, it’s not a therapy. In times past, decades ago, there were some practices to that effect. We have eradicated them in the Church now.” (Dallin H. Oaks, Apostle, “Elizabeth’s Story: Ricardo’s Wife,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/videos/elizabeths-story?lang=eng>, 2016)

I have heard many accounts of local church leaders, presumably unaware of the church’s changed position on mixed-orientation marriage, who still counsel gay church members (who do not express any opposite gender attraction) to earnestly consider marrying someone of the opposite sex. So I think the church’s apparent desire to have such advice “eradicated” should be followed up with additional action: more training materials that emphasize the change, and required review on a regular basis by local leaders.

Even some other relatively recent statements by church leaders that seem to encourage mixed-orientation marriage, don’t actually do so when they are read closely. Instead, they illustrate that a couple should only marry if there is genuine attraction present between them. I think that means the church’s position is that any person who experiences gay sexual desires must be **actually bisexual in-actuality (at least bisexual to a degree sufficient to feel sincerely attracted to their potential spouse)** in order to appropriately marry a person of the opposite sex—**That’s** because there has to be genuine attraction present between both parties:

“We are all thrilled when some who struggle with these feelings are able to marry, raise children, and achieve family happiness...[but] recognize that **marriage is not an all-purpose solution** [and that] same-gender attractions run deep, and **trying to force a heterosexual relationship is not likely to change them**...[Some attempts at marriage] have **resulted in broken hearts and broken homes**” (Jeffrey R. Holland, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2007/10/helping-those-who-struggle-with-same-gender-attraction>, 2007).

Many members of my congregation said afterward that they did not know the church held those positions now. But because of the church's website (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/>) showing this revised approach, it was easy for me to stay within orthodox boundaries during that meeting, while still keeping the focus on gaining greater love and understanding.

How exactly does the church want us to love LGBTQ people?

Unfortunately, I have observed that many church members still aren't aware of the change in the church's teachings about gay sexual orientation and how we should increase our efforts to love LGBTQ people. I can understand why that is. The church's website on same-sex attraction (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/>) has not yet been discussed in any General Conference or publicized much, especially in comparison to marketing efforts the church has made in other contexts. And there is a long history of many prophets, apostles and other General Authorities in the church making incredibly homophobic and hurtful comments, teaching them as church doctrine and God's will (*trigger warning: the quotes contained in this ~~comprehensive~~[comprehensive](https://lattergaystories.org/record/) history of church leader statements can be difficult to read: https://lattergaystories.org/record/*). As with most instances of homophobia, I understand church leaders were speaking from a position of protecting their own worldview and social/religious dynamics, not out of hate. But because their statements were taught as doctrine, I think it will take many years and sustained, increased efforts by church leaders at new messaging before most church members adopt a new way of thinking.

But while I think much more needs to be done in that regard, I am nonetheless glad that church leaders have been trying in recent years to correct the harmful teachings of the past. Some of my favorite teachings from our current church leaders encouraging more love are as follows:

“Hope is very important to everyone involved, but especially to the LGBT individual. Love is the minister of Hope.” (Dallin H. Oaks, Apostle, statement on the original church website mormonsandgays.org)

“Young people struggling with any exceptional condition, including same-gender attraction, are particularly vulnerable and need loving understanding – not bullying or ostracism. With the help of the Lord, we can repent and change and be more loving and helpful to children, our own and those around us.” (Dallin H. Oaks, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/10/protect-the-children>, 2012)

“We need to listen to and understand what our LGBT brothers and sisters are feeling and experiencing. Certainly we must do better than we have done in the past so that all members feel they have a spiritual home where their brothers and sisters **love them and where they have a place to worship and serve the Lord.”** (M. Russell Ballard, Apostle, BYU address, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/elder-ballard-tackles-tough-topics-and-gives-timely-advice-to-young-adults>, 2017).

authorities in the church). But at that point, the young missionary felt so discouraged he decided to go home early from his mission anyway (<https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/12/15/can-latter-day-saints/>.)

How did my experiences as a bishop prepare me for my son coming out to me?

All that being said, overall, I am happy the church has tried to correct many of the harmful teachings of the past. And I will forever be grateful to the individuals in our congregation who came to talk to me about their gay sexual attractions. They helped me change my views and led me to further research in science and in church policy. I am also glad I spent so much time talking about love and acceptance of gay people in that special meeting our congregation held – because it was only a few months later that Wes finally came out to Cheryl and me. I had no idea my own son was among the members of my congregation toward whom I was trying to be especially (and discreetly) sensitive during that meeting. I’m glad Wes heard me talk about love and acceptance of **LGBTQs** [LGBTQ people](#) in a public setting like that - because I know I had said (and know Wes heard me say) unkind things about gay people in the privacy of our own home over the years.

I believe God was preparing me to appropriately and lovingly respond to Wes when he came out privately to Cheryl and me in the fall of 2015. Without hesitation I told him that I loved him and would support him in any path he chose for his life. In hindsight, I can admit now that I always knew Wes was gay. But I was in involuntary denial. I used to ask Cheryl about once a year or so when he was growing up if she thought Wes was gay. I would see him act a certain way or hear him talk about girls in a way that seemed different to me. Back then, knowing how worried I would have been if I knew Wes was gay, Cheryl would just kindly respond by telling me “No, he’s not gay – don’t worry about it” (while privately thinking to herself: “I think he actually might be gay”). So I accepted her reassurance and just kept on being oblivious.

Because he is close to his siblings, Wes told them he was gay around the same time he told Cheryl and me. It was good for us all to recognize that his fears about being gay contributed to the depression Wes had been suffering for about 18 months. Cheryl and I tried to help him with his depression to no avail, because he would only partially open up to us, as he was just coming to terms with being gay himself. It finally felt really good for our whole family to be open and honest about everything. And Wes was a bit happier. He was no longer depressed or as scared about being gay because he knew his family accepted him unconditionally. But he did still have worries about finding his place in the church as a gay man.

Overall, we were in a bit of a better place. While we still didn’t like the church’s position preventing doctrinal marriage equality, we had hope that it would change eventually. But we knew God did not want us to engage in any sort aggressive public protesting to pressure the church to change its doctrine. I believe only God can know when the membership of the church as a whole is ready for change. Sometimes external pressure can help church leaders pray harder to receive revelation about that, but we didn’t feel like it was our role to exert that pressure. I believe that if the time comes, change will be revealed through proper channels (i.e., through the First Presidency and the other apostles). We felt inspired to stay in the church. We felt that God wanted us to encourage more church members to open their hearts to LGBTQ individuals. And we hoped that maybe as more people became increasingly loving and sympathetic, God would deem the time to be right sooner for expanded truth to be revealed. So we had hope for change, even if it was likely decades away still.

[Side note: Historian and scholar Clair Barrus has recorded the numerous stories of families negatively affected by the policy: [http://www.withoutend.org/reactions-the-policy-november-2015/.](http://www.withoutend.org/reactions-the-policy-november-2015/)]

Nothing about the policy made any sense to me. And I couldn't shake the clear feeling that the church was trying to purge its ranks of anyone who might be raised thinking marriage with same-gender spouses was okay – like this was some kind of preemptive measure to prevent support for doctrinal marriage equality from rising up within the church in the years ahead. But, recognizing that this was just a policy, not a new doctrine canonized in the scriptures, I still clung to my private hope for change and continued serving as a bishop. I think I found it possible to still cling to my hope for change because SO many other church members felt exactly the same way I did about this new policy. It was easy to think it wouldn't last long. Even when an apostle declared a couple of months after the policy's implementation that it was given by divine revelation, I was still guessing the policy wouldn't last more than 10 years.

And it didn't. By way of further divine revelation, the reversal of the policy (dubbed the “Exclusion Policy” by many), was announced on April 4, 2019 after only 3½ years. I was so happy to see it changed. Wes happened to be coming home from his mission in Brazil around the same time. It just gave me such hope that, despite what the prophets and apostles said at any given point in time about God's will for the church, things could change in the future as God gently works on hearts and minds to afford them greater compassion and understanding.

Following the April 2019 announcement regarding the reversal of the Exclusion Policy, the church's handbook of instructions for local and regional leaders was not officially updated to reflect any change until eight months later in December 2019, despite the church having updated several other sections of the handbook in the interim. When the handbook change finally came, the requirement was removed that children of gay parents needed to get First Presidency approval for their kids to be baptized before age 18. Currently, only local church leader approval is needed for any child over the age of 8 to be baptized. Surprisingly though, the December 2019 handbook change also included a brand-new section titled “Church Participation” with this alarming language:

“Those who attend should avoid disruptions or distractions contrary to worship or other purposes of the meeting. All age and behavior requirements of different Church meetings and events should be respected. **That requires refraining from overt romantic behavior** and from dress or grooming that causes distraction. **It also precludes** making political statements or **speaking of sexual orientation or other personal characteristics in a way that detracts from meetings focused on the Savior.**”

(https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng#title_number3https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng#title_number3, General Handbook, Section 38.1.1)

While the language “overt romantic behavior” and “sexual orientation” is neutral as to gay vs. straight behavior/orientation, many people are worried that local leaders, given the church's doctrine prohibiting gay sex, will interpret such wording only to the detriment of LGBTQ individuals, and not against similar heteronormative behavior or speech. Many LGBTQ church members and their allies fear this will lead to interpretation by local leaders throughout the church

completely opposite feelings to them in heaven. That seems to contradict the idea that the same sociality we have here will exist there.

[Side note: I have also had people tell me they don't believe gay spousal love can be in heaven because it isn't as powerful or pure as straight spousal love – because the ability to procreate is lacking in gay couples. I think that is too limited a view of the purpose of sex within marriage. While I believe procreation is one of the divine purposes of sex within a heterosexual marriage, I don't think it is the primary purpose of marital sex, even for a heterosexual couple. If I were to think that, I would be suggesting that an infertile heterosexual married couple's physical intimacy is not as meaningful or loving as the intimacy expressed between a husband and wife who are both able to have kids. And I don't think that's right. I think it's better to view procreation as a wonderful outcome that sometimes occurs from heterosexual married sex than as the primary purpose for it. Take, for example, the situation where an elderly widow and widower who have each already been sealed to their respective deceased spouses decide to marry. They are unable to procreate together in this life (because of old age) and are unable to procreate together in heaven as well (because our doctrine says they will each be with their respective deceased spouse to whom they are sealed, not with each other). The fact that heterosexual marriage is allowed by the church in situations like that, where the spouses will not be procreating together either in this life or in the next life, illustrates that marital sex is viewed as a positive thing by the church, even when procreation between spouses will not ever be possible.]

In any event, asking gay people to just trust in the Lord and the power of the Atonement to make everything good for them in the afterlife seems, at first glance, like a hopeful, compassionate doctrinal loophole. But it ironically turns into a demeaning and cruel sentiment when the implications are fully considered. Under our current doctrine, those unavoidable implications mean, even in the most merciful scenario possible, that they're being asked to believe joy will come for them by having the very way they love and connect intimately be changed or ignored forever. In short, without at least admitting that a trust-in-the-Lord approach might mean God could exalt gay couples too, it will ironically remain a teaching that dehumanizes gay sexual orientation and therefore harms gay church members in this life. And that needs to change if we desire to be a church of Christ's love. As inspiring church scholar and poet, Carol Lynn Pearson, has said:

“God wants us to be happy in the afterlife, but surely God also wants us to be happy here. If we see something terrible going on here, it's not our task to say ‘Well, that's too bad, but it's going to be all for the best in the afterlife.’ We are here on earth to make things better.”

(<https://religionnews.com/2016/07/20/mormon-women-fear-eternal-polygamy-study-shows/>)

I hope the church can make things better in this life by, at the very least, allowing for doctrinal ambiguity about whether gay couples can exist in heaven. That would allow a trust-in-the-Lord fallback approach to at least not be harmful.

But my hope doesn't stop there. Because of what I have learned about Christ-like love through having a gay son, my vision of an ideal heaven has expanded beyond the monochromatic heteronormative version of it that is taught by the church. I think that's the power of diversity: to help us learn to love more purely. So I sure hope diversity will continue to exist in ALL its colors and variety in heaven for everyone's sake there. Otherwise, I will mourn the lack of love for others who are different from me (~~if I'm lucky enough to~~assuming I make it there).

[Side note: It should be noted that our belief in spousal love continuing in heaven arguably makes our doctrine more traumatizing for gay people than the doctrines of many conservative Protestant sects and Catholicism. While

same-gender relationships are prohibited in many of those denominations, there are also several honorable paths to celibacy for men and women available. Also, their versions of the afterlife are affirmatively non-sexual and do not contemplate anyone in sealed, eternal marriages. So the despair is worse under our doctrine because, for example, a gay Catholic only has to make it through this life, and then they will be equal with everyone else in the next life – but a gay Latter-day Saint has to make it through this life and somehow also try to find joy in the prospect of continuing to remain unequal with other people after this life as well.]

What can our feelings tell us about doctrine?

When I think of the psychological harm caused to LGBTQ church members by our doctrines on marriage, gender, and family, and when I think of church teachings that exclude loving couples from heaven just because they're loving each other in a way that's consistent with how God created them, I feel sadness, darkness, and hopelessness. In our religion, we place a ton of emphasis on trusting the feelings of God's spirit to tell us what is true (Moroni 10:4-5). We know that God's spirit is one of truth (John 15:26). We also know that the fruit of that spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, and goodness (Galatians 5:22).

A simple trust-in-the-Lord approach to solving everything for **LGBTQs** LGBTQ people without also hoping for a change to our current doctrine produces feelings for me that are the opposite of God's spirit. I cannot believe that God wants me to have faith in the status quo. To truly believe Christ will work things out, I have to believe that His true doctrine has yet to be revealed – and that when it is shown, it will provide a way for a gay person to have the same degree of happiness in heaven as a straight person without switching the natural “sociality” they have had their whole mortal lives. Otherwise, our concept of heaven is downright scary for around 2-10% of the earth's population (which is the estimated number of LGBTQ people, depending on the study – see Chapter 1). And it would mean God treats us all differently just based on our biological makeups – which contradicts many scriptures, such as:

“Of a truth I perceive that **God is no respecter of persons**: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35).

“[God] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and **all are alike unto God**.” (2 Nephi 26:33).

So, because I don't see any other way to believe that Christ will be fair and loving, I still held onto my hope for change, even after I heard President Nelson's BYU address. I guess I'm a determined optimist and really take God at His word when he says that faith, hope, and love are enduring attributes and that love is paramount (1 Corinthians 13:13). I was so persistent in my optimism that I was emotionally still ready to go back to church without missing a week, even following our family's in-person ordeal with the General Authority that happened the week after President Nelson gave his talk at BYU (see Chapter 9).

[Side note: Despite a family decision to take a “church break” for 9 weeks at the end of 2019 (to try to help one another heal from our experience with the General Authority), I still went to church alone a few times during that period, including when I saw that our ward elders quorum planned to discuss President Oaks' General Conference talk “Two Great Commandments” in class one week (my thoughts on that talk are found in the next section). Our

entire family also attended church together again for the Christmas 2019 services at our ward. I expect I will be the only member of my family who attends church with any sort of regularity going forward.]

Since that negative experience, my optimism increases as I study more in depth about what the scriptures teach on the subject of equality. I love how my heart feels when I read the following commentary on the above Book of Mormon verse that states “all are alike unto God:”

“There is no social category of life circumstance that prevents a person from being worthy to sit down at God's table. God invites all. There is no price. No one is excluded...with no strings attached. Biblical scholars point to the use of merism in the story of the creation. Merism is a rhetorical device in which two ends of the spectrum are named as a way to encompass the entire spectrum in between. In Genesis, this means that God created the light and the dark, but also every point of dawn and dusk in between. God created the earth and the firmament, but also every place between the seas and the stars. God created males and females, but also every person who identifies as bi, trans, non-binary, or queer. The two points encompass the spectrum, they don't exclude it. Merism seems to be employed here [2 Nephi 26:33]. God welcomes not just black and white people, but also every shade of pink and brown skin in between. Every social division of Jacob's society is disrupted by God embracing the spectrum of human life. If modern-day readers were to create their own list of categories used to divide people...we would probably add heterosexual/homosexual, transgender/cis-gender, and immigrant/citizen, among others. Regardless of which groups are named, the message is the same: All are alike unto God.” Rev. Dr. Fatimah Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming, *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These, Volume 1*, 89-90, [https://www.amazon.com/Book-Mormon-Least-These/dp/1948218232/ref=tmm_pap_s_watch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=\)](https://www.amazon.com/Book-Mormon-Least-These/dp/1948218232/ref=tmm_pap_s_watch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=))

Can we keep Christ's two great commandments and still hope for doctrinal marriage equality?

My optimism and hope for change were diminished greatly just six days after that experience with the General Authority when, on October 5, 2019, I listened to President Oaks deliver a sermon regarding LGBTQ issues in General Conference that church members around the world are encouraged to watch

(<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/35oaks>). In his talk “*Two Great Commandments*,” (italics in the original) he spoke about what Jesus taught were the two greatest commandments, which are: 1) to love God with full devotion; and 2) to love others as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). He said that, when we're trying to show love to others, we should be careful not to forget the importance of everyone still needing to show their love for God by obeying all other commandments as well. He seemed to indicate that the two great commandments can conflict with one another or that there is a ranking, or order of importance, between them. He said:

“[O]ur zeal to keep [the] second commandment must not cause us to forget the first, to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We show that love by keeping His

commandments.”

(<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/35oaks>)

President Oaks then referenced teachings from President Nelson’s BYU talk mentioned above addressing LGBTQ issues, and said that the commandments of the law of chastity and the law of marriage apply with particular significance to LGBTQ individuals specifically. While I don’t like how President Oaks singled out **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ people** as being more prone to sin than other people, I was grateful to at least hear him use the term *LGBT* instead of *same-sex attracted*. Even though I was nervous about where President Oaks was heading in his talk by ranking the two great commandments as he had, I remember appreciating that shift in terminology in the moment I was listening to his words. I recalled he was not always willing to respect the terms *gay* and *lesbian* as personal identifiers in the past:

“We should note that the words *homosexual*, *lesbian*, and *gay* are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. **We should refrain from using these words as nouns to identify particular conditions or specific persons. Our religious doctrine dictates this usage.** It is wrong to use these words to denote a condition, because this implies that a person is consigned by birth to a circumstance in which he or she has no choice in respect to the critically important matter of sexual behavior.”

(<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/10/same-gender-attraction?lang=eng, 1995>)

Given that past teaching from President Oaks, when I heard him use *LGBT* in his General Conference talk, I started to wonder if that shift might indicate his views on LGBTQ matters in general were also changing. I have since thought that, at the very least, the shift in terminology shows that his prior teaching (that we should refrain from using those terms) was not founded in any sort of divine revelation.

As I continued listening to President Oaks speak, I quickly learned that his views on LGBTQ matters remained mostly unchanged. I was disappointed when I heard him next state that a temple marriage (which, as discussed, the church denies to gay people) was required for the highest degree of heaven, and that “[e]ternal life [there] includes the creative powers inherent in the combination of male and female.” While the part about temple marriage being required was not new or disappointing, the line about male and female creative powers was upsetting to me, because I can find no scriptural support for that assertion. Even the scriptures cited in the written version of his talk in support of the combination of male and female eternal procreative powers (Doctrine & Covenants 131:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 11:11) do not talk about the specifics of how spiritual procreation actually occurs at all.

[Side note: Before I go any further, I want to reiterate that my intention in writing this book is not to criticize our church leaders. I know President Oaks is a good, faithful, and loving man who is trying to serve as he feels God desires him to. I sustain him in his calling and don’t presume to know more than he does.

In fact, I remember teaching some youth once as a bishop this very idea: that the church may not allow gay marriage because spiritual procreation was only possible through the combined efforts of a male exalted being and a female exalted being. I am sorry for the pain I’m sure I caused in the hearts of the few LGBTQ youth who were in our ward at the time (including my own son, who I didn’t know was gay then). I apologize for teaching a non-canonical and speculative concept like that.

ALL God's blessings available to ALL God's children? Why not just assume that all those honorable people will likewise be just fine inheriting a lesser kingdom, without our missionary-minded interference?

[Side note: Someone visiting my congregation a few weeks after President Oaks gave his talk suggested to me an analogy to help me get comfortable with that line of thought. They said maybe I should be okay with Wes being relegated to a lower kingdom of heaven because parents often see their kids pursue career choices that limit them financially – but those kids are happy anyway. Their son decided to become a plumber even though they wanted him to be a doctor – but their son is actually happier being a plumber. So the analogy goes that maybe Wes will actually be happier just being an angel in a lesser kingdom of heaven, instead of being an exalted god in the highest degree of heaven, I guess?

*I think that's a faulty comparison because the mental health effects of repressing one's sexual orientation are much more significant than those associated with just being stuck in the wrong career. A gay church member who cannot live with the depression that can come from needing to always **avoid** falling in love, trying to make a mixed-orientation marriage work, or needing to have their sexuality reversed in the afterlife, opts for the only path that will provide them hope and good mental health here and now – leave the church to try to find a same-sex spouse. Many aren't given a fair chance at exaltation under current church doctrine because they have to leave the church to stay healthy. In the analogy, they aren't given a fair or legitimate choice to become a doctor because the path to becoming one is immeasurably more difficult for them than it is for other people. The cards are impossibly stacked against them. Besides, anyone can change their mind and switch careers, but **LGBTQs LGBTQ people** can't stop being themselves. Those who can't be healthy and stay in the church (which is the vast majority of LGBTQ church members) are essentially forced to become a plumber under our current doctrine.]*

As I listened to President Oaks' talk, I wondered how his teachings would affect the emotional well-being of my family as we hear those teachings taught repeatedly over the next who-knows-how-long until the church's position against doctrinal marriage equality hopefully changes. General Conference talks are taught as part of Sunday classes or in sermons, so President Oaks' talk will presumably be discussed by people in the church for many years to come. That is hard to consider, as his talk teaches that we can feel justified and derive comfort in thinking that LGBTQ people who aren't obeying church standards will be just fine inheriting a lesser kingdom of glory in heaven. When I think about how such "disobedient" LGBTQ people have almost universally had to choose between maintaining good mental health or following church rules, the notion that we should feel comfortable with them being relegated to a lesser kingdom seems incredibly harsh.

President Oaks did say toward the end of his talk that everyone should be kind and civil toward LGBTQ people, even if they disagree with them. And he ended by praising women for their efforts in helping build up the church.

Those parts of his talk - about being kind and praising women - I liked. But, as noted, many of his other remarks were disturbing to me. Every time a church leader teaches concepts that treat **LGBTQs LGBTQ people** differently from other people, it's like poking an open wound – a reminder that my son isn't treated fairly in the church, and neither are other gay people I know and love. But I thought President Oaks' words were even more demeaning of gay people than messages on LGBTQ matters that I have heard him or other church leaders deliver before. To my view, he basically had just relieved straight church members from feeling true compassion and empathy, giving them license to feel like they are being adequately loving by just teaching obedience. Sure, he talked about love and civility toward others. But he seemed to qualify that tremendously.

It seemed like President Oaks was giving church members instructions for loving LGBTQ individuals in a way that seems passive-aggressive, certainly not unconditional love. He didn't include much by way of specifics about how to actually show compassion (i.e., his words did not clarify or redact the prior comments he's made about why families might want to treat their adult gay kids and their partners differently on family occasions and not introduce them to their friends, etc.:

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>). While he talked about being kind and respectful, he also said "Our walk. . . denies support to any who lead people away from the Lord." In my opinion, that is a line that some may use to justify treating **LGBTQs**LGBTQ people differently from others – if, for example, parents think their gay kid being around the family along with their partner or spouse is leading younger siblings away from the church. I have heard of many examples of parents who have that sort of mentality – who think that just by being themselves and living a "gay lifestyle," their kid is trying to lead others astray.

Since President Oaks' talk, I have seen social media reports of church members using the talk's rationale (that obeying God is more important than loving others) to condemn and distance themselves from LGBTQ family members and friends. And it seems clear that other General Authorities are embracing the construct of a hierarchy that exists between the two great commandments as well. This first became apparent to me two months later, on December 6, 2019. During a news conference to discuss a proposed bill in the U.S. Congress (the Fairness for All Act), which tries to balance religious liberty concerns with LGBTQ rights, Elder Jack N. Gerard said the following:

"[The Church is supportive of this bill] because it's consistent with the teachings of the Savior. ... **We aspire to live the two great commandments: to love the Lord by keeping His commandments and *secondarily* to love our neighbor as ourselves.**" (Jack N. Gerard, General Authority Seventy, with Ronald A. Rasband, Apostle, present and presiding at the conference, <https://twitter.com/ChurchNewsroom/status/1204232675222908928>, 2019)

When I first saw that statement, I was sad to see another General Authority embrace the notion that the first great commandment is superior to the second, rather than that the two commandments are equal and interconnected. I even looked up the definition of "secondarily" to see if perhaps it could just mean "second" – i.e., to simply denote that there is more than one (like how Jesus seemed to use the word "second" when He taught that there are two great commandments, not just one). But to my chagrin, the dictionary says the word "secondarily" only means a "secondary or less important factor" or a "subsequent consequence," not just "more than one."

Four months later, on February 11, 2020, Elder Terence M. Vinson gave an address at BYU that further underscored the influence that President Oaks' talk seems to be having among other General Authorities. In his remarks, Elder Vinson said:

"The order and emphasis given by the Savior is critical. We cannot supplant the first commandment — the great commandment — with the second...And we cannot disregard the first commandment while purporting to live the second. We must live

both, but we must never allow our love for others to work against our love for God and our desire to keep His commandments...Some interpret a desire to love others with a need to embrace their life choices. There are many today who believe that to love someone means that we cannot disagree with their life choices. This belief is false! ... Our first responsibility is to God and to His teachings of absolute truth, and to His commandments.” (Terence M. Vinson, General Authority Seventy, <https://speeches.byu.edu/speakers/terence-m-vinson/>, 2020)

I am truly saddened that these three leaders of our church seem to now teach that the two great commandments should be ranked in importance, or can even be at odds with one another, instead of beautifully completing one another equally. As I’ll describe below, I wonder if that is a misinterpretation of the New Testament, which shows how the two great commandments are functionally intertwined: we can’t obey one without doing the other.

That being said, two months later, on May 1, 2020, Sister Sandra Rogers, international vice president at BYU and former Relief Society general board member (2012 – 2017), spoke at the general session of the BYU Women's Conference, cosponsored by the Relief Society (https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/sandra_rogers_0.pdf). Sister Rogers said, “When **youwe** are fully obedient to the first commandment, **youwe** cannot help but **keepobey** the second-**commandment**.” She hinted at no prioritization between the two great commandments, contrary to President Oaks and Elders Gerard and Vinson. Her talk was appropriately titled “Gather All Safely in Christ.”

President Oaks’ talk makes me wonder if he actually thinks that the best way to love LGBTQ people is for us to just tell them they need to keep the law of chastity. But I have to be honest: so long as that means Wes has to always be striving to remain alone or live in a mixed-orientation marriage, my parental instincts can’t support that hope. My only hope in order to balance my love for my son with my desire that he can be in full fellowship with me in my religion again someday, is a hope that my church will one day change its doctrine.

[Side note: President Oaks’ talk received much criticism online after General Conference, [including from many non-LGBTQ people and people without LGBTQ family members](#). My feelings resonate well with the words of this particular commentator, Jana Riess: <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/10/11/jana-riess-oaks-oaks/>.]

President Oaks’ talk also cut deep wounds in my faith because what he taught about the relationship between the two great commandments is the opposite of what I have been teaching in my home and in my church callings for years. I have taught many times that obedience to church rules (i.e., showing our love for God by obeying His commandments) was important because of the way that can remind us to be more kind and loving to others each day – because charity is the most important thing we can learn in the gospel. Faithfulness without charity is nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). But President Oaks basically said being loving toward others can run the risk of making us forget to love God. So the whole framework of his talk was the opposite of what I had felt the Spirit tell me was true many times before over the years – that we love God the most when we view church rules as a way to help us remember to always be kind and charitable.

President Oaks’ talk has honestly made me wonder whether he and I believe differently about the nature of God’s divine attributes. The God represented in the framework of his talk seems to worry

that too much love and acceptance can be dangerous. But I have long believed that God prefers that if we are going to make a mistake in how we love, that we err on the side of loving others too much, not too little. And I don't believe that the two great commandments somehow conflict with one another. In fact, other scriptures teach that when we are in the service of others, that is exactly how we serve God (Mosiah 2:17). And when Christ said that we show our love for God by keeping His commandments (John 14:15), I suspect the two great commandments were the ones He mostly had in mind. That creates a beautiful circular construct that all points back to loving others as the most important thing we can do. That is, if we love God by keeping His commandments, and the only "great" commandment that doesn't also deal with loving God itself says we should love other people, then that means to me that the most important way we can actually love God is by simply loving other people. I believe any rules God has for us can all be viewed as ways to help us avoid causing harm to others, or inspiring us to help them. In other words, they all relate to loving others, because that is what God cares most about – and that we learn to become perfectly loving like Him.

I have found it comforting to see online that many ~~LGBTQs~~[LGBTQ people](#) and families have had similar reactions to President Oaks' talk. I thought the following comment made a good point (included anonymously to protect privacy):

“Because Christ said ‘The second is like unto it’, I am comfortable not treating the second commandment as a subsidiary, especially because Jesus was asked for THE great commandment. **He was specifically asked which ONE commandment was most important and He easily could have just said to love God, but He didn't because ‘the second is like unto it’.**”

[Side note: While it has been comforting for me to see comments like this one online, I have been deeply saddened to also see posts from LGBTQ individuals discussing how the teachings in President Oaks' talk have negatively affected them. Many individuals have described increased alienation from family, because family members are using the teachings in President Oaks' talk to justify increased appeals for LGBTQ individuals to repent. They also report higher levels of depression, unsolicited confrontations with church members (including church leaders taking away temple recommends), decisions to step away from church activity, and worsened suicidal ideation – all related to the teachings in President Oaks' talk.]

I think it is very important to remember that “like unto it” is a phrase that denotes equality, not an order or ranking of importance. The idea that the commandment to love God is intertwined with, not superior to, the commandment to love others, is powerfully found elsewhere in the New Testament:

“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; **for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.**” (1 John 4:20)

“Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**” (Matthew 25:40)

It seems clear to me that by loving our neighbors we in turn love God. That's the construct under which the two great commandments work best (which is interestingly, also the order in which they are presented in Moses 7:33). And it makes sense that Jesus linked them together equally; otherwise, I imagine the Pharisees would have thought that loving God meant keeping all their

[*Side note: This position that biological sex assigned at birth is what constitutes someone's eternal gender was formally codified in the church General Handbook that was released to the public in February 2020. In addition, new provisions were added to the General Handbook that: (i) instruct church members to love and be sensitive toward transgender individuals, (ii) use "transgender" instead of the insensitive word "transsexual" that was in the handbook before, (iii) reference a new church website on the church's gospel topics page titled "Transgender" (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/transgender/?lang=eng>), (iv) allow transgender individuals to record their preferred name in church membership directories and be referred to by it in church, and (v) unfortunately, mandate that church membership restrictions will be applied for transgender individuals as a result of any social, medical, or surgical gender transition steps they take, including a name change. The prior version of the church's handbook only required membership restrictions in the event surgical transition steps were undertaken (see Section ~~38.6.21~~[38.6.22](#) here: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng#title_number118).*]

I was disappointed when I heard about that new teaching. Not because it directly affects Wes. He is not transgender; he does not experience gender dysphoria. But rather, I was troubled because I thought it failed to address science, by: (i) ignoring the clear scientific evidence that shows that biological sex is not a simple binary construct in humans (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/>; <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=kT0HJkr1jj4&feature=youtu.be>); and (ii) excluding the 1 in every 1,500 babies who are born "so noticeably atypical in terms of genitalia that a specialist in sex differentiation is called in" (<https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>) or the 1 in 60 babies born with perhaps less visible, but still significant, biological characteristics of both sexes (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/%28SICI%291520-6300%28200003/04%2912%3A2%3C151%3A%3AAID-AJHB1%3E3.0.CO%3B2-F>) (which rate of occurrence, by the way, means there are many, many more intersex people alive on earth than there are members of the church!). Since intersex individuals have biological characteristics of both sexes at birth, what is their eternal gender?

Also, I continued to wonder about something I have pondered for years, namely, how to reconcile the church's teaching that gender is eternal for everyone (since 1995 when the family proclamation was published), with what Joseph Fielding Smith (former prophet and President of the church) taught in a book published a few years after he passed away in 1972, namely, that no one in the lower two degrees of heaven will have any gender at all:

"In the terrestrial and in the telestial kingdoms there will be no marriage. Those who enter there will remain 'separately and singly' forever. Some of the functions in the celestial body will not appear in the terrestrial body, neither in the telestial body, and the power of procreation will be removed. I take it that **men and women will, in these kingdoms, be just what the so-called Christian world expects us all to be — neither man nor woman, merely immortal.**" (Joseph Fielding Smith, Prophet, *Doctrines of Salvation, Volume 2*, https://archive.org/stream/Doctrines-of-Salvation-volume-2-joseph-fielding-smith/JFSDoctrinesofSalvationv2_djvu.txt, 1972)

I have always considered this teaching from Joseph Fielding Smith (that people will be genderless in the lower degrees of heaven) to be an oddity to which I didn't need to pay much attention. But I remembered it when President Oaks declared the church's new position on eternal gender being defined by someone's biological sex at birth. And I thought, rather than take a position that seems

However, many church members just don't see how it's even possible for church doctrine to change. So I would like to discuss in this chapter some common-sense ideas about how our doctrine could naturally evolve to reflect a more logical and, more importantly, a more kind, inclusive, and loving theology. I can't ignore the call to hope that these ideas scream out to me.

[Side note: Bryce Cook and Dr. Taylor Petrey are among many Latter-day Saint thinkers who have written excellent (and faithful) notions about the conceptual possibilities for doctrinal evolution. Some of my thoughts in multiple chapters of this book come from their articles:

- *Mormon LGBT Questions: <https://mormonlgbtquestions.com/>*
- *Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology: https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V44N04_420.pdf*

Do the scriptures prohibit doctrinal marriage equality?

The first place to start for the “change-is-impossible” camp is the scriptures that seem to prohibit gay sexual behavior. But all such scriptures can very easily be interpreted as just prohibiting selfishness, rape, pederasty/pedophilia, sex slavery, fornication, and/or prostitution, not marriage to someone of the same gender. How could ancient writers of the scriptures even be thinking about monogamous gay marriage when almost all societies prohibited that concept until modern times? Sure, they were apostles and prophets, so perhaps they could see our day. But the church interprets a LOT of other ancient scriptural teachings to not apply to our day (like the apostle Paul prohibiting women from speaking in church in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; instructions that slaves need to obey their masters in Ephesians 6:5 and 1 Peter 2:18-25; and Mormon saying that women lose their virtue when they are raped in Moroni 9:9).

In any event, the Bible is the only book of scripture that Latter-day Saints believe in that might possibly reference gay sexual activity at all. **I say “possibly” because the only translations of the Bible that include the word “homosexual” are modern versions. The King James Version does not contain that word. Those other versions have since been shown to have incorrectly used that word rather than translate the pertinent verses to more appropriately communicate sexual abuse (<https://www.facebook.com/stan.mitchell.58/posts/3135281313206974>; <https://www.forgeonline.org/blog/2019/3/8/what-about-romans-124-27>).** And many Christian churches affirm marriage equality as being consistent with Biblical teachings. Whole books have been written about how all the Biblical scriptures that seem to reference gay sexual behavior, including those found in the New Testament, have been misused to condemn marriage between same-gender partners (<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/christian-pastor-reframes-scripture-used-against-lgbtq-community-n673471>).

[Side note: Other Christian authors who have written books about how the Bible does not prohibit gay marriage include:

- *Matthew Vines- A gay Christian's process and findings of studying biblical texts and meanings to discover more accurate meanings and cultural contexts. (This is the book that seems to be the most known and widely read.)*
- *Karen Keen- Key arguments on the current debate about gay relationships, weighing the context and thought of Old and New Testament laws and ethics, the problem with blanket celibacy subscription, exploring the origins of gay sexual attraction, and ideas for moving forward toward inclusion.*

[*Side note: The church's General Handbook released in February 2020 explicitly condemns gay sexual behavior by using the clear terminology of "sexual relations" rather than "powers of procreation" (see Section ~~38.6.13~~38.6.15 here: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng>).]*

Elsewhere in the family proclamation, other concepts are presented to support that heterosexual marriage and parenthood are essential to God's plan for His children. But, just like our scriptures, nowhere does it say that gay marriage can't be something "extra" or also "essential" for different reasons. To me, it's like saying trees are essential for a forest - but that doesn't mean other plants and animals can't be important or essential parts of it also, to provide variety and make the whole forest healthier and more beautiful, right? Diversity is a wonderful thing and helps people learn to love more open-mindedly. Perhaps God wants us to have diversity in married couples both here and in heaven, so we can learn to better appreciate one another and all of His creations equally. Could God have inspired the wording of the proclamation to still be flexible for a future, more open-minded interpretation?

[*Side note: Some people have postulated that the family proclamation was written for primarily legal reasons to help the church engage in multiple litigations against gay marriage (because, based on just our scriptures alone, it may not have been clear to the courts that opposition to gay marriage was a core doctrine – so having sufficient legal standing to petition the courts could have been lacking). It is interesting to see the timeline of events around when the family proclamation was issued and the church's involvement as an amicus curiae party in an early court case in Hawaii dealing with legalizing gay marriage (<https://rationalfaiths.com/from-amici-to-ohana/>). If it is true that the initial impetus of the document was mostly to fortify a legal argument, could it make sense that, knowing church leaders were going to use their agency to write the proclamation no matter what (given existing attitudes and biases), God inspired the wording of the proclamation to still be adaptable for the future?]*

This might also explain why this document on the family took the form of a proclamation instead of a new revelation in the canonized book, the Doctrine & Covenants. Could God have been guiding the process to help keep the door open for change to happen more easily when the time is right? As mentioned above, gay folks are written out of the family proclamation. Perhaps the current iteration of the family proclamation may come to be known as "The *Heterosexual* Family: A Proclamation to the World." Then, when we are ready to receive it, God might reveal something like "The *Human* Family: A Proclamation to the World," inclusive of our LGBTQ siblings.

[*Side note: Evidence that the family proclamation should not be considered a formal new "revelation" from God is found in the words used by President Gordon B. Hinckley when he first presented the proclamation to the church:*

*"[T]he First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles now issue a proclamation to the Church and to the world as a **declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices** relative to the family **which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history.**"*
(Gordon B. Hinckley, Prophet,
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/10/stand-strong-against-the-wives-of-the-world?lang=eng>, 1995)

We can also see that it is inappropriate to call the family proclamation a "revelation" because President Boyd K. Packer's use of that term to describe the proclamation in a General Conference talk was corrected:

"In his original talk, Packer said the church's 1995 statement, 'The Family: A Proclamation to the World,' 'qualifies according to scriptural definition as a revelation.' That descriptive phrase has now been omitted,

“Catholic doctrine is that the Pope is infallible, but they don’t believe it; Latter-day Saint doctrine is that the Prophet is fallible, but they don’t believe it.”
(<https://www.fairmormon.org/blog/2014/11/25/living-fallibility>).

That saying is amusing to us because it seems to be a true reflection of the doctrine of both churches and of the mentalities of their respective church members as well. But I think the damage caused by Latter-day Saints placing too much weight on prophetic statements that are discriminatory in nature is not a laughing matter at all. I wish more church members could get comfortable with the idea that our prophets are human, so we don’t get stuck in a paradigm where we think it’s bad for prophets to declare doctrinal change.

Many prophets in the Bible exhibited personal failings, including prejudice. As one Bible commentator noted, the Biblical authors were not perfect, and they made errors of expression even in the Biblical record:

“Though purified and ennobled by the influence of His Holy Spirit; men each with his own peculiarities of manner and disposition—each with his own education or want of education - each with his own way of looking at things - each influenced differently from another by the different experiences and disciplines of his life. **Their inspiration did not involve a suspension of their natural faculties**; it did not even make them free from earthly passion; **it did not make them into machines—it left them men. Therefore we find their knowledge sometimes no higher than that of their contemporaries.**” (James R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible: Complete in One Volume, with General Articles and Maps* (New York: Macmillan, 1984 [1904]), p. cxxxv.)

Why do we expect our modern-day prophets to be more perfect than scriptural prophets? A helpful chart comparing the flaws of Biblical prophets to those of our latter-day prophets is found under the section “How do Biblical prophets compare to modern prophets?” here:

https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible#Question:_Were_Biblical_prophets_infallible.3F.

I wish more church members could acknowledge that sometimes, even in the prophet’s official capacity as the presiding authority, he just teaches according to his own discretion, not divine revelation, ~~as even Brigham Young admitted:~~

“**If I do not know the will of my Father**, and what he requires of me in a certain transaction, if I ask him to give me wisdom concerning any requirement in life or **in regard to my own course**, or that of my friends, my family, my children, or **those that I preside over, and get no answer from him, and then do the very best that my judgment will teach me, he is bound to own and honor that transaction**, and he will do so to all intents and purposes.” ([Brigham Young, Prophet](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/171150-if-i-do-not-know-the-will-of-my-father), <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/171150-if-i-do-not-know-the-will-of-my-father>)

[“Question: Do you believe that the President of the Church, when speaking to the Church in his official capacity is infallible?”](#)
[Answer: We do not believe in the infallibility of man. When God reveals anything it is truth, and truth is infallible. No President of the Church has claimed infallibility.”](#)

(Charles W. Penrose, Apostle, https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_in_fallible)

Consistent with that quote, I think God can sometimes make alternative arrangements to ensure His plan for the church doesn't go off the rails when His prophets act according to their own desires rather than His wishes. The story of the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon is a great example of God having a back-up plan already in place, centuries before a future misstep by Joseph Smith (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_116_pages). I think there are individual lives that may be hurt by a prophet's mistakes, which God has to allow because He can't take away a prophet's agency, but He can still take steps to inspire people in other ways to protect the overall trajectory of the church nonetheless.

“Even with the best of intentions, [Church government] does not always work the way it should. Human nature may express itself on occasion, but not to the permanent injury of the work.” (Elder Boyd K. Packer, https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_in_fallible#cite_note-16,1991)

“Revelations from God...are not constant. We believe in continuing revelation, not continuous revelation. We are often left to work out problems without the dictation or specific direction of the Spirit. That is part of the experience we must have in mortality. Fortunately, we are never out of our Savior's sight, and if our judgment leads us to actions beyond the limits of what is permissible and if we are listening,...the Lord will restrain us by the promptings of his Spirit.” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_in_fallible#cite_note-15,1997)

All that said, a lot of my fellow Latter-day Saints think that a change to existing doctrine somehow suggests that a prior prophet was wrong. Would it be better if more of us would instead just view the prior prophet to be as correct as he thought the people of his day would allow? That perspective might help more church members be willing to accept future changes without their testimonies of prophets being negatively affected. We cannot expect our prophets to always be as willing to disrupt the status quo as Christ was during His mortal ministry. I think acknowledging that our prophets can sometimes fall short might help more church members remain strong in their testimonies of the gospel, rather than get upset when they learn of the imperfections of our church leaders.

I believe it's good for us to think that as people become more open-minded and more like God over time, then the prophet becomes more confident in asking God to reveal additional information. In that way, I think God's truth can at times be less available to one generation and then expanded and made more accessible when a new generation comes along that is ready to embrace further light. I also assume that sometimes a prophet might fail to get an answer from God about something, and therefore be left to his own devices, because he fears (even if just subconsciously) the people of the church aren't ready for God to reveal the answer. That makes me wonder if revelation might break through any prejudice that a prophet has in his mind if the membership of the church was more

That also echoes earlier teachings by Brigham Young that the primary purpose of polygamy was to bring about the second coming (see John Cairncross, *After polygamy was made a sin: the social history of Christian polygamy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, ISBN 0-7100-7730-0, p. 181). And it is consistent with the following statement made in 1891 by the First Presidency and all the apostles of the church in a petition to the President of the United States:

“We formerly taught to our people that **polygamy or celestial marriage** as commanded by God through Joseph Smith was right; that it **was a necessity to man’s highest exaltation in the life to come.**” (*Reed Smoot Case, Vol. 1*, page 18) (<http://bitly.ws/8HXJ>)

All of those teachings are no longer publicly taught as the church’s doctrine today. However, some Latter-day Saint scholars have noted that because church leaders haven’t actually denounced the idea of polygamy in heaven, current church doctrine is essentially just putting a pause on polygamy, speculating that it will resume in the eternities for everyone in the top degree of heaven: <https://www.amazon.com/Ghost-Eternal-Polygamy-Haunting-Hearts/dp/0997458208>.

If our prophets and apostles changed what they were saying about the superiority of one form of marriage before ([including statements that only that one form of marriage could allow someone to enter the highest degree of heaven](#)), why can’t they likewise change their teachings again now to allow for marriage between same-gender spouses ([and allow for the possibility that gay couples might exist in heaven too](#))? Many think that current church leaders are talking about gay marriage often and strongly today for legal reasons (see Chapter 4). Well, if the forceful nature of the above quotes was intended to bolster pro-polygamy sentiment against the government, then why couldn’t all the forceful statements against gay marriage simply become moot in the future as well? I think it’s sometimes good to remember that, even if well-intentioned, not all statements from our apostles and prophets stand the test of time:

“God will not change his law of celestial marriage (polygamy). But the man, the people, the nation, that oppose and fight against this doctrine and the Church of God will be overthrown.” Lorenzo Snow (1886, from jail) - *History of Utah*, Whitney, 3:471

Do we know for sure that spiritual procreation requires a man and a woman?

I think the most compelling (while still not actually convincing) reason some people think doctrinal change allowing gay temple marriage will always be impossible is based in the belief that spiritual procreation occurs in the highest degree of heaven. President Oaks said in his October 2019 General Conference talk titled “Two Great Commandments” that spiritual procreation will happen through the “creative powers inherent in the combination of male and female.” That teaching seems to make sense upon first thought because, if things work in heaven in a similar pattern to how they do here, then only a combination of male and female would be able to reproduce there too. While we don’t know very much about how spiritual procreation is actually carried out, existing scripture teaches us just enough about the way spirits are created that we have a decent basis for understanding that it is an entirely different thing than biological procreation. Different rules of nature apply because an eternal spirit is being created, not a mortal body.

inclusive of ~~LGBTQs~~ [LGBTQ people](#) here and now than we want to be. I think God knows we have to overcome our biases on our own, and then He will reveal expanded doctrine that makes more sense.

If doctrinal change is possible, why hasn't it happened?

Because marriage between same-gender spouses is not specifically prohibited in the Bible, in any other book of Latter-day Saint scripture, or by the family proclamation – and because there are ways to imagine doctrinal change occurring within existing theological frameworks and expanded temple practices - I can imagine a future day when God opens the minds and hearts of our prophets and apostles to reveal a doctrinal clarification to them that allows for gay temple marriage. That would be consistent with our beliefs that God continually reveals truth line upon line and that He will “yet reveal many great and important things” pertaining to His kingdom (Article of Faith 9).

Even though change is possible doctrinally, some likely reasons that change hasn't occurred yet might be:

- A change like that may be viewed as a negative reflection on the credibility of our church leaders as prophets and apostles. Our leaders don't want to risk hurting people's faith in them.
- Some of our leaders might have grown accustomed to using the rallying cry against LGBTQ equality as a convenient way to energize church members – inadvertently feeding off of our collective homophobia to unite us in a “just” cause. It may be that the zealotry of such rallying efforts are making it harder for those leaders to reverse course now.
- Some of our leaders may be hesitant to lose the support of other conservative churches. Our church is part of a conservative political movement against many LGBTQ rights, and some of our leaders may not want to lose the benefits that come from being part of a large coalition.

For those reasons, I would be incredibly surprised to see such a change happen any time before it is either essentially imposed on the church by outside forces (see Chapter 8), or until the teenagers of today grow up to become the prophets and apostles leading the church in the future.

That doesn't mean I don't suspect some of the apostles who are currently alive might wish gay marriage were allowed in the church (although I would never expect them to say so publicly because church leaders always like to maintain an image of unanimity in public). I actually think it likely there are robust discussions happening about marriage equality among the apostles and the First Presidency. When my parents were called to preside over a couple hundred young missionaries in Tennessee in 1999, our entire family had the opportunity to meet with an apostle when my parents were set apart (a ritual to formally bless a person to carry out a specific calling or responsibility). Our meeting with the apostle occurred in a room in a church office building in Salt Lake City that, upon entering, he described as the “war room” because it was where the apostles and/or First Presidency met regularly when they are not otherwise meeting in the temple together. He explained that there are often intense and vigorous (but respectful) discussions where differences of opinion are debated on many topics in those meetings. He also explained that a

Is it appropriate to compare being gay to anything other than being straight?

First, I want to spend some time discussing the inadequacies of analogies made in an effort to justify the church's prohibition of gay marriage. When I discuss contexts that I believe offer precedential value in this chapter, I don't intend to suggest that any of the situations I'll examine are analogous to gay sexual orientation. Rather, I am only suggesting that doctrinal or policy approaches that the church has already adopted to deal with certain other situations might also be helpful in finding a more compassionate approach to our LGBTQ siblings as well.

I want to make sure no one confuses any of the comparisons I'll be drawing in later sections of this chapter to any comparison with gay sexual orientation itself - because I feel it is very important for everyone to understand that there is only one analogy that is appropriate for being gay - and that is being straight. When someone tries to compare being gay to anything other than being straight, the comparison inevitably fails when it is closely scrutinized.

Is alcoholism or any other addiction appropriately analogous?

A common comparison sounds like this: asking gay people to refrain from gay sex is like asking someone born with a predisposition to alcoholism to avoid drinking. Other comparisons are often made to other addictions as well – with the general theme being that keeping gospel commandments may be harder for some because of predispositions that they are born with.

I think any comparison to addiction is wrong for many reasons, including because alcohol, drugs, gambling, and pornography can all lead to disconnection from self and others – whereas LGBTQ identities are about seeking connection with self and others. I believe **allmost** comparisons to addiction originate from disproven psychological understandings of gay sexual orientation which were developed decades or even centuries ago, when gay sexual orientation was regarded as psychologically abnormal or unhealthy. In the 1970s, the American Medical Association removed “homosexuality” from its list of mental disorders. That was a long time ago! Nevertheless, comparing gay sexual orientation to addiction is still a common occurrence, even though being gay is not considered a disease any longer by any reasonable therapist, counselor or doctor, yet addiction has been categorized as a disease by the American Medical Association since 1956 (<https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/why-is-alcoholism-classified-as-a-mental-illness>).

Because comparing gay sexual orientation to addiction is so common, I have seen many comments in social media groups for Latter-day Saint allies of LGBTQ individuals where people debunk the comparison. I thought the following three comments were particularly good (included anonymously to protect privacy):

healed of their disability if they could understand the idea of it). That is not true for all gay people though, especially for those who are in loving relationships with a same-gender spouse. While some individuals who experience gay sexual desires, perhaps especially those in mixed-orientation marriages, may want to be changed after this life, many gay people do not want to be changed. This is especially true for those who are in loving relationships and are learning how to connect intimately and express affection and devotion in ways that are strongly connected to their sexuality. Those are all good things, especially the bond they share with their spouse. Can those of us in loving heterosexual marriages understand how painful it is to imagine being asked to think of our closeness and affection with our spouse as something that doesn't fit anywhere in heaven? Or that it's something we should have faith will be a good thing to lose in the afterlife? For that reason, it is incredibly painful and inappropriate to suggest that a gay person being "fixed" after this life is similar to a disabled person being healed of their disability.

In short, I believe that the resurrection will only "fix" negative things – not take away something positive. And diversity is a positive thing. We should teach that all the things that bring us deep and lasting joy in this life should remain, not be removed. If we start accepting the belief that the resurrection will physically change us in ways that will result in us no longer being able to maintain the loving relationships that bring us the most joy in this life, then our theology becomes quite dark and depressing, not full of the Spirit.

Is the ability to speak a language appropriately analogous?

Perhaps because comparing gay sexual orientation to a disease like addiction or to a physical or mental disability is harmful, some Latter-day Saint thinkers and therapists have tried to compare it to other human behaviors or capacities that do not have negative connotations. Dr. Jeff Robinson, a Utah psychotherapist, espouses a notion that gay sexual orientation is like being able to speak a native language. He argues that having a gay sexual orientation is something someone just "knows how to do" without remembering having learned it. Like native-language acquisition, he teaches that sexual orientations are acquired, not inborn. I first came across Dr. Robinson's teachings in 2018, after he gave a speech at a church apologist conference:

<https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2018/thinking-differently-about-same-sex-attraction>). A few well-intentioned people I know asked me to read Dr. Robinson's lecture, to help me view Wes' sexuality from a different perspective. Unless hearing a presentation that justifies harmful conversion therapy will be emotionally ~~trama~~**traumatizing** for you, I encourage you to take a break from reading here and spend some time to review in full that speech by Dr. Robinson, so you can understand his viewpoint better before you read my thoughts on his teachings.

-- Okay. Are you done reading his presentation? Great. ☺

My first reaction when I read Dr. Robinson's speech was that it was harmful to gay individuals because it implies that it is just as possible to learn a different sexual orientation as it is to learn a foreign language. But I have never heard of anyone killing themselves over not being able to learn to speak a different language – yet there are many, many cases where gay people have killed themselves because therapies to help them become straight haven't worked (see Chapter 8). I think his views nonetheless seem to resonate with many of my fellow Latter-day Saints who are trying to understand gay sexual orientation because his ideas allow them to take the position that even

willing to apply it to themselves, but in reverse. After all, Dr. Robinson says that: “[W]hat I have said about homosexuality, or same-sex attraction, also applies to heterosexuality. I believe that no specific sexual arousal pattern is hardwired at birth.” Since most people are presumably able to learn to speak another language, then straight church members should be okay learning to be gay too, right? If they really think hard about that prospect, I believe most of those straight church members will abandon their support for Dr. Robinson’s analogy because they’ll realize their sexual orientation has more to do with their body’s physiology than it does the heteronormative culture in which they were raised. I imagine they’d agree with what I have already noted from Dr. William Bradshaw, a BYU microbiologist (and former mission president): “I don’t think I have tried to hide my conclusion about [the cause of gay sexual orientation]. **It isn’t nurture. It’s nature.**”

I think all of those points make Dr. Robinson’s analogy dangerous. I believe he is giving church members a basis on which they can treat gay people in harmful ways by telling them their sexuality isn’t a part of them; it’s just something they know how to do. When our gay siblings learn that, contrary to Dr. Robinson’s views, their sexual orientations are innate, not acquired, their feelings of depression and darkness might become more acute if they are emotionally close to family or church members who believe in his misguided teachings. Many church leaders are aware of FairMormon, the apologetic group that put on the conference at which Dr. Robinson spoke, and they rely on it for church-friendly information about difficult issues. I think it’s a shame that some church leaders will rely on this man’s well-intentioned but false (and harmful, even dangerous) ideas.

Is pedophilia appropriately analogous?

I unfortunately feel it is necessary to address one final type of false comparison to gay sexual orientation that I’ve heard people raise: pedophilia. I really want to just type “NO, being gay is NOT like being a pedophile!!” and move on, because I still have a hard time believing someone would ever think pedophilia could be analogous to gay sexual orientation. But, believe it or not, several people have told me they consider the two desires to be comparable. So I feel like I have to at least briefly address this insulting and hurtful comparison.

The argument of those who make this analogy is that, assuming both gay sexual orientation and pedophilia are things people are born with, asking a gay person to refrain from having sex with someone of their same gender is no different than asking a pedophile to refrain from having sex with a child. But the obvious reason why those situations are vastly different is that one involves a request to refrain from engaging in intimacy and companionship with a consenting adult (which are things that have been shown in multiple studies can reduce depression and suicidality among **LGBTQs** [LGBTQ people](#)). The other is a request to refrain from preying on a child who cannot provide consent. Requiring that pedophiles not have sex with minors protects children from harm. But requiring consenting gay adults to avoid intimate relationships with each other *causes* harm.

[Side note: There are many resources that debunk the myth that gay men are more likely to be pedophiles. The well-respected Southern Poverty Law Center website linked below includes some of those resources as well as others that debunk the following myths too:

- *Myth #1: Gay men molest children at far higher rates than heterosexuals*
- *Myth #2: Same-sex parents harm children*

As I write about that analogy here, I pray I have done so with the sensitivity and care that any rape victim reading this is owed. I in no way desire to belittle your suffering or, if you became pregnant as a result of rape and decided to have an abortion, draw any comparison that diminishes in any way the agony I'm sure you endured in making that decision. I know such a choice is completely different in its nature than the one that two people of the same sex make when they decide to get married. The abortion is a traumatic experience, whereas the marriage is joyful. So I hope I do not offend anyone by discussing abortion and marriage in an analogous way like I do here. My analogy is intentionally very limited in scope (just two unchosen biological conditions) because I know they are fundamentally different things.

The church's position on abortion is as follows:

“Church leaders have said that some exceptional circumstances may justify an abortion, such as when pregnancy is the result of incest or rape, when the life or health of the mother is judged by competent medical authority to be in serious jeopardy, or when the fetus is known by competent medical authority to have severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth. But even these circumstances do not automatically justify an abortion. **Those who face such circumstances should consider abortion only after consulting with their local Church leaders and receiving a confirmation through earnest prayer.**”
(<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/abortion>)

The narrow parallel I have drawn above focuses on how the church's position on abortion allows for a context-driven exception to a serious commandment. In the case of abortion, that commandment is: “Thou shalt not ... kill, *nor do anything like unto it*” (Doctrine & Covenants 59:6). The church teaches that killing is a more severe sin than breaking the law of chastity, which makes obvious sense. But I completely support the church's position that abortion in the case of rape is not a sin at all. No one should feel guilt or shame for having an abortion in that context. One reason for this particular abortion exception seems based on the fact that the pregnant woman did not make a choice that resulted in her becoming pregnant. The circumstance was forced upon her.

Given that both science and the church agree that gay sexual desires are not chosen, I wonder if church leaders could view permitting abortion in the circumstance of rape as a conceptual precedent to allow for gay marriage – because both situations could view an unchosen biological condition as justification for an exception to a commandment. Could such an idea be used to help adopt a policy whereby gay church members are allowed to enter into a gay marriage after they have consulted with their local leaders and received confirmation through earnest prayer as well?

Again, I recognize it's problematic to compare the feelings of despair felt by Latter-day Saint **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ people** with those of a woman who is pregnant with her attacker's child. They are very different contexts and it's meaningless to try to compare their respective pains. I definitely do not intend to do so here. I simply wish to point out that there seems to be a precedent where the church allows an exception to a serious commandment so that suffering can be relieved in a circumstance where someone's biological condition is not of their choosing. Christ is all about hope, so I think it would be wonderful to see the church extend His mercy in *all* such situations, including allowing gays and lesbians to have uniform-orientation marriages and still stay in the

church, whether or not the church allows them to be sealed. Even if no revelation is forthcoming on gay couples being allowed to exist in heaven, could an analogy to the church's position on abortion be useful in providing relief to gay couples here and now at least?

[Side note: I want to clarify that, in making this analogy to the church's position on abortion, I don't think that gay relationships should be seen as an exception to a serious commandment to prevent harm. Allowing them only as an exception reinforces the problematic doctrine about eternal exaltation being solely available to straight couples that I believe is mostly responsible for currently prohibiting gay relationships in the church. So, as I've stated elsewhere in this book, I would prefer to see revelation received that formally changes the law of chastity. But in the absence of that revelation, I see the church's approach to abortion as a precedent that could justify gay marriage being allowed today simply on the basis of fairness and compassion alone – without any revelation being required.

I also want to acknowledge that I know this analogy does not properly consider bisexual church members. In making the comparison, I do not want to suggest that bisexual people should be forced to marry someone of the opposite gender, because it's feasible for them to find attraction there, and gay people should be allowed to "sin" because there is no opposite gender attraction possible biologically. Rather, I believe true justice and equality will be achieved when we treat same-gender couples (including bisexual individuals in a same-gender marriage) the same as opposite-gender couples.

It is also important to explain that this analogy should not in any way be extended to justify pedophilia. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, protecting a child who cannot consent to sexual activity is a compelling reason to not allow an unchosen, biological attraction to minors to justify any exception being made for pedophiles. In the case of abortion, the church's position reflects the fact that we simply do not know when the spirit actually enters the body in the womb. We do not know if the fetus being aborted is yet "alive". But, in the case of pedophilia, we clearly know a living child is being harmed without their consent.

Ideally, because two consenting same-gender individuals marrying one another causes no harm to anyone, gay couples should be included in the church as equals with straight couples, and not just as exceptions to a commandment. A gay couple should be included at the center, on the same terms as a straight couple, because both simply reflect an arrangement between consenting adults that doesn't hurt anyone else at all.]

Can we sustain our leaders if we disagree with them and empathize with ~~LGBTQ~~LGBTQ people?

Now, despite my musings here, I honestly have no idea where the church's doctrine regarding marriage equality might go, or even if it will ever progress or change at all. But hopefully my doctrinal imaginings will at least help some people better understand LGBTQ church members and their supporters so that more love and understanding can be expressed to them.

I think asking introspective questions is the best way to engender understanding. That is what helped me change my mind the most - questions I would ask myself regarding how I would feel about things as a man who falls on the straight end of the sexual orientation spectrum. Church doctrine has a history of changing only when questions are asked; in fact, the whole restoration began with a question (see Joseph Smith History 1:10-20). I hope that if enough people learn to have sincere sympathy (or even empathy if possible), the prophet will ask more intently to receive revelation effecting a change. To really try to relate to gay church members, I would challenge each of us to ask questions like these ones I have asked myself:

- How would I feel about being told my sexual relationship with my spouse was sinful?

- How would I feel about my sexual desires for my spouse needing to be reversed or at least turned off in order for me to enter the highest degree of heaven?
- Would I be able to give up sex, intimacy, loving companionship, and never have children for my whole life so I could stay in the church?
- Straight singles in the church can embrace love if it comes their way. How would I feel about having to actively turn my back on love if it came my way?
- As a straight man, if my situation were reversed, how would I feel about the idea that marrying another man was the only “righteous” way I could have a sexual relationship?

When I answer all those questions honestly, despair is my universal response to each of them. I ache at the lack of hope for LGBTQ individuals in this life and the next, and the fact that First Presidency members dug in over the pulpit in the fall of 2019 with a stronger emphasis than ever before, to snuff out any spark of hope that applicable doctrine will ever change.

However, because I believe in Christ, I continue to have faith and hope, despite what any church leaders at any level are saying over the pulpit or to me in person, that love can bring further light to shine on our depressing LGBTQ doctrine – perhaps when a prophet believes most church members are ready for that to happen. And until that change comes (and I can’t help but imagine it will come someday), I’ll keep sustaining the prophet and other church leaders as good men who are trying sincerely to do what’s right, within their mental frameworks and given their respective backgrounds and implicit biases. I sustain them in the same way the scriptures teach that God sustains us: with love and hope for good decisions, while recognizing that sometimes poor use of agency results in disappointment for oneself and others. I believe sustaining is a public expression that is separate from personal opinion. In the words of Patrick Mason, head of Mormon studies at Utah State University, sustaining is “a public act, which is distinct from conscience which is personal” and respecting church leaders while holding a different perspective than they do “is a generous act, *the epitome of sustaining*” (<https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/12/15/can-latter-day-saints/>).

So even if I hold a different personal perspective than my church leaders, I can still sustain them by refusing to protest against them or besmirch their character. **The only time the word “sustain” is used in any of our books of scripture is in reference to our belief that we are “bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which [we] reside” (Doctrine & Covenants 134:5). That verse cannot mean we are bound to publicly agree with everything our elected government leaders say and do. Rather, it seems to mean we are supposed to be respectful in how we interact with our systems of government. I think we should apply that same meaning of the word “sustain” to our relationships with the church and our church leaders: sustaining them is about respect, not a duty to publicly agree.**

Accordingly, I will be respectful while I wait for them to declare that the time is right for change. In the meantime, I will refuse to believe any teachings that make me feel despair and darkness. Unless God’s spirit of love, peace, and hope testify to me of a difficult teaching I hear and pray about, I will not accept it. I don’t think that will render me apostate because, again, I can sustain my leaders and not believe everything they say. This is explained in the following excerpt from an article included on the church’s own website under the topic “What is Doctrine?” (with my commentary in brackets):

4) Society is better off when a person gets sick and their spouse can care for them, pay the bills, take him/her to the doctor, and keep their family life going. Society has to step in with government assistance when a person gets sick and can't pay the bills, especially if the gay person has been shunned by parents.

5) Gay marriage is a MUCH better option than promiscuity. Fidelity, monogamy and commitment are much better for society at large than promiscuity. **When people don't feel safe to come out or live in a monogamous, healthy relationship, sometimes they seek fleeting intimate experiences in dangerous places.**

6) FAMILY is good for society.

7) Compared with times when a gay couple has no rights to help a partner who is hospitalized, like making serious medical decisions when the partner is unconscious, or having access to medical records, it just makes sense that the person most qualified to make those decisions is the one the ill person has chosen to spend his/her life with. If a gay person has lived with a partner for 20 years, does it make any sense to contact the aging parents about those decisions? In a heterosexual marriage, that would seem ludicrous. Same thing. Gay marriage takes care of this.

8) I believe our church and members would be much better off to allow gay marriage as part of the gospel, so these good, compassionate people can be blessed by and contribute in the gospel, their local congregations, and the plan of salvation. It's painful for so many of these people to be forced to choose between two important parts of their identity - being Latter-day Saint, and being gay and desiring marriage and family like their upbringing instilled in them.

9) Another benefit I see if the church would embrace gay marriage is that morality standards could truly be the same for both gay and straight people. I often see really good gay young people who have graduated from seminary and served missions, leave the church and leave their moral compass of chastity before marriage, since gay marriage isn't respected within the church.]

Also, as society witnesses more children of parents in gay marriages grow up to be just like all other adults, I believe worries will diminish and hearts will soften. I think it will take time to see that happen, because a lot of people already ignore existing consensus that kids raised by

LGBTQs [LGBTQ people](#) are no different:

“Taken together, this research forms an overwhelming scholarly consensus, based on over three decades of peer-reviewed research, that having a gay or lesbian parent does not harm children.”

(<https://whatwewknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-wellbeing-of-children-with-gay-or-lesbian-parents/>)

Rarely is there as much consensus in any area of social science as in the case of gay parenting. This is why the American Academy of Pediatrics and all of the major professional organizations with expertise in child welfare have issued reports and resolutions in support of LGBTQ parental rights (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_parenting). Similarly, a scholarly consensus seems to be forming that kids raised by gay couples are not more likely to self-identify as LGBTQ (although they are more open-minded about sexuality, and, if LGBTQ, such kids may be more likely to come out of the closet sooner). Most of them identify as heterosexual, and they do not have any differences in their gender role behaviors in comparison to those observed in heterosexual family structures (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_parenting#cite_note-Stacey_Biblarz-33).

But again, I don't think widespread knowledge of the normalcy of gay marriage and gay parenting will be the primary impetus for doctrinal change either. I say that because, by reversing the November 2015 Exclusion Policy, our prophets and apostles have already acknowledged that gay parents might be good at parenting, because the policy change implicitly acknowledges that gay parents are able to raise kids who want to be in the church. Yet the church still prohibits gay marriage.

A third factor that could help facilitate eventual change might be if it becomes more widely known how intense the harm is that certain religious teachings can cause ~~LGBTQs~~ LGBTQ people. I saw a powerful public post online about this topic in response to President Nelson's talk at BYU on September 17, 2019 (in which he said the law of chastity was a divine law, comparable to unchanging laws of nature: <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/>). Because the post in response was so eloquent, I am just going to let it speak for itself on this point (included anonymously to protect privacy):

“A Response to President Nelson’s BYU Address: What makes a heart beat and what makes a heart stop? As a physician, that’s what President Nelson shared learning about in his talk. Learning which eventually enabled him to perform successful open heart operations. He went on to share, ‘The same can be said of the law of gravity, and the laws of foil and lift that allow airplanes to fly. Each is an absolute truth. Doctors or pilots do not have the power to change those laws, but their understanding of them safeguards lives.’

As a mental health therapist, I too completed my graduate work with a focus on the heart, but in my case, on an aspect more specific and sometimes harder to see: What makes a LGBTQ heart beat and what makes it stop. Or in other words, what makes a LGBTQ heart want to live and what makes a LGBTQ heart want to die. As I am tasked with safeguarding LGBTQ lives against suicide, learning the principles that govern positive mental health outcomes for LGBTQ people has been imperative. Presently, I work with suicidal LGBTQ Mormons on a daily basis and I feel God with me in my work.

President Nelson cites looking to research and new experimentation in his graduate years as the foundation of his learning. My graduate learning about the LGBTQ heart took a similar focus. A growing body of research indicated that sexual orientation had a biological origin and that decades of trying to change people's orientation or gender identity via reparative therapies not only didn't work, in countless cases it caused considerable harm. Research had also begun to point to the incredible power of Family Acceptance of their LGBTQ children -- that accepting families reduced risk of LGBTQ suicide attempts by 8 times.

Perhaps one of the most moving studies I learned about was MRI brain scans of people falling in love: Whether someone falls in love with someone of the opposite gender, or falls in love with someone of the same gender, the same parts of the brain bursting with dopamine light up. Recently, brain scans of transgender people have also shown their brains to be more similar to the gender identity they feel within themselves than their biological sex. Science is fantastically eye opening and these are all things we didn't know a generation ago.

Two studies specific to LGBTQ Mormons also had a significant impact on my learning. One found that LGBTQ Mormons who took a single celibate or mixed-orientation marriage path frequently had poor mental health while those who dated a same sex partner had significantly better mental health. **The most eye opening part though was this: that LGBTQ Mormons who were able to integrate**

example of teachings that contradict what the church is trying to say now about its opposition to conversion therapy. Summaries of the talk, with some pertinent excerpts can still be seen here: https://religion.wikia.org/wiki/Bruce_C._Hafen; and here: https://www.mormonwiki.com/Bruce_C._Hafen#2009_Talk_on_Gay_Rights_and_Same_Gender_Attraction. The talk stated very clearly that sexual orientation could be willingly changed. While those summaries available online don't show it, Elder Hafen quoted a study by Dr. Robert Spitzer that the researcher himself retracted in later years. Dr. Spitzer said,

“I believe I owe the gay community an apology for my study making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy. I also apologize to any gay person who wasted time and energy undergoing some form of reparative therapy because they believed that I had proven that reparative therapy works with some 'highly motivated' individuals.”
(https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/pn.47.12.psychnews_47_12_1-b)

*[Side note: Many ~~practioners~~practitioners of conversion therapy have abandoned their teachings to lead lives of openly gay men themselves, often pursuing same-gender romantic relationships. This includes Latter-day Saint David Matheson, who was formally associated with the conversion therapy organization Evergreen International and who was a founder of ex-gay program Journey into Manhood:
<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2019/out-darkness-conversion-therapist-quits-ex-gay-movement>.]*

I'm glad the church removed Elder Hafen's talk from its website. But I think it would have been better for the church to have actually kept the talk on its site and included a disclaimer that the talk no longer represented church teachings. Just taking the talk down is insufficient because, without a label saying the talk has been denounced or without a different General Authority giving a new talk that specifically renounces all past teachings endorsing conversion therapy, the implication still exists that the church might be okay with statements made in similar talks made by other General Authorities endorsing conversion therapy as well
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evergreen_International), like this one:

“Can individuals struggling with some same-gender attraction be cured? ‘With God nothing should be impossible’ (Luke 1:37) ... The right course of action remains the same: eliminate or diminish same-sex attraction...Feelings of attraction toward someone of the same gender should be eliminated if possible or controlled.” (James O. Mason, General Authority Seventy,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120724194231/http://www.evergreeninternational.org/2005%20Mason.pdf>, 2005)

Unless the church does more to affirmatively denounce all prior teachings made by General Authorities about changing sexual orientation with enough faith, mixed understandings about the church's views on gay sexual orientation and conversion therapy will continue to persist.

The First Presidency said the following in 2016: “The Church denounces any therapy that subjects an individual to abusive practices”
(<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/statement-proposed-rule-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-change>). While I appreciate that statement, it does not constitute a denunciation of conversion therapy because it leaves the word “abusive” open to interpretation and also implies that

changing sexual orientation is possible through “non-abusive” therapeutic practices. The closest thing I have seen to a denunciation of conversion therapy by one of our apostles is the following from a General Conference talk in 2015:

“And, I must say, **this son’s sexual orientation did not somehow miraculously change—no one assumed it would.**” (Jeffrey R. Holland, Apostle, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2015/10/ behold-thy-mother , 2015>)

Indeed, based on what the church’s own professional counseling affiliate, Family Services, offers by way of counseling for individuals who experience gay sexual desire, it still seems quite unclear to me whether the church truly opposes conversion therapy in all forms:

“We assist individuals and families as they respond to same-sex attraction. Our therapists do not provide what is commonly referred to as 'reparative therapy' or 'sexual orientation change efforts.' However, **when clients self-determine** to seek assistance for individual and family issues associated with same-sex attraction, we help them strengthen and develop healthy patterns of living. We assist clients who desire to reconcile same-sex attraction with their religious beliefs. Our services are consistent with applicable legal and ethical standards, **which allow self-determined clients to receive assistance with faith-based or religious goals.**”

(<https://www.deseret.com/2018/2/7/20639656/the-weeds-story-is-one-of-many-stories-of-lgbt-latter-day-saints-that-continue-to-be-written>)

Similar statements about self-determination being respected in therapy can be found on the church’s “Same-Sex Attraction” website as well:

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/leaders?lang=eng>.

I wonder how much a minor child brought to a Latter-day Saint therapist by their religious parents is really able to “self-determine” the degree to which they want to receive the “regular” or the “religious” version of counseling. It seems to me like the religiosity of the parents and of the therapist may do more of the determining in that situation than the kid does. I have heard stories about kids who felt forced to try to stop having gay sexual desires by their parents and Latter-day Saint therapists. I think the church should not be involved in determining the licensing rules for professional therapists and it is sad that the church succeeded in getting a religious exception put into the final version of the new rule in Utah.

[When it comes to conversion therapy, I wish the church would follow the example of Allen Bergin, a former BYU professor, bishop, stake president, and member of the General Sunday School Presidency, who apologized in July 2020 for his past endorsement of conversion therapy. Brother Bergin was a psychotherapist and was often quoted by church leaders in the late 20th century as an authority on gay sexual orientation. His teachings included that “homosexuality was a compulsion, it led to bondage...label\[ed\] homosexuals as bizarre...\[that\] the average gay man had between 500-1000 partners...\[and he\] taught that self-discipline and a mixed orientation marriage would successfully overcome the problem of homosexuality.” His July 2020 apology is sincere and far-reaching, completely reversing his](#)

[prior teachings and expressing anguish over the harm he caused. It is worth reading as an example of sincere contrition: https://lattergaystories.org/bergin/;](https://lattergaystories.org/bergin/)
[https://religionnews.com/2020/08/07/a-prominent-mormon-therapist-apologized-for-anti-lgbt-activism-whats-the-next-step/.](https://religionnews.com/2020/08/07/a-prominent-mormon-therapist-apologized-for-anti-lgbt-activism-whats-the-next-step/)

Are church teachings contributing to more suicides?

Is there a need for doctrinal change in the church to prevent parents and therapists from contributing, intentionally or unintentionally, to kids feeling depressed about their sexuality? That seems like an effective solution to me, but I leave that up to God and the prophets and apostles to answer. However, in the meantime, I think there is a pressing need to do something now to change how lonely and unwanted most LGBTQ youth in the church feel.

Because Utah has a higher suicide rate than the national average, with suicide being the leading cause of death among Utah youth, and with LGBTQ individuals having a higher suicide rate in general, a debate has been ongoing in recent years about the causality between suicide and church teachings regarding gay sexual orientation (<https://www.kuer.org/post/can-lds-church-be-blamed-utah-s-lgbt-suicides#stream/0>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_among_LGBT_youth). Some strongly believe that church teachings play a role in high suicide rates in states with high Latter-day Saint populations (<https://www.mrm.org/suicide-and-mormonism>).

The following social media post from May 2020 is written by Thomas Palani Montgomery, a fellow Dragon Dad and an excellent LGBTQ ally writer and commentator. It provides useful resources assessing the reality that church teachings are a contributing factor in suicides of LGBTQ church members:

“Meridian Magazine has once again published an article protecting the LDS Church in any/every way possible regarding harm the LDS Church causes its own LGBTQ youth and adult members. The article meanders through many arguments without actually presenting anything new and attempting to put out many fires.

<https://latterdaysaintmag.com/is-latter-day-saint-theology-responsible-for-lgbt-suicides/?fbclid=IwAR0F5ErowdnEgoXQSPkLAmZFEIIxVsAgNLVyQMdnP4A18lapw3gxcShBNp8>

It challenges John Dehlin’s study saying that “most studies” say something else - except for the fact that there are no “other studies” that either contradict or challenge John’s study. John’s study is published and peer-reviewed (9 studies across 7 different journals have published the findings of his studies: <http://www.johndeclin.com/research/>).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MxCXjfAunk>

It ignores that John’s study is fully consistent with Brian Simmons’s study on PTSD among LDS-LGBTQ Mormons. Brian’s study is published and peer-reviewed.

<https://athenaeum.libs.uga.edu/handle/10724/38227>

different sex, would have been protected by law (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/15/politics/supreme-court-lgbtq-employment-case/index.html>). That ruling resulted in landmark legal protections for LGBTQ people from employment discrimination in general, but the court specifically left open the question about whether religious employers were exempted (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/16/supreme-court-closed-door-lgbtq-employment-discrimination-it-opened-window/>). Then, in another case decided just a few weeks later, the Supreme Court confirmed that a religious employer is in fact allowed to discriminate against **LGBTQs** [LGBTQ people](#) in ways that secular employers no longer can (<https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2020/7/8/21302953/supreme-court-employment-discrimination-catholic-schools-ministers-hiring-firing-ruling>). The church filed an amicus brief in this later case as well, arguing that religious employers should be allowed to discriminate against LGBTQ people (https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-267/132581/20200210172618740_19-267%20Amici%20Curiae.pdf). So, after these two court decisions, this is now the law of the land in the United States: secular employers cannot discriminate against someone for being LGBTQ but religious employers can.

[Side note: Here is some further background on this issue, as presented by Latter Gay Stories (<https://lattergaystories.org/>):

“In 1984, newly minted Apostle, Dallin H. Oaks, former BYU President, and judge for the Utah Supreme Court wrote a confidential and secret memorandum for the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints supporting homosexual discrimination in society and the workplace. The memorandum titled, “Principles to Govern Possible Public Statement on Legislation Affecting Rights of Homosexuals,” has been the guiding light for Latter-Day leaders in promoting the Church’s discriminatory agenda towards LGBTQ people.

Supported by the First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles, the memo includes the following statements:

“... arguments for job discrimination against homosexuals are strongest in those types of employment and activities that provide teaching association and role models for young people. This would include school teachers (especially at the elementary and secondary levels), and youth leaders and counselors (such as scoutmasters , coaches, etc.)...The best strategy to oppose further anti-discrimination legislation protecting homosexuals is to propose well-reasoned exceptions rather than to oppose such legislation across the board. Total opposition (that is, opposition to all non-discrimination legislation benefiting homosexuals would look like a religious effort to use secular law to penalize one kind of sinner without comparable efforts to penalize persons guilty of other grievous sexual sins (adultery for example)...I recommend that if an anti-job-discrimination law is proposed to protect homosexuals, the Church should oppose the Law if it did not contain a youth protection exception.

I recommend that the Church tailor its communications on this subject to take account of the formal difference between the condition or tendency of so-called homosexual persons on the one hand and homosexual practices on the other.” (Pages 4-7)

“Take no position on laws changing the extent to which there are greater criminal penalties for homosexual behavior than for illicit heterosexual behavior.” (Pages 8-10)

“Oppose job discrimination laws protecting homosexuals, unless such laws contain exceptions permitting employers to exclude homosexuals from employment that involves teaching of or other intimate association with young people.” (Pages 10-17)

“Take no position on laws barring other types of discrimination against homosexuals, unless there is a secular basis (persuasive public policy) to justify such discrimination.” (Page 15)

“Vigorously oppose the legalization of homosexual marriages.” (Page 17)

<https://lattergaystories.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Principles-to-Govern.pdf>]

Can a church member be in good standing if they support LGBTQ political causes?

Many church members wonder whether they can support civil marriage equality and other LGBTQ political causes and still be a member of the church in good standing. When one of our current apostles, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, was asked by a reporter back in 2015 whether Latter-day Saints would risk losing their church membership or temple privileges if they supported gay marriage privately among family and friends or publicly on social media, marched in pride parades, or belonged to gay-friendly organizations such as Affirmation or Mormons Building Bridges, he responded as follows:

“We have individual members in the church with a variety of different opinions, beliefs and positions on these issues and other issues...In our view, **it doesn't really become a problem unless someone is** out attacking the church and its leaders — if that's a deliberate and persistent effort and trying to get others to follow them, trying to draw others away, **trying to pull people, if you will, out of the church or away from its teachings and doctrines.**” (<https://archive.slttrib.com/article.php?id=2301174&itype=CMSID>).

So, given that latitude allowed by the church, and now that I am no longer in any church leadership position, I am more open about my political support for LGBTQ rights and about laws affecting the LGBTQ community (like the Utah conversion therapy licensing rule). I was hesitant to do so before because I didn't want to risk confusing someone who perceived me as a representative of the church. But in being more open about my support for LGBTQ equality, I am not trying to pull people out of the church. I myself am deciding to stay in the church.

[Side note: I do not support the Fairness for All Act (FAA) that the church endorses:

<https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2019/12/6/20995260/mormon-utah-chris-stewart-latter-day-saint-leaders-lgbtq-lds-civil-rights-gay-religious-freedom>. In short, I don't think a religious institution/college should be allowed to keep its ~~tax~~ **exempttax-exempt** status and continue to receive federal aid money if it fires someone just because they're in a gay marriage. As a hypothetical situation, if a white supremacist religious organization had tax exempt status and fired an employee for being in an interracial marriage, should the government still allow that organization to not pay taxes? Many believe that true religious liberty means we should answer yes to that question. But I don't believe that. While our government should not make it illegal for any religion to maintain racist or homophobic beliefs, I do not believe tax exempt status or taxpayer dollars should be given by the government to any religious institution that discriminates in employment based on biological traits unrelated to job performance.]

In fact, even in postulating publicly ways the doctrine of the church could possibly change, I don't intend to attack the church. Rather, as I stated in the Preface, my intention is to help facilitate greater understanding of the pain that many LGBTQ church members and their families feel. I don't see how I can do that without sharing my thoughts about church doctrine and my hope for how it could possibly change – because the way that hope has been affected by ongoing teachings from church leaders on LGBTQ matters gets at the root of my pain. I don't want anyone to leave the church because of what I have shared. I haven't left the church myself.

I'm also not sad about Wes' decision to leave the church because he got an answer to his prayers. After many years (years!) of sincere and repeated petitions, he felt that God did not want him to spend his life trying to avoid falling in love and having a family. When he told me about his answer, I was comfortable with it, because I had seen the process Wes had gone through to get it. He was humble, willing to do whatever might be required of him. He was patient, always willing to wait until God deemed fit to answer questions on His timeline. Wes had counseled with Cheryl and me, some close friends, and church leaders extensively. The answer to his prayer came as he was finally, truly ready to offer up lifelong celibacy to God, knowing how hard that would be for him, if that was what God wanted. This was not a case of someone praying and wanting something so badly that they fooled themselves into getting an answer they preferred. I accepted that Wes had received divine personal revelation for his life. I was glad his personal answer was consistent with the scripture that says "it is not good that...man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). But I also recognized that his answer was unique to him. And Wes recognized that too. Not everyone in a situation similar to his will get the same divine direction (although over 70% of same-gender attracted church members do feel it necessary to leave the church:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gay-mormon-men-marriage_n_6464848). God deals with each of us individually and many personal facts and circumstances can result in different answers for different people. Some church members who feel gay sexual desires feel prompted by God to stay in the church and remain celibate. While that is a hard and lonely road that often results in depression and mental health struggles, I still respect their stated inspiration and admire their desires to be obedient. But that wasn't what God told Wes to do – and I equally respect his inspiration and admire his desire to be obedient to God's clear will for him as well.

*[Side note: The idea that it is not good for man (or woman) to be alone is foundational in our understanding of eternal families. People who enforce celibacy and want some of God's children to be alone in this life (or who teach **LGBTQ**s **LGBTQ people** will be happy enough being alone in the lower kingdoms of heaven) are therefore asking for something that is "not good" according to the scriptures. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: "Celibacy is not of God, whose law is that 'marriage is honourable in all' (Hebrews 13:4)" (Bruce R. McConkie, Apostle, https://archive.org/stream/MormonDoctrine1966/MormonDoctrine1966_djvu.txt, 1966). I find it perplexing that church leaders today are asking gay Latter-day Saints, who do not feel an attraction to anyone of the opposite gender, to remain celibate their entire lives, contrary to what the scriptures teach is "good" for people.]*

For my fellow Latter-day Saints reading this who are perplexed at how God could give Wes direction that contradicts what the church teaches is a commandment from God, it might be helpful for us all to remember that there are examples in our scriptures where prophets were commanded by God to do things that would normally be considered sins but that God still wanted them to do because a higher cause was to be served. One example of this is the story with Nephi and Laban in the Book of Mormon – but I don't love that one because that involved a sin that causes actual harm – killing; I prefer instead the example of Adam choosing to partake of the forbidden fruit in Eden so he could obey the commandment to have a family with Eve. Now, yes, I will admit Wes is not a prophet (in the sense in which we most frequently use that term in the church anyway). ☺ But, regardless, he is still entitled to receive personal revelation as to the affairs of his own life, as we all are. So when Wes told me he finally got his answer, I soon felt from my own subsequent personal prayers that even if the church says gay marriage is a sin, Wes is still on the path God wants for him, and God wants me to support him. Given the wholesome goals that Wes has (to find lifelong monogamous marriage, continue worshipping Christ, and serving others), I think his path is right alongside the covenant path that the church offers, **and represents his own covenant path that is**

as equally valid as the unique covenant path any other church member walks. But the visiting General Authority seemed to want to reprimand me for having that perspective.

Am I struggling because I was personally offended?

Regardless, at this point, I'm no longer offended and am absolutely fine not being in the stake presidency. In fact, since my release I have received inspired feelings, confirming for me that things happened exactly as they did for a special reason: so I can relate just a tiny bit better to Wes and catch a fleeting glimpse into what he felt, in needing to choose between church loyalty vs. family loyalty. I wrote the following to a friend to describe that impression, just a few days following the experience with the General Authority:

I'm glad this experience happened because I think I can now better empathize with Wes, even if just slightly; so I could understand a little bit better how painful it was for him to have to choose between having a stable future family vs. having full fellowship in the church. In the moment I had this epiphany, I felt comfort me and I seemed to catch a glimpse of the empathy that Christ has for Wes - and of His ability to love and console him so much more than I can. And I saw how important it is for me to always try to show that same type of pure love, without mixed emotions or qualifications, to my family.

I'm so thankful God blessed me with a gay son. My understanding of the comforting power of Christ's Atonement and of His matchless love and empathy have been deeply enriched because of the challenges Wes has faced. Because of his belief in Christ, he has forgiven so many people who have said hurtful things to him. The Atonement has similarly helped me forgive the General Authority who met with me. I have accepted his apology completely. I know his words aren't reflective of the Savior's views (or even of the views of some other General Authorities I have spoken with, to be honest). And I'm eternally thankful for the Atonement's ability to alleviate my pain and to teach me how to best support Wes by loving him as Christ loves me.

So in a way, I'm grateful for the General Authority and how he helped me come to relate to Wes a tiny bit better. Yes, I was offended at the time by what the General Authority said and how he said it. But I am over that now. I know some people reading this may not believe that. But, seriously, I am no longer upset or offended by what happened that weekend in late September 2019 with the General Authority.

Any enduring pain I feel relating to the church has nothing to do with a personal affront or conflict of personalities. Rather, it has only to do with the doctrine of the church regarding gender, marriage, sexuality, and family and the harm (sometimes fatal harm) that it causes in the lives of LGBTQ church members and their families. In any event, I love the people in my local congregation and wouldn't want to separate myself from them just because of a bad experience with someone from church headquarters.

But I know there is a strong tendency in our church culture to assume that people struggle with the church simply because they were offended. So I hope all the doctrinal analysis and opinion in this book will help get that notion out of the way. I am committed to frequent church attendance going

CHAPTER 10: CAN WE STAY IN CHURCH & AVOID THE “DARK CLOUD”?

Chapter synopsis: I’m committed to a new approach to my church membership. I know it won’t be easy to continue because of the pain caused by church doctrine. But God’s allowance for variation among faithful disciples and a focus on love for LGBTQ church members – and, admittedly, the protection I feel from mental harm myself, due in part I believe to my relative privilege as a straight, white male in the church – allow me to stay.

Well, after so much discussion, it’s time to answer the final question: How exactly am I managing to stay in the church if the doctrine on LGBTQ issues hurts so much? Well, because of the doctrinal doubling down against **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ people** (see Chapter 4) and the meeting I had in person with the General Authority (see Chapter 9), I need to approach the church differently going forward to make sure that church culture and anti-LGBTQ doctrines don’t make my church experience painful. Over the years, when something about church doctrine or culture has caused Cheryl angst, she has often referred to those negative feelings as the church’s “dark cloud” (whether it’s over LGBTQ issues, the unequal treatment of men vs. women in the church, feelings of inadequacy next to the long list of church expectations, confusion about the relationship between blessings and obedience, not being able to relate to a Heavenly Mother because we don’t know hardly anything about Her at all, the fact that there seems to be more judgment than love at times at church, etc.). In the past, we were able to avoid the church’s dark cloud from becoming too overwhelming by focusing on hope for change and just teaching love amongst our fellow Latter-day Saints. Our feelings closely mirrored this statement from a gay son of one of our apostles:

“A truth behind any power structure is that the power of the system is proportional to peoples’ belief or adherence to the system. As much as the organization appears to be top-down, **meaningful changes in the lives of individuals start from the bottom up. This gives me hope that even while the organization and religion remain unyielding, the culture can be the impetus for change.**” (Matthew Gong, <https://m.facebook.com/notes/matthew-gong/birthday-letters-27-28/10158377175735021/>, 2019)

But, given how much more acute the pain over LGBTQ issues has gotten just recently, and how much more intractable the current doctrine seems to be now, Cheryl and I aren’t sure how to avoid the dark cloud and remain members of the church unless we take steps to guard ourselves that are different from what we tried before.

Church should make us happy and Christ should give us hope, right?

It’s disappointing that we feel we need to protect ourselves from the influence of the church because the idea of any religion is that it’s supposed to generally make people feel happy, right? This is something our leaders have taught us repeatedly about the church:

“In the days and years ahead, you may suffer some discouragement and disappointment. On occasion, you may feel genuine despair, either for yourself or your children or the plight and conditions of others. You may even make a personal mistake or two—serious mistakes,

doubt we've ever spent less than 20 hours a week collectively on average on church service and devotion since the beginning of our marriage. We've taken time off work to go on many youth camps. For many years when our three oldest kids were little, we woke them up early Sunday morning to bring them to church with us more than an hour earlier than the rest of the congregation, because Cheryl and I were both serving in congregational leadership roles and had council meetings to attend. We've taught early morning scripture study classes to teenagers every day before school for years. We even paid for babysitting once a week for a year so we could go together to teach college students a weekly scripture class at night as well. And we found joy in all of that service. We love the people with whom we served, and we love the Lord.

But unfortunately, ever since I first counseled with people as a bishop about their gay sexual orientations several years ago, and especially since Wes subsequently came out to us as gay in 2015, the doctrine against marriage equality makes it feel at times like church depletes, rather than replenishes, my spiritual cup - because of the despair I feel when I'm reminded of painful church teachings. While I know my feelings are not as intense because I am not gay, the following statement resonates with me nonetheless for how it expresses a similar duality:

“The religion [teaches] me to be intentional, patient, compassionate, forgiving, repentant, and to strive to better myself. I believe at the religion’s core is an immensely powerful set of values that drive human progression. In that core, I see an elegance that is beyond human intention. **[But] I have also seen the human intentions in the history of weaponizing the religion. The religion also taught me that queerness, is a mental illness, is vile, or simply does not exist.** I learned this explicitly from the pulpit.” (Matthew Gong, <https://m.facebook.com/notes/matthew-gong/birthday-letters-27-28/10158377175735021/>, 2019)

And as much as I believe in the power of the Savior's love, just hoping that the love of Christ will “work things out” for gay church members after this life is still a very sad and depressing thought if that means abandoning their same-sex spouses and altering their sexuality in order to be in the highest degree of heaven. For me, part of trusting in Christ to “work things out” means believing that the church's doctrinal teaching in this area is incomplete and more will be revealed. I can't separate my belief in Christ and His mercy from a belief that the doctrine will change – because Christ is hope, not despair.

So I am no longer hesitant to use words like “incomplete,” “deficient,” “painful,” “dark,” “hurtful,” “un-Christ-like,” etc., when referring to doctrines on LGBTQ issues in the church. I may need to moderate my exposure to some church members and some messages from here on out, in order to ensure that church is an uplifting, rather than a painful, experience for me. The members of my local congregation are great, so hopefully that challenge won't prove too difficult.

Some people have reached out to Cheryl and me, encouraging our family to have faith like other marginalized or traumatized groups in our church's history have had historically. But, as I have mentioned in Chapter 2, and with as much sympathy and sensitivity as I can imagine expressing to individuals in such groups, I think **LGBTQs** [LGBTQ people](#) in the church face a different

situation. In addition to the examples about Blacks and polygamy mentioned elsewhere in this book, here are others:

- Many people feel that women in the church do not have an equal voice. But their voice is heard more loudly than that of gays and lesbians who **pursue** [are in uniform-orientation love marriages](#) (because they are kicked out of **the** church [callings](#) entirely for **doing that** [being in such marriages](#)).
- Parents of straight children who have left the church have hope that such children will nevertheless be saved in the highest degree of heaven with them (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/09/hope-for-parents-of-wayward-children>). But parents of gay children can only have such hope if it also involves having their kids' sexuality changed, which is a depressing thought.
- Parents of deceased young children have the assurance that their kids will automatically make it to the highest degree of heaven (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1981/06/i-have-a-question/will-those-who-died-as-little-children-have-to-receive-baptism-at-some-future-time>). While I would never want to trade places with any parent who has lost a child, the *eternal* hope provided to parents of **gays and lesbians** [inactive gay and lesbian children](#) is much more bleak.
- Straight singles in the church can have hope for uniform-orientation love someday, even if only in the afterlife. But gay singles are supposed to avoid uniform-orientation love here. And because of the church's teachings, many gay singles struggle with feelings that something about their physical makeup offends God – because uniform-orientation love can't exist for them in heaven either, without rewiring.
- And lastly, Mormon pioneers who died crossing the plains had the hope of being together forever as families. But **gays** [gay](#) and **lesbians** [lesbian couples](#) are told there is no way they can be with their [same-sex](#) mortal spouses after this life.

So, when mortal circumstances and eternal prospects are viewed collectively, there is much to despair about for our LGBTQ siblings.

That realization clearly negatively affects the parents and family members of LGBTQ individuals as well. Under current doctrine, Cheryl and I are stuck with church teachings that relegate our son to either a lesser kingdom of heaven or requires a change to how he loves to be in the highest degree of heaven, which engenders feeling of anguish as well. And that is the prospect he faces simply because he wants to eventually marry someone with whom he can raise a family in a stable marriage filled with love, intimacy, and lifelong companionship, just like the rest of us. That desire is good and selfless. So the dichotomy the church is asking us to endure is incredibly hard to bear as parents.

[\[Side note: I am grateful for older families with LGBTQ children who paved the way in the church years ago, through their efforts to increase awareness and understanding among church leaders and church members. They make the journey that our family has to endure less painful. I recognize that many families have suffered more than we have. One situation I recently learned about with the David and Carlie Hardy family has made me reflect on how much improvement is still needed in the church. Their story happened over two decades before ours, but still resonates for many reasons: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/mormon-family-values/> \(I am glad conversion therapy was never encouraged by our church leaders for Wes\). Even though written decades ago, this letter by Brother Hardy to Elder Boyd K. Packer does an excellent job of outlining the still pertinent reasons why the](#)

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/hardy.shtml>. The church pamphlet authored by Elder Packer referred to in that letter can be found here: <https://blakeclan.org/jon/to-the-one/>. Over 20 years later, the fact that families like ours are still feeling pain in the church over this issue means we still have a lot more progress to make.]

Are there different ways to endure to the end?

Each member of our family has had their own unique reaction to this whole situation. We're learning that each of us has a different ability to ignore others' views that we should feel guilty about hoping for a change or to hold up under the pain of the constant pokes to our wounds brought about by demeaning General Conference talks on LGBTQ matters (which then get discussed during church lessons on Sundays). Ironically, we have never felt closer as a family, as we've united to express love to each other and talk about each of our respective capacities to tolerate the emotional pain and the "dark cloud" that the church's doctrine on this topic produces.

As I have thought about our situation recently, the word "endure" has come to mind often. How much church can we endure? It's interesting that one of the commandments we have in the church is to "endure to the end," which means to basically always stay active in the church until death (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/03/i-have-a-question/what-does-it-mean-to-endure-to-the-end-and-why-is-it-necessary>). With that being a commandment, I have wondered how guilty I should feel if I fail to serve in the church in the same ways I have been up until now in my life. But I had an epiphany come to my mind one day some time ago while thinking about why the church is okay with some people being exempt from following certain commandments. I wrote the following in my journal when the thought came to me:

*Jesus taught that the first and most important commandment is to love God (Matthew 22:35–40). He also taught that the way we love Him is by keeping His commandments (John 14:15). But what's interesting is that when he taught the commandment to love God, he used subjective wording: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all **thy** heart, and with all **thy** soul, and with all **thy** strength, and with all **thy** mind" (Luke 10:27). So maybe that's why, if someone's mind can't comprehend the importance of a commandment, it makes sense that they're not expected to obey it. And if someone's heart and soul would be broken by keeping a commandment, maybe that commandment just doesn't apply to them. And if someone doesn't have the strength to keep a commandment in full, maybe God only sees it as a commandment for them to the extent their strength allows it to be. We love God by keeping His commandments, but maybe Christ said we only need to love Him with our own respective hearts, souls, strengths, and minds for a reason – so we understand that obedience is a personal, subjective matter – just between us and God – not something about which we should be compared to others.*

So, with that understanding, maybe I should view the commandment to endure to the end a bit differently. Maybe God will understand if I (or members of my family) are not able to keep serving in the church as actively as we have before. While I don't agree with most of what Elder Hafen taught in his talk about conversion therapy (as I noted in Chapter 7), I do like an analogy he gave in that talk about the way God judges us (https://religion.wikia.org/wiki/Bruce_C._Hafen). He referred to Olympic diving, in which a diver is judged not only by his technical execution of a dive, but also on the difficulty of the dive. (Maybe I just like that analogy because I was a diver in high

school!) I like remembering that the Lord judges us not only on our thoughts, desires, and behaviors, but also on the difficulties we face, which are unique to us, or in other words, on the difficulty of our varying dives. Because my family is being asked to perform a more difficult dive than some families in the church, maybe we can still get just as good of an overall score, even if we aren't as involved in the church as some other families? All of that seems consistent with what the Book of Mormon teaches about how "it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength" (Mosiah 4:27). Because LGBTQ-related church doctrines result in us being asked to essentially run uphill in the church, I think God might view us just as favorably as He does some other church members who might only be running on a flat incline, even if we are less involved in church service than they are. Our strength is no less than theirs, but it is depleted more quickly inside the church because our circumstances there are harder. So I am comfortable with anyone in my family who feels their strength is best spent serving others outside the church, where their strength can last longer. In my view, that decision is just as worthy (and in some ways more selfless) as a decision to stay and serve within the church.

I personally will *strive* to attend church as often as I can to renew my personal commitment to God, including to comfort others who are struggling as well and to help be a voice for increased love. But I know my family members may not all be with me every time I go to church because we all have to take care of our own respective mental health too. My family is basically trying to figure out how to keep the good things we've felt from the church in our lives, including continuing to serve and help others, while better managing how to avoid the things that cause us to hurt and despair. That means each of us may end up walking our own unique path, which is consistent with the scriptural teaching that the righteous path is entered into by a strait (i.e., narrow) gate and then continues on a narrow way (Matthew 7:14). I think that suggests a path that is unique to each of us, because the narrowness of both the gate and the path doesn't allow anyone else to be on it. That makes sense given that our covenants are unique to each of us too – so the same should hold true for our respective covenant paths. But, notwithstanding our unique paths, we will always support each other on our individual journeys.

I am coming to appreciate more and more how my family members' strengths may be needed outside the church, to be with and comfort those who are leaving church activity. My path inside the church is not better than theirs – it is just different. And their strengths are just different from (not less than) mine too, which is why I am sure they can faithfully endure to the end utilizing their strengths outside church activity on the path of service God has revealed to them.

Is it okay if no one else in my family comes back to church with me?

For various reasons, Cheryl has decided that her church involvement will be more limited than mine. And I support her 100% in that decision. While Wes has not asked that anyone in our family leave the church with him, I am personally glad that he has his mother's company as he walks "alongside" the **church-prescribed covenant path, on his own valid and worthwhile** covenant path outside the church. For our three other children (all younger than Wes), the dichotomy is confusing and causes anxiety and guilt, either way they turn. They like the relationships they have with people at church, but they don't like how church doctrine against marriage equality makes them feel – at all. So at the time of this writing, they have each decided to stop attending church regularly.

Some less active adult church friends have said that when they were kids, they felt their parents loved the church more than them – or at least that their parents prioritized church service over them. We do not want to alienate any of our kids from us, regardless of their chosen level of activity in the church. We don't want to make the mistake that one of our past prophets made with his inactive son:

“Over the years Spencer’s repeated, anguished efforts to call his son to repentance only widened the gap between them. The son believed he should not be expected to profess faith and live his life in a way inconsistent with his convictions. The father kept hoping that perhaps one more appeal would make the difference. Even if it did not, he felt it his responsibility as a parent to make the effort.”
(<https://www.millennialstar.org/president-kimball-and-his-inactive-son/>)

I never want a lack of unity between any members of our family. So I have given my kids more freedom to decide for themselves about church than ever before – because things are more intense and difficult church-wise for all of us now. All of our kids love many things about the church – especially the people. They might have decided to remain active in the church were it not for the pain caused by the newly entrenched doctrine on LGBTQ issues. (They each also don't like the inequality between men and women in the church, but they were able to ignore that concern for years and still participate fully.)

Interestingly, giving my children more space to choose what to do is consistent with an impression I had when I went to the temple on September 20, 2019, after President Nelson's BYU sermon but before my meeting with the General Authority. I wrote the following down in my journal when I came out of the temple:

*I had a spiritual witness in the temple today that I need to trust the Lord when it comes to my kids. I need to avoid pressuring them. **Teach them, yes. Testify to them, yes. Love them, absolutely. But pressure them about the church, no. God can guide them more effectively and wisely than I can, and He knows what paths will be best for them.***

I heard an interesting analogy on a podcast (which I already shared briefly in a [sidenoteside note](#) in Chapter 9 and which, as noted, I believe was originally taught by Derek Knox) that relates to that sentiment as well. At a conference for LGBTQ-supportive parents in the church, a mother was expressing anguish. She was upset about the desires of her teenage daughter to no longer attend church because she was a lesbian. Going to church and related activities made the daughter feel bad about herself and think about suicide. The conference presenter thought for a minute and then answered the mother's question by relaying the Bible story of Solomon and the baby: two women are fighting over the baby, and Solomon says he could just chop the baby in half so they could share (1 Kings 3:16-28). One woman ~~was~~ was okay with that solution; she was apparently most interested in winning the argument. But the other woman was more concerned for the baby's well-being and so was willing to let the baby go to a different home to be raised in safety and peace. The presenter then asked the mother if she was willing to let her lesbian daughter be raised in a different spiritual home so she could likewise be safe and at peace – so she wouldn't want to kill herself. That story resonates with me and I am trying now to focus more on the emotional and

“I never thought it was right to call up a man and try him because he erred in doctrine; it looks too much like Methodism and not like Latter-day Saintism. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church. I want the liberty of believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammled.” (The Prophet Joseph Smith, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-8-april-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton-b/3, 1843, spelling and capitalization modernized>)

“The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that **we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without...being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds...of men...when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds**, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.” (The Prophet Joseph Smith, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-22?lang=eng, 1839>);

“...if a man rejects a message that I may give to him but is still moral and believes in the main principles of the gospel and desires to continue in his membership in the Church, he is permitted to remain...so long as a man believe in God and has a little faith in the Church organization, we nurture and aid that person to continue faithfully as a member of the Church **though he may not believe all that is revealed.**” (President Joseph F. Smith, *Reed Smoot Hearings, US Congress, 1903-1907*, pg 97) (<https://bit.ly/2TksPK9>)

I think selectively choosing which church doctrines I will have hope and faith in is a good thing for me as I start what feels like a new spiritual journey. To that end, I really like this quote from Brigham Young:

“**I do not even believe that there is a single revelation**, among the many God has given to the Church, **that is perfect in its fullness**. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principles so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, groveling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections” (Discourses of Brigham Young, Deseret Book, 1977, p. 40) (https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Doctrine_and_Covenants/Textual_changes/Why_did_Joseph_Smith_edit_revelations#Brigham_Young_.281855.29:_22I_do_not_even_believe_that_there_is_a_single_revelation.2C_among_the_many_God_has_given_to_the_Church.2C_that_is_perfect_in_its_fulness.22)

I will try to promote growth and healing in the church by worshipping God in the way I see most worthwhile: through creating love wherever I can. So ironically, the current doctrine of the church provides me a great opportunity to worship more meaningfully than I perhaps could anywhere else:

“**We have the privilege in our day of doing something of historical importance for our gay loved ones** just as our ancestors did when they gave up the slave trade, when they banned segregation, when they decided women had souls and even gave them the vote. They knew there was no love in what they had been doing and also knew that for there to be love things had to change. **You and I have the privilege of seeing the sad places and**

A PATH FORWARD

From Gay Latter-day Saint Crossroads: My Journey, Your Journey, and a Scripture-based Path Forward by Evan Smith

Same-sex attraction occurs in 2-10% of all humans across culture and time. It is also widespread at around the same rate in the animal kingdom, occurring in every major animal group (see Chapter 3). **LGBTQs** **LGBTQ beings** are part of God’s creation and part of His plan.

Same-sex attraction is not a choice but is inborn (agreed by science and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - see Chapter 3).

Current choices for LGBTQ* Latter-day Saints

1) Remain celibate and stay in the church	2) Enter a mixed-orientation marriage and stay in the church	3) Leave the church, with or without a gay legal marriage
This is a joyful choice for some. For nearly 90%, teachings about this choice result in increased depression, trauma and suicidality (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 10).	This is a joyful choice for some but generally correlates with a higher rate of depression and lower reported quality of life. For nearly 70%, this results in divorce (see Chapter 3).	Some find a joyful spiritual home outside the church. Others keenly feel the loss of church blessings for self, parents, children and ancestors
“Every Sunday for <i>one whole year</i> , every Sunday I went into my bishop’s office and he gave me a blessing. All that happened during that year was that I pretty much succeeded in feeling nothing for anyone. My emotions were dead. At the end of the year, I thought, I am never going to change. I’m destined to go to the lowest place in God’s kingdom, and I’d just as well go now.” **	“I have a friend who will commit suicide very soon. He has a beautiful wife and six wonderful children. They were married in the temple and are active in the Church. He has served as a bishop and has never acted on his same sex attraction. He is empty inside. He has sought professional counseling. He does not draw strength and hope and the will to go on from his relationships.” **	“Jo had to decide to give up the Church or to end her own life, so she gave up the Church. But there is still a ‘huge ache’ there for all the things she loves so much and still believes.” ** “The Mormons have got to stop being so rejecting. To be rejected by something so wonderful as the Mormon Church is nearly more than a person can bear.” **

Institutional church choices regarding LGBTQ* Latter-day Saints

1) Insist on celibacy or mixed-orientation marriage for church worthiness	2) Same worthiness standards but (i) formally acknowledge doctrinal ambiguity about gay couples in heaven and/or (ii) formally allow LGBTQ* members to leave the church without guilt if needed to protect mental health.	3) Accept gay civil marriage for church worthiness but not temple worthiness (i.e., the individuals can be members of the church but not hold temple recommends)	4) Accept gay civil marriage in the temple for time only. This would make the individuals temple worthy but would not change the status of their marriage after death	5) Full equality for LGBTQ* church members, including gay temple sealing and full church and temple participation
Status quo	These changes could be done simply through a General Conference talk by the prophet or an apostle. They would allow LGBTQ* church members to better trust in God and avoid needing to believe in a traumatic or sad heaven (see Chapter 4).	For this change to be universally applied in all congregations where gay civil marriage is legal, it would likely require a policy change to the Handbook (see Chapters 6 and 7).	This change would require a policy change to the Handbook and likely a re-interpretation of the 1995 family proclamation as only addressing the heterosexual family (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7).	This change would require a doctrinal clarification through revelation from God (Official Declaration 3?) (see Chapter 6).

* Lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning/queer. Absent from this acronym is T for transgender. Issues for our transgender siblings may be different from these in this chart.

FAVORITE CHURCH-RELATED LGBTQ AND ALLY RESOURCES

Essays and Books:

- Mormon LGBT Questions – Essay by Bryce Cook – <https://mormonlgbtquestions.com/>
 - ~~Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology— Essay by Taylor Petrey—~~
https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V44N04_420.pdf
- [Faith, Hope, Charity and My Son’s Marriage — Essay by Jack Hadley —](https://www.jackhadley.com/faith-hope-charity-and-my-sons-marriage/)
<https://www.jackhadley.com/faith-hope-charity-and-my-sons-marriage/>
- *Listen, Learn and Love – Embracing LGBTQ Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* – Book by Richard Ostler – ~~To be published in September~~
2020 <https://www.amazon.com/Listen-Learn-Love-Embracing-Latter-day/dp/1462135773>
 - ~~Gay Rights and the Mormon Church—Book by Gregory A. Prince—~~
<https://uofupress.lib.utah.edu/gay-rights-and-the-mormon-church/>
- *Goodbye I Love You* – Book by Carol Lynn Pearson -
<https://www.amazon.com/Goodbye-Love-Carol-Lynn-Pearson/dp/1555179843>
- *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons around our Gay Loved Ones* – Book by Carol Lynn Pearson -
<https://www.amazon.com/No-More-Goodbyes-Circling-Wagons/dp/0963885243>
- [Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology – Essay by Taylor Petrey –](https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V44N04_420.pdf)
https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V44N04_420.pdf
- *Tabernacles of Clay – Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* – Book by Taylor Petrey -
<https://www.amazon.com/Tabernacles-Clay-Sexuality-Gender-Mormonism/dp/1469656213>
- [Gay Rights and the Mormon Church – Book by Gregory A. Prince –](https://uofupress.lib.utah.edu/gay-rights-and-the-mormon-church/)
<https://uofupress.lib.utah.edu/gay-rights-and-the-mormon-church/>

Websites, Podcasts and Blogs:

- <https://affirmation.org> – [Affirmation](#) - A non-profit organization working to connect, uplift, and empower lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Mormons and their allies around the world from all along the spectrums of sexual orientation, gender identity, faith, and involvement with the church.
- <https://beyondtheblockpodcast.com> – ~~Co-hosts, Brother~~ [Beyond the Block – Weekly podcast where James C. Jones and Brother Derek Knox describe themselves, a Black life-long member and queer convert, respectively, discuss the scriptures](#) as staunch advocates for the theology and harsh critics of the culture ~~when it comes to Mormonism. A Black life-long member and queer convert, respectively, they bring a less heard perspective to the notoriously white and heteronormative faith. They feel their~~ [of the church, maintaining that the](#) inner thrust for justice, love, and salvation for all people, regardless of color, sex, orientation, and other identities is not only consistent with the message of Christ, but it **is** the message of Christ.
- <http://www.blairostler.com/> – [Blaire Ostler is a philosopher who is specialized in queer studies, and is a leading voice at the intersection of queer, Mormon, and transhumanist thought.](#)
- <https://encircletogether.org> – **Encircle** seeks to deepen and enrich the conversation among communities of faith and LGBTQ+ people. By teaching individuals to love themselves and empowering families, Encircle helps cultivate an environment where LGBTQ+ individuals can thrive.

- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/human-stories-with-jill-hazard-rowe/id1468623842> – [Human Stories Podcast](#) where Jill Hazard Rowe goes in depth with some of today's most inspiring and touching LGBTQ stories. ~~There is something here for everyone to learn as we come together to celebrate our shared humanity.~~
- <https://lattergaystories.org> – [Latter Gay Stories](#) - A podcast and resource center with a simple and organized approach to understanding the intersection of sexuality and reality. An amazing collection of all quotes on LGBTQ matters from church General Authorities since the time of Joseph Smith was compiled by Kyle Ashworth, who manages Latter-Gay Stories. It can be a triggering history to read, but it is crucial to understanding church history and efforts to avoid the mistakes of the past: <https://lattergaystories.org/record/>.
- <https://listenlearnandlove.org> – [Listen, Learn & Love](#) - Resource site and podcast [hosted by Richard Ostler](#). Fully committed to the success of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Not proposing or advocating for changes in the church's policies or doctrines. But committed to facilitating meaningful, loving, and productive dialogue. LGBTQ guests are frequently interviewed on the podcast.
 - ~~<https://www.facebook.com/lovespokenqueer/> – Podcast by LGBTQ church members commenting on church culture and doctrine.~~
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/love-is-spoken-queer/id1491809605> - [Love is Spoken Queer Podcast - Join Dustin Larsen \(an active gay church member\), Hayden Davis, René Hernandez and their guests each week as they discuss a new gospel topic through a queer perspective.](#)
- <https://mormonsbuildingbridges.org> – [Mormons Building Bridges](#) - The MBB ministry is about making every congregation welcoming to LGBTQIA+ people. The MBB community does not center itself around a single leader or organizational body; instead MBB is a movement centered around a sense of ministry and mission. It is not a formal organization and there are no formal members. The MBB ministry embraces and amplifies all thoughtful innovation and collaboration that helps LGBTQIA+ people to thrive.
- <https://thepeculiar.org> – [Peculiar](#) - Resource and networking to inspire and empower parents and families to unconditionally love and embrace their LGBTQ+ children.
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/questions-from-the-closet/id1504990147> - [Questions from the Closet – Podcast where two gay, active Latter-day Saints, Charlie Bird and Ben Schilaty, are joined each week by a guest to discuss common questions from LGBTQ/SSA members of the church. Also check out Ben's personal blog for some great thoughts: <http://benschilaty.blogspot.com/>; and also Charlie's book: <https://www.amazon.com/Without-Mask-Coming-Into-Light/dp/1629727849>](#)

TOPICAL INDEX OF REFERENCED WEBSITES
(websites of particular significance are **bolded**)

2019 First Presidency Teachings (and related teachings/commentary)

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/	As Prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, compares the church’s current formulation of the law of chastity to the unchanging laws of nature.	Chapter 4
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/35oaks	President Dallin H. Oaks says church members should not love LGBTQ people so much that they forget to remind them to obey the church’s law of chastity – and that LGBTQ members who don’t obey that law can be happy enough in the lower degrees of heaven.	Chapter 4
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/17oaks	President Dallin H. Oaks teaches that we should just trust in the Lord to work out difficult situations - after this life.	Chapter 4 Chapter 7
https://twitter.com/ChurchNewsroom/status/1204232675222908928	Elder Jack N. Gerard said: “We aspire to live the two great commandments: to love the Lord by keeping His commandments and <u>secondarily</u> to love our neighbor as ourselves.”	Chapter 4
https://speeches.byu.edu/speakers/terence-m-vinson/	Elder Terence M. Vinson said “The order and emphasis given by the Savior is critical. We cannot supplant the first commandment — the great commandment — with the second. . . . And we cannot disregard the first commandment while purporting to live the second.”	Chapter 4
https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/sandra_rogers_0.pdf	Sister Sandra Rogers, international vice president at BYU and former Relief Society general board member (2012 – 2017), speaking at the general session of the BYU Women's Conference, said: “When youwe are fully obedient to the first commandment, youwe cannot help but keepobey the second commandment .”	Chapter 4
https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/10/11/jana-riess-oaks-oaks/	Review by commentator and researcher, Jana Riess, of President Oaks’ talk “ <u>Two Great Commandments</u> .”	Chapter 4
https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/10/02/dark-day-transgender/	News article reporting on church’s formal position that eternal “gender” is determined by biological sex at birth.	Chapter 4
http://www.inspiredconstitution.org/talks/ETB_67oct.html	Elder Ezra Taft Benson said in October 1967 General Conference that “When we fail to put the love of God first, we are easily deceived by crafty men who profess a great love of humanity, while advocating programs that are not of the Lord.” His talk referenced the Civil Rights Movement.	Chapter 4

Abortion

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/abortion	The church allows its members to have abortions in the case of rape, incest, or risk to the health of the mother, and still remain in good standing.	Chapter 7

Anti-LGBTQ church teachings/practices

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://abcnews.go.com/Health/mormon-gay-cures-reparative-therapies-shock-today/story?id=13240700 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigham_Young_University_LGBT_history	Church-sanctioned genital electroshock conversion therapy took place at BYU	Chapter 3
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_LGBT_Mormon_history_in_the_20th_century	Timeline that shows electroshock conversion therapy was going on during the entire duration of President Dallin H. Oaks serving as president of BYU.	Chapter 3
https://web.archive.org/web/20120724194315/http://www.evergreeninternational.org/morrison.htm	Elder Alexander B. Morrison said church members should avoid gay people and their allies like the plague.	Chapter 3
https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said parents might be justified in not letting their adult gay children meet their friends or participate in family events in the same way as their other children.	Chapter 3
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/truth-and-the-plan	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said Satan “seeks to confuse gender [and] distort marriage.”	Chapter 3
https://devotional.byuh.edu/node/1788 ; https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/06/20/this-week-mormon-land/	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said in 2019 that LGBTQ “lifestyles and values” are part of “a culture of evil and personal wickedness.”	Chapter 3 Chapter 10
http://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2019/9/19/celestial-genocide .	The idea that LGBTQ identity will be completely wiped out in heaven has been powerfully described as genocide by writer Blaire Ostler.	Chapter 4
https://blakeclan.org/jon/to-the-one/	Church pamphlet <i>To The One</i> in which Elder Boyd K. Packer says “some forms of these treatments [reparative therapy] are of substantial help in about 25 percent of the cases” without offering any authority for this statistic.	Chapter 10

Black African race-based priesthood/temple ban

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood	The church’s current essay disavowing prior racist teachings.	Chapter 5
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_racial_issues/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/State_ments	The First Presidency issued statements in 1949 and 1969 saying the priesthood/temple ban against Black people was a doctrine from God, not a policy.	Chapter 5
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_people_and_Mormon_priesthood http://bitly.ws/8Egg (see the bottom of page 42)	Brigham Young said the priesthood ban against Black people would not end until after the second coming of Christ (i.e., “until the redemption of the Earth”).	Chapter 5
http://mit.irr.org/brigham-young-it	Brigham Young said the priesthood/temple ban against	Chapter 5

https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-267/132581/20200210172618740_19-267%20Amici%20Curiae.pdf		
https://lattergaystories.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Principles-to-Govern.pdf	In 1984, Elder Dallin H. Oaks (who was a newly called apostle at the time) wrote a confidential memorandum for the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in which he outlines how the church could effectively oppose employment anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ people.	Chapter 8
https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2019/12/6/20995260/mormon-utah-chris-stewart-latter-day-saint-leaders-lgbtq-lds-civil-rights-gay-religious-freedom	The church supports religious liberty legislation so it can continue to be allowed to not employ people in gay marriages.	Chapter 8
https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/07/11/stop-skipping-the-establishment-clause/	Elder Charles W. Penrose said “Anything that persons profess to do under the name of religion, which interferes with the rights of others is wrong.”	Chapter 8
https://gregkofford.com/blogs/news/five-times-mormons-changed-their-position-on-slavery	The church changed its political position five times in respect of slavery.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interracial_marriage_and_The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints	The church supported laws making interracial marriage illegal and taught that it was a sin.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints_and_politics_in_the_United_States	Most church members in Utah voted to repeal Prohibition even though President Heber J. Grant didn’t want them to.	Chapter 8
https://www.facebook.com/ProgressiveMormonTeachings/posts/2138582373112536	Collection of statements from church leaders on immigration and refugees (including that “there’s nothing wrong” with undocumented status).	Chapter 8

Conversion therapy; church’s past (and limited present) endorsement of

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evergreen_International	Church leaders historically taught that gay sexual orientation could be “treated” or “cured.”	Chapter 8
https://religion.wikia.org/wiki/Bruce_C._Hafen https://www.mormonwiki.com/Bruce_C._Hafen#2009_Talk_on_Gay_Rights_and_Same_Gender_Attraction	Elder Bruce C. Hafen taught that same-sex attractions can be replaced with opposite-sex attractions in this life (and after it) if gay people are faithful enough. He also taught we are judged on the degree of difficulty of lives’ challenges, not just our thoughts and actions.	Chapter 8 Chapter 10
https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/pn.47.12.psychnews_47_12_1-b	Dr. Robert Spitzer (who was quoted by Elder Bruce C. Hafen as a professional who said conversion therapy could work to make someone no longer be gay) apologizes for his “unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy.”	Chapter 8
https://lattergaystories.org/bergen/	Allen Bergin, a former BYU professor, bishop, stake president, and member of the General Sunday School	Chapter 8

https://religionnews.com/2020/08/07/a-prominent-mormon-therapist-apologized-for-anti-lgbt-activism-whats-the-next-step/	<u>Presidency, who was a psychotherapist often quoted by church leaders in the late 20th century as an authority on gay sexual orientation, apologized in July 2020 for his past endorsement of conversion therapy, among other things.</u>	
https://web.archive.org/web/20120724194231/http://www.evergreeninternational.org/2005%20Mason.pdf	Elder James O. Mason taught that same-gender attraction could be cured.	Chapter 8
https://www.deseret.com/2018/2/7/20639656/the-weeds-story-is-one-of-many-stories-of-lgbt-latter-day-saints-that-continue-to-be-written	Church therapists still provide a form of conversion therapy for patients who “self-determine” that they want to stop experiencing gay sexual attraction.	Chapter 8
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/leaders?lang=eng	Similar statements about self-determination being respected in therapy can be found on the church’s “Same-Sex Attraction” website as well.	Chapter 8
https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2019/out-darkness-conversion-therapist-quit-s-ex-gay-movement	Article describing many former conversion therapists who have abandoned their teachings to lead lives of openly gay men, including Latter-day Saint David Matheson, who was formally associated with Evergreen International and who was a founder of ex-gay program Journey into Manhood.	Chapter 8
https://blakeclan.org/jon/to-the-one/	<u>Church pamphlet <i>To The One</i> in which Elder Boyd K. Packer says “some forms of these treatments [reparative therapy] are of substantial help in about 25 percent of the cases” without offering any authority for this statistic.</u>	<u>Chapter 10</u>

Conversion therapy; Utah’s ban on (church’s view of)

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.deseret.com/platform/amp/utah/2019/10/23/20929351/lds-mormon-church-conversion-therapy-opposition-jesus-christ-latter-day-saints	News article wherein the church explains why it opposed a ban on conversion therapy for minors in Utah.	Chapter 8
https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2019/11/27/gov-herbert-announces/	The church was able to get changes made to a proposed ban on conversion therapy for minors in Utah.	Chapter 8
https://www.kuer.org/post/how-bill-became-rule-journey-utahs-conversion-therapy-ban#stream/0	History of the full legislative and rule-making process for the ban on conversion therapy for minors in Utah.	Chapter 8
https://societyforpsychotherapy.org/integrating-spirituality-religion-psychotherapy-practice/	Professional guidelines require a therapist to discuss with a patient their religious values when providing counseling.	Chapter 8

Demographics

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demog	Around 2-10% of the human population is LGBTQ,	Chapter 3

Doctrine; definitions/exploration of

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/J._Reuben_Clark	President J. Reuben Clark said real truth cannot be harmed by investigation.	Chapter 1
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/si/questions/what-is-doctrine	Church website response to the question: What is doctrine?	Chapter 4
https://www.newspapers.com/clip/21138508/partial_transcript_of_ap_interview_with/	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said he doesn't think "it's possible to distinguish between policy and doctrine."	Chapter 4
http://podcast.latterdayfaith.org/031-what-is-doctrine	Podcast that discusses how all church doctrines have evolved and changed over time.	Chapter 4
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/si/questions/what-is-doctrine https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/What_is_Mormon_Doctrine.pdf	The church says that any teaching that has not been voted on by the whole church to be canonized can be known to be of God or not if we feel God's spirit testify of their truthfulness. "It is likely that the Lord has allowed (and will continue to allow) his servants to make mistakes."	Chapter 7

Doctrine; changes in that coincide with external forces

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-stories/chapter-31-the-word-of-wisdom-february-1833	Joseph Smith got the Word of Wisdom revelation after feeling compelled to pray because his wife, Emma, asked him to.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1890_Manifesto	The church stopped polygamy at time the U.S. government forced it to.	Chapter 8
http://www.lds-mormon.com/taxes_priesthood.shtml	Worry over the church potentially losing its tax exempt tax-exempt status and end of the racial priesthood/temple ban in 1978.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_rights_and_Mormonism#NAACP_involvement	The threat of losing revenue from BYU sports programs and end of the racial priesthood/temple ban in 1978.	Chapter 8
https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2019/11/11/two-science-societies/	In 2019, two science societies removed BYU job postings over the school's Honor Code ban on 'homosexual behavior'.	Chapter 8
https://soundcloud.com/mormonland/college-administrator-examines-byus-honor-code-reversal-on-lgbt-q-issues-episode-129	Podcast discussion with Michael Austin, a BYU alumnus and executive vice president for academic affairs at the University of Evansville, a Methodist school in Indiana, about the possibility that, as BYU continues to prohibit gay dating on campus, the school and its students will become more and more alienated from the associations that they have traditionally relied upon for success.	Chapter 8
https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2020/01/21/first-time-ever-byu-will/	BYU gave in to external pressure to allow same-sex couples to participate in ballroom dancing competition.	Chapter 8

Gay sexual orientation; scientific findings about

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=8IHw9DVI3hE (if pressed for time, start at the 30-minute mark and listen for 20 minutes there)	BYU microbiology professor (and former mission president), Dr. William Bradshaw, explains how sexual orientation is not a choice – that it is determined biologically (he specifically says it is determined by nature, not nurture).	Preface Chapter 3
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epigenetic_theories_of_homosexuality https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2015/10/homosexuality-may-be-caused-chemical-modifications-dna	Scientific studies say sexual orientation is not a choice. Epigenetic explanations for sexual orientation.	Chapter 3 Chapter 7 Chapter 8
https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/kinsey-scale.php	There is a spectrum of sexual orientation.	Chapter 3
https://docs.google.com/book/d/15RtVqRQ5KOeyc6i5BzbNSprMpbJCD6n99VfpKirv_F0/mobilebasic	Physiological traits of gay individuals reflect some sexually dimorphic traits of their opposite sex rather than their same sex.	Chapter 3
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gssnz1WZ3dU (if pressed for time, watch from the 14-minute mark through the 30-minute mark)	Historian and scholar, Dr. Greg Prince, explains how epigenetics causes sexual orientation and gender dysphoria.	Chapter 3
https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2015/jul/24/gay-genes-science-is-on-the-right-track-were-born-this-way-lets-deal-with-it https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/science/gay-gene-sex.html	While sexual orientation is primarily determined by epigenetics, science has shown that inherited genetic factors (as opposed to epigenetic factors) can explain about 25-30% of the differences between people in sexual orientation - and that sexual orientation cannot be changed. A 2019 comprehensive study shows that a third of the influence on whether someone has gay sex can come from inherited genetics (as opposed to epigenetics).	Chapter 3 Chapter 7
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handedness	Other biological traits are determined through a similar mix of inherited genetics and epigenetics. For example, being right-handed or left-handed is caused 25% by inherited genetics and 75% from epigenetic changes occurring in utero.	Chapter 3
https://www.listenlearnandlove.org/articles	A great summary of the science can be found under the section titled “Sexual Orientation is Not a Choice” on the website for Richard Ostler’s “Listen, Learn, and Love.”	Chapter 3
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexual_behavior_in_animals	Same-sex sexual behavior in animals is widespread across many species and happens at around the same rate as humans report being LGBTQ.	Chapter 3
https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/03/15/homosexuality-may-be-triggered-by-environment-after-birth/amp/	<u>Some researchers have found after-birth epigenetic changes relating to gay sexual orientation. Evidence of such changes are not as prevalent as evidences of epigenetic changes in utero.</u>	<u>Chapter 3</u>
https://www.ted.com/talks/dr_lisa_diamond_why_the_born_this_way_argument_does_not_advance_lgbt_equality?language=en	<u>Dr. Lisa Diamond has noted that relying too much on scientific explanations for LGBTQ realities can actually hurt the cause of LGBTQ equality.</u>	<u>Chapter 3</u>

deochristian/protestantism/mormon/mormon-homosexuality	viewed as a way to resolve homosexual problems. The lives of others should not be damaged by entering a marriage where such concerns exist.” <i>(Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems. Suggestions for Ecclesiastical Leaders, 1992, p. 4.)</i>	
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/videos/elizabeths-story?lang=eng	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said mixed-orientation marriage is not recommended as a “solution” for being gay.	Chapter 3
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay/leaders?lang=eng	Elder D. Todd Christofferson says choosing to enter into a mixed-orientation marriage is a personal choice and not something on which the church maintains a uniform position.	Chapter 3
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2007/10/helping-those-who-struggle-with-same-gender-attraction	Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said trying to force a mixed-orientation marriage is “not likely” to change gay sexual attraction and that such marriages have resulted in “broken hearts and homes.”	Chapter 3
https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said someone who is attracted to the same sex may appropriately marry a person of the opposite sex if they can suppress their same-sex feelings and have a “great attraction” to that person (i.e., bisexuals are okay marrying someone of the opposite sex).	Chapter 3
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gay-mormon-men-marriage_n_6464848	Study that shows that mixed-orientation marriages are 2 to 3 times more likely to end in divorce than uniform-orientation marriages.	Chapter 2 Chapter 3
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19359705.2014.912970	Study that shows people in mixed-orientation marriages report higher rates of depression and a lower quality of life.	Chapter 2 Chapter 3
http://joshweed.com/	Weed family story of a high profile failed mixed-orientation marriage.	Chapter 3
https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2019/12/08/ed-smart-father/ https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ny-ed-smart-came-out-struggles-gay-acceptance-elizabeth-smart-20191210-qyd6dnbc3vh6fdguwczh3v44pm-story.html	Smart family story of a high profile failed mixed-orientation marriage.	Chapter 3

Myths about gay sexual orientation

<u>Referenced site</u>	<u>Summary</u>	<u>Location used</u>
https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/10-anti-gay-myths-debunked	<p>Great website with resources that debunk the following myths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Myth #1: Gay men molest children at far higher rates than heterosexuals</u> • <u>Myth #2: Same-sex parents harm children</u> • <u>Myth #3: People become homosexual because they were sexually abused as children or there was a deficiency in sex-role modeling by their parents.</u> • <u>Myth #4: LGBT people don't live nearly as long as heterosexuals.</u> 	Chapter 7

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Myth #5: Gay men controlled the Nazi Party and helped to orchestrate the Holocaust.</u> • <u>Myth #6: Hate crime laws will lead to the jailing of pastors who criticize homosexuality and the legalization of practices like bestiality and necrophilia.</u> • <u>Myth #7: Allowing gay people to serve openly will damage the armed forces.</u> • <u>Myth #8: Gay people are more prone to be mentally ill and to abuse drugs and alcohol.</u> • <u>Myth #9: No one is born gay.</u> • <u>Myth #10: Gay people can choose to leave homosexuality.</u> 	
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Parenting

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyRAueeJNIY	BYU microbiology professor (and former mission president), Dr. William Bradshaw, hosts a video on embracing LGBTQ children.	Chapter 3
https://mormonlgbtquestions.com/	Church-published tips for parents of LGBTQ children cited (including that they should not “blame” themselves).	Chapter 3
https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said parents might be justified in not letting their adult gay children meet their friends or participate in family events in the same way as their other children.	Chapter 3
https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-wellbeing-of-children-with-gay-or-lesbian-parents/	There is an overwhelming scholarly consensus, based on over three decades of peer-reviewed research, that having a gay or lesbian parent does not harm children.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_parenting	Parents being gay causes no harm to children. The American Academy of Pediatrics and all of the major professional organizations with expertise in child welfare have issued reports and resolutions in support of LGBTQ parental rights.	Chapter 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_parenting#cite_note-Stacey_Biblarz-33	Kids raised by gay couples are <u>not</u> more likely to self-identify as LGBTQ.	Chapter 8
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/09/hope-for-parents-of-wayward-children	Parents of straight children who have left the church have hope that such children will nevertheless be saved in the highest degree of heaven with them. Parents of gay kids can’t hope for that without it meaning their kids will need to have their sexual orientation switched after they die.	Chapter 10
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1981/06/i-have-a-question/will-those-who-died-as-little-children-have-to-receive-baptism-at-some-future-time	Parents of deceased young children have the assurance that their kids will automatically make it to the highest degree of heaven.	Chapter 10
https://www.millennialstar.org/president-kimball-and-his-inactive-son/	President Spencer W. Kimball worsened his relationship with his non-believing son by repeatedly calling him to repentance.	Chapter 10
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org	President Boyd K. Packer taught that personal revelation	Chapter 10

g/study/general-conference/2007/10/the-weak-and-the-simple-of-the-church	for our families is no less important than revelation received by church leaders for the church.	
https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/mormon-family-values/ http://www.lds-mormon.com/hardy.shtml	<u>David and Carlie Hardy family story from late 1990s. Brother Hardy wrote a letter to Elder Boyd K. Packer outlining the still pertinent reasons why the church is damaging LGBTQ people and their families.</u>	<u>Chapter 10</u>

Myths about gay sexual orientation

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/10-anti-gay-myths-debunked	<p>Great website with resources that debunk the following myths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myth #1: Gay men molest children at far higher rates than heterosexuals • Myth #2: Same-sex parents harm children • Myth #3: People become homosexual because they were sexually abused as children or there was a deficiency in sex role modeling by their parents. • Myth #4: LGBT people don't live nearly as long as heterosexuals. • Myth #5: Gay men controlled the Nazi Party and helped to orchestrate the Holocaust. • Myth #6: Hate crime laws will lead to the jailing of pastors who criticize homosexuality and the legalization of practices like bestiality and necrophilia. • Myth #7: Allowing gay people to serve openly will damage the armed forces. • Myth #8: Gay people are more prone to be mentally ill and to abuse drugs and alcohol. • Myth #9: No one is born gay. • Myth #10: Gay people can choose to leave homosexuality. 	Chapter 7

Personal revelation

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/04/revelation-for-the-church-revelation-for-our-lives?lang=eng	President Russell M. Nelson taught: "Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and mind about what is true."	Chapter 5

Polygamy

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_polygamy/1835_Doctrine_and_Covenants_denied	The church actually changed its scripture/canon to redefine marriage: to allow for polygamy.	Chapter 6

amation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world		
https://rationalfaiths.com/from-amicus-to-ohana/	Timeline of events around when the church’s family proclamation was issued and the church’s involvement as an amicus curiae party in an early court case in Hawaii dealing with legalizing gay marriage.	Chapter 5
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/10/stand-strong-against-the-wives-of-the-world?lang=eng	President Gordon B. Hinckley did not describe the family proclamation as a new revelation when he introduced it to the church in 1995. Rather, he said it was “a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which...have repeatedly [been] stated throughout [the church’s] history.”	Chapter 5
https://archive.satrib.com/article.php?id=50440474&itype=CMSID	President Boyd K. Packer’s use of the term “revelation” to describe the family proclamation in a General Conference talk was corrected.	Chapter 5
https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/4/5/21208843/church-proclamations-history-mormon-lds-latter-day-saints-gordon-b-hinckley-russell-m-nelson https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Family:_A_Proclamation_to_the_World#cite_note-16	The church has issued five other “proclamations” over the course of its history.	N/A

Prophets; inspiration and fallibility of

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2001/07/words-of-the-prophet-the-spirit-of-optimism?lang=eng	<u>President Gordon B. Hinckley said “I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. Growth comes of correction.”</u>	<u>Preface</u>
http://www.eugeneengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/BRM-to-EE-Feb-80-Combined.pdf	<u>Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote that “Prophets are men and they make mistakes. Sometimes they err in doctrine.”</u>	<u>Chapter 2</u>
https://archive.org/stream/MormonDoctrine1966/MormonDoctrine1966_djvu.txt	Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that General Authorities may or may not be authorities in doctrinal knowledge or the receipt of the promptings of the Spirit.	Chapter 2
https://www.fairmormon.org/blog/2014/11/25/living-fallibility	The church believes that prophets can make mistakes.	Chapter 5
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible#Question:_Were_Biblical_prophets_infallible.3F	Comparison of the mistakes/fallibility of Biblical prophets to those of modern prophets.	Chapter 5
https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/171150-if-i-do-not-know-the-will-of-my-father	Brigham Young said he sometimes taught, even in his official capacity as the presiding authority over the church, according to his own discretion, not divine revelation.	Chapter 5
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/	<u>Elder Charles W. Penrose said the President of the Church, when speaking to the Church in his official</u>	<u>Chapter 5</u>

Prophets are not infallible#cite_note-13	capacity, is NOT infallible.	
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_116_pages	God can have a back-up plan already in place to make up for the mistakes that prophets make.	Chapter 5
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible#cite_note-16	Elder Boyd K. Packer said “Even with the best of intentions, [Church government] does not always work the way it should. Human nature may express itself on occasion, but not to the permanent injury of the work.”	Chapter 5
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible#cite_note-15	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said “We are often left to work out problems without the dictation or specific direction of the Spirit. That is part of the experience we must have in mortality.”	Chapter 5
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lKQrYUE3yc	Prophets and apostles can contradict each other, even within short periods of time. This video shows that in the context of whether we should be okay with the nickname “the Mormon Church.”	Chapter 5
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interracial_marriage_and_The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints	The church banned white church members who married Black individuals from entering a temple into at least the 1960s and recommended against any interracial marriages in official publications into the 2000s.	Chapter 5
https://www.sixteensmallstones.org/debunking-that-quote-about-brigham-youngs-greatest-fear/	Brigham Young said he worried about people not asking for themselves whether their leaders are led by God.	Chapter 5
https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/	President Russell M. Nelson says people can learn for themselves whether the church’s leaders are truly prophets and apostles.	Chapter 5
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/04/revelation-for-the-church-revelation-for-our-lives	President Russell M. Nelson said “good inspiration is based upon good information” (so can new scientific discoveries about gay sexual orientation result in better inspiration?)	Chapter 6
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Web_sites/MormonThink/Blacks_and_the_Priesthood	Elder Bruce R. McConkie said new revelation makes prior prophetic statements worthy of forgetting.	Chapter 6 Chapter 10
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/si/questions/what-is-doctrine https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/What_is_Mormon_Doctrine.pdf	The church says that any teaching that has not been voted on by the whole church to become canon can be known to be of God or not if we feel God’s spirit testify of their truthfulness. “It is likely that the Lord has allowed (and will continue to allow) his servants to make mistakes.”	Chapter 7

Psychological harm; from non-LGBTQ affirming positions

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/simmons_brian_w_201712_phd.pdf	Peer-reviewed, academic study showing that church teachings on marriage, family, gender, and sexuality cause PTSD symptoms for nearly 90% of LGBTQ Latter-day Saints.	Preface Chapter 2 Chapter 8 Chapter 10
http://mormonsbuildingbridges.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20190928-U-of-U-MBB-Presenta		

cripture-used-against-lgbtq-community-n673471	marriage are interpreted incorrectly.	
https://www.facebook.com/stan.mitchell.58/posts/3135281313206974 https://www.forgeonline.org/blog/2019/3/8/what-about-romans-124-27	<u>Firsthand account of research revealing that modern translations of the Bible that use the word “homosexual” incorrectly do so and that the translators knew of their error but failed to correct it.</u>	<u>Chapter 5</u>
https://www.gaychurch.org/homosexuality-and-the-bible/the-bible-christianity-and-homosexuality/ https://medium.com/@adamnicholasphillips/the-bible-does-not-condemn-homosexuality-seriously-it-doesn-t-13ae949d6619 http://www.wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical_evidence.html https://www.rmnetwork.org/newrmn/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Booklet-about-Homosexuality-and-the-Bible-Sept.-2016.pdf	Sites where Christian pastors and commentators explain how the scriptures that many people say prohibit gay sexual behavior of any kind can more accurately be interpreted to allow for gay marriage.	Chapter 5
https://beyondtheblockpodcast.com/episodes/the-longest-clobber-passage-s1!0cdef	Great podcast episode where a gay convert to the church (who is a Bible scholar and theologian by training) explains how Bible scriptures don't condemn gay marriage.	Chapter 5
https://www.reddit.com/r/latterdaysaints/comments/1zdsbd/the_old_testament_doesnt_prohibit_homosexuality/	Scholar, Dr. Hugh Nibley, said the primary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was actually greed and that they lacked compassion and hospitality (it wasn't gay sexual behavior).	Chapter 5

Scriptures promoting equality (just some favorites, not a comprehensive list)

Referenced verse/site	Summary	Location used
2 Nephi 26: 25 33	All are alike unto God.	Chapter 4 Chapter 6
https://www.amazon.com/Book-Mormon-Least-These/dp/1948218232/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=	<u>Rev. Dr. Fatimah Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming comment on the use of merism in 2 Nephi 26:33 “as a rhetorical device in which two ends of the spectrum are named as a way to encompass the entire spectrum in between.”</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u>
Mosiah 4:26	Minister to people according to their wants, not church leader's assessment of their wants or needs.	Chapter 2
Mosiah 18:8-9	Comfort those who stand in need of comfort.	Chapter 2
Matthew 25:40	Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Christ.	Chapter 4
John 13:34-35	Love one another, as Jesus loved us.	Chapter 4
Acts 10:34-35	God is no respecter of persons.	Chapter 4

the-creation (Abraham 3:22-24)	all these played their parts” in creating the earth.	
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/spirit-children-of-heavenly-parents	The church teaches all people are “literally” children of Heavenly Parents and that we have inherited divine potential from Them.	Chapter 6
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/new-young-women-theme-class-name-and-structure-changes-announced?lang=eng	The revised Young Women theme announced in October of 2019 includes the mention of Heavenly Parents (not just Heavenly Father).	Chapter 6
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/04/the-father-and-the-son	Even though Christ was not involved in forming our spirits, we can still refer to Him as our “Father” (because he is the father of our salvation, among other things).	Chapter 6
https://medium.com/neodotlife/same-sex-reproduction-artificial-gametes-2739206aa4c0	Science is finding ways to allow gay couples to reproduce biologically.	Chapter 4 Chapter 6

Staying in the church

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/why-i-stay-2/	Author, poet, and scholar, Carol Lynn Pearson, says God is where love is, which she sees in gay relationships and in the church (which is why she stays in the church). She also stays because she believes in growing where we are planted spiritually. She says she’s able to stay in the church because she does “not stay in concepts that [she does] not accept.” She also says: “Our church provides a perfect opportunity for me to create love in places where it appears to be lacking.”	Chapter 10
https://mormonquotes.wordpress.com/2014/10/02/be-spiritually-independent/	Former General Relief Society Presidency member, Chieko N. Ozaki encouraged church members to have the spiritual independence to be the best church members the <u>they</u> can--in their own ways.	Chapter 10
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-22?lang=eng	The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that we can embrace truth without being limited by “the creeds...of men...when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.”	Chapter 10
https://bit.ly/2TksPK9	President Joseph F. Smith taught that people can stay in the church even if they don’t believe in all its teachings.	Chapter 10
https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-8-april-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton-b/3	<u>Joseph Smith taught that it is inconsistent with “Latter-day Saintism” to kick people out of the church just because they don’t believe in certain teachings of the church.</u>	<u>Chapter 10</u>

Suicide

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
http://www.russellyanderson.com/	President Spencer W. Kimball taught that suicide is a sin	Chapter 7

mormons/basic/doctrines/suicide_om.htm	and a terrible criminal act.	
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrine-and-principles/doctrine-and-principles	Current church teachings leave the eternal effects of suicide ambiguous.	Chapter 7
https://www.kuer.org/post/can-lds-church-be-blamed-utah-s-lgbt-suicides#stream/0 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_among_LGBT_youth	Debate about the causality between church teachings regarding gay sexual orientation and suicide	Chapter 8
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_Mormon_suicides	Research has shown that church teachings that gay sexual orientation will be “cured” in the afterlife have led many gay Latter-day Saints to engage in suicidal ideation or to attempt or die by suicide.	Chapter 8
https://latterdaysaintmag.com/is-latter-day-saint-theology-responsible-for-lgbt-suicides/?fbclid=IwAR0F5ErowdnEgoXQSPkLAmZFEIIXVsAgNLVYQMdnP4A18lapw3gxcShBNp8	May 2020 Meridian Magazine article arguing church teachings do not contribute to LGBTQ church member suicides (no studies are sourced in the article to back up this claim).	Chapter 8
http://www.johndehlin.com/research/ https://athenaeum.libs.uga.edu/handle/10724/38227 https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/	Numerous published, peer-reviewed studies show church teachings and family disapproval cause trauma for most LGBTQ church members and are contributing factors in their suicidality.	Chapter 8
https://rationalfaiths.com/utahs-escalating-suicide-crisis-lds-lgbtq-despair/	Statistics showing increases in suicides in Utah coincide with time periods in which the church was actively engaged in anti-LGBTQ rights campaigns.	Chapter 8
https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_gender_issues/Same-sex_attraction	Site that quotes “multiple” church leaders teaching that “same-sex attraction” will not exist after death.	Chapter 4
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/god-loveth-his-children/god-loveth-his-children?lang=eng&_r=1 https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/god-loveth-his-children/god-loveth-his-children?lang=eng	Church pamphlet/article that says gay sexual attraction will not exist after death.	Chapter 4
https://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/holland.html	Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said gay sexual attraction will not exist after death.	Chapter 4
https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction	Elder Dallin H. Oaks said gay sexual attraction will not exist after death.	Chapter 4
https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction	Elder Lance B. Wickman said gay sexual attraction will go away after this life.	Chapter 8

Sustaining leaders

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
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https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/12/15/can-latter-day-saints/	Professor Patrick Mason says respecting church teachings while holding a different perspective is the “epitome of sustaining.”	Chapter 7
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2001/07/words-of-the-prophet-the-spirit-of-op-timism?lang=eng	<u>Elder Gordon B. Hinckley said: “I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. Growth comes of correction...Wise is the man who can acknowledge mistakes pointed out by others and change his course.”</u>	<u>Preface</u>

Temple ordinances; sealings

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://religionnews.com/2019/01/03/major-changes-to-mormon-temple-ceremony-especially-for-women/	Changes in temple ceremonies have been done to reflect progressive change (i.e., improvements for women).	Chapter 6
https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V34N0102_87.pdf	Many people (men and women) have been sealed to church leaders with whom they had no family relationship.	Chapter 6
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1625&context=byusq	Many men not related to each other have been sealed to one another directly (in a father-son-type relationship) under the “law of adoption.”	Chapter 6
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_adoption_(Mormonism)	LGBTQ activists asked the church in the 1970s to allow for gay civil unions (using the “law of adoption” doctrine/practice as an analogous argument)	Chapter 6
https://interpreterfoundation.org/news-an-invitation-to-thank-dr-richard-bushman/	The doctrine of sealing may have more to do with uniting all of humanity together, through priesthood and sacred covenants, than with binding individuals as romantic couples.	Chapter 6
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?old=true	The church recognizes that the way Joseph Smith taught the doctrine of sealing was more expansive than how it is currently taught today.	Chapter 6
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/members-guide-to-temple-and-family-history-work/chapter-7-providing-temple-ordinances	A deceased woman can be sealed to multiple deceased men.	Chapter 6

Terminology

Referenced site	Summary	Location used
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay	Proper use of LGBTQ terminology.	N/A
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/10/same-gender-attraction?lang=eng,1995	President Oaks taught in 1995 that we should refrain from using gay and lesbian as nouns to identify people. But in 2019, he used <i>LGBT</i> repeatedly in General Conference.	Chapter 4

Women quoted*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Summary</u>	<u>Location used</u>
<u>Christina Dee</u>	<u>Book endorsement</u>	<u>Cover pages</u>
<u>Judy Dushku</u>	<u>Book endorsement</u>	<u>Cover pages</u>
<u>Rachel Held Evans</u>	<u>“Faith is about following the quiet voice of God without having everything figured out ahead of time.”</u>	<u>Chapter 10</u>
<u>Margaret Olsen Hemming</u>	<u>Commentary on 2 Nephi 26:33</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u>
<u>Marci McPhee</u>	<u>Book editor; <i>Jesus’ First and Last Message</i></u>	<u>Editor’s Foreword</u>
<u>Chieko Okasaki</u>	<u>We should have the spiritual independence to be the best church members we can--in our own ways.</u>	<u>Chapter 10</u>
<u>Blaire Ostler</u>	<u>Describes as genocide idea that LGBTQ identity will be completely wiped out in heaven.</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u>
<u>Carol Lynn Pearson</u>	<u>Book endorsement. Numerous quotes from various articles and books she has authored (see above references in this index).</u>	<u>Dedication page</u> <u>Chapter 4</u> <u>Chapter 6</u> <u>Chapter 10</u> <u>Favorite Resources</u> <u>Path Forward</u>
<u>Sarah Quincy</u>	<u>Book endorsement</u>	<u>Cover pages</u>
<u>Jana Riess</u>	<u>Cited articles on President Oaks’ talk and on temple recommend questions.</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u> <u>Chapter 8</u>
<u>Sandra Rogers</u>	<u>“When we are fully obedient to the first commandment, we cannot help but obey the second.”</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u>
<u>Fatimah Salleh</u>	<u>Commentary on 2 Nephi 26:33</u>	<u>Chapter 4</u>
<u>Cheryl Smith</u>	<u>Facebook post that prompted this entire book.</u>	<u>Chapter 1</u>

*I wish more women were quoted in this book. However, because this book analyzes church doctrine, which has only ever been officially declared by men (prophets and apostles) in our church, almost all quotes/citations included in this index come from men. I have added this list of women here to highlight their contributions and to create a space for me to express my hope that women’s voices will someday become allowed to declare doctrine as well.