

(Gay) Mormon Guy the Blog

Mormon Guy

*To my God, who has been my support in all things.
And to all the men and women in the world – those who live life as I do,
and those who help us continue living.*

Mormon Guy

Some of my favorite entries:

The Future is as Bright as Your Faith

Walking in the Rain

Growing up to Be Perfect

Starting in First Gear, and Going Slowly

Just a Touch of His Robe

A Light Inside the Tunnel

President Packer's Talk... From a (Gay) Mormon Perspective

A Voice of Faith

But If Not...

Grateful to Be a (Gay) Mormon Guy

Yesterday I Wanted to Die, Today I Have a New Life

"Be Yourself": The 8th Day of Christmas

One Today at a Time

(Gay) Mormon Guy – the Blog

The true day-to-day account of a man who lives life as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) while also being attracted to men (gay), as taken with permission from www.gaymormonguy.blogspot.com.

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Table of Contents

Childhood Memories.....	8
How I Deal With Overwhelming Urges.....	11
An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure: Avoiding Temptation.....	13
A Curse? A Trial? A Blessing in Disguise?.....	15
The Future Is as Bright as Your Faith.....	18
The Importance of Guys.....	20
To Tell... or Not to Tell.....	21
Setting Boundaries.....	23
Proposition 8. And All Related Issues.....	24
True Love.....	26
Sharing the Light.....	30
Changing the Church vs. Changing the World.....	31
Walking in the Rain.....	32
Scripture Power.....	33
Things I Wish I Had Known When I Was 14.....	34
The Miserable, Amazing World of Dating.....	35
Watching the Stars.....	37
FHE – Family Home Evening.....	38
Being Alone.....	39
Fitness And Physical Activity.....	40
Growing Up to Be Perfect.....	41
Family – Isn't it About... Time?.....	43
Personal Conversion.....	44
The Gift of God.....	45
Romantic Idealism.....	47
The Guise of Anonymity.....	48
The Title (Gay) Mormon Guy.....	49
Friday Night.....	50
Disappearing.....	51
I Love My Ward.....	52
Physical Resources in Overcoming Temptation.....	53
Intellectual Resources in Overcoming Temptation.....	55
Spiritual Resources in Overcoming Temptation, Part 1.....	56
Spiritual Resources in Overcoming Temptation, Part 2.....	57
Wow. I'm Way Busy.....	59

The Day Before Fast Sunday.....	60
...and Long Walks on the Beach.....	61
Exhaustion. And Cleaning.....	63
I Wish.....	64
Being a Change in Me.....	65
Living in Double.....	67
I Love.....	68
The Struggle Is Not the Sin.....	69
Elder Scott Helps to Redefine LDS Dating Culture.....	70
Faith.....	71
We Can Do Better.....	73
Try Again. And Again. And Again.....	74
In Real Life.....	75
Dreams of Eternity.....	77
Music in the Night.....	78
Starting in First Gear, and Going Slowly.....	79
Peace.....	81
Understanding the Gospel Ideal.....	83
Good Friends.....	84
Becoming Self-Aware.....	85
“Moderation” in All Things.....	87
Being Different.....	90
Preparing for General Conference.....	92
Taking Care of Myself.....	93
Scripture Power!.....	95
Moments of Plenty.....	97
Just a Touch of His Robe.....	98
A Light Inside the Tunnel.....	100
In the Presences of Others.....	101
The 180th Semi-Annual General Conference of the Church.....	102
Peace.....	103
More Thoughts on General Conference.....	104
President Packer's Talk... From a (Gay) Mormon Perspective.....	105
Thanks for Paying it Forward.....	108
Official Statement on President Packer's Edits.....	109
A Voice of Faith.....	110
But If Not.....	112
Official Church Statement: Goodwill Can Prevail.....	113
How Can I Help My Family and Friends?.....	114

The Manner of Happiness.....	116
Finding the One.....	118
Likening the Teachings of the Prophets... to Me.....	120
Living on Borrowed Light.....	122
...And Not to Be Acted Upon.....	124
I Hope They Call Me On A(nother) Mission.....	129
When Days Are Rough.....	131
Another (Not-So-Hidden) Weakness.....	133
Hard Work.....	135
Answers to Questions.....	137
Answers to Questions, Part 2.....	140
The Miracle of Forgiveness.....	143
Simple Indulgences.....	145
To Never Be Alone.....	146
On Being Real.....	148
Fame, Fortune, and Feelings About Them Both.....	153
Just a Good Day.....	155
Learning to Love.....	156
The Lord Will Fulfill His Promises.....	159
Enough.....	160
Lifting Me.....	161
The Things I Can't Do.....	163
Friday Nights: Turning Grief into Good.....	166
Reflections on Writing Here.....	167
Sunrises & Sunsets.....	168
I Know. I'm Crazy. But at Least I'm not Bad Crazy.....	169
Frustration with Girls.....	170
Overwhelming Desire.....	172
And Wanting to Die.....	173
Dear Father.....	174
Blizzard.....	175
Grateful to Be a (Gay) Mormon Guy.....	176
Strength to Bear My Burdens.....	178
A Sense of Entitlement.....	179
Hopeless Romantic.....	180
Rise Up, and Run.....	181
Faith in the Darkness.....	182
Being a Mediocre Friend.....	183
Can I Tell You One Thing?.....	184

Exercise: One of the Keys to the Kingdom.....	185
Nothing Really Monumental.....	186
Reaching Out, Lifting Others.....	187
Complete Honesty.....	188
Being Socially “Self-Sufficient”.....	189
Anonymity.....	191
Falling Off the Path, Wallowing in the Dust.....	192
Unconditional Love.....	193
I Asked God to Kill Me Today.....	194
Yesterday I Wanted to Die. Today I Have a New Life.....	196
Begging for Peace, Love, Faith.....	198
Being Amazingly, Awesomely, Infectiously Happy.....	200
Another Very Dissenting Opinion.....	202
What I, (Gay) Mormon Guy, Want for Christmas.....	206
The Light of Christmas.....	208
Outed on the 1st Day of Christmas.....	209
Dreams on the 2nd Day of Christmas.....	213
Fitting In: The 3rd Day of Christmas.....	214
Spiritual Paradox: The 4th Day of Christmas.....	215
Golden Rings: The 5th Day of Christmas.....	219
A New Year's Prayer: The 6th Day of Christmas.....	221
New Year's Peace: The 7th Day of Christmas.....	222
“Be Yourself:” The 8th Day of Christmas.....	224
Finding Direction: The 9th Day of Christmas.....	227
Being Honest with Myself: The 10th Day of Christmas.....	229
Deepening Faith: The 11th Day of Christmas.....	231
The Man I Want to Be: The 12th Day of Christmas.....	233
Simple Things.....	235
Let His Light so Shine.....	236
One Today at a Time.....	238
You May Be Like (Gay) Mormon Guy, If.....	240
Never Again.....	242
Bigoted, Hateful, and Homophobic.....	244

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

After reading some of the psychological theories surrounding same-sex attraction, I've tried looking back on who I am. This chapter also serves as a good introduction for this blog.

I grew up in the ideal Mormon family - parents who are superheroes, a supportive ward, and happy extended family. My mom and I have a great relationship, but I've never been able to really understand my dad. Our brains work totally different.

I was a jock in school. And a nerd. And an arts kid. I did everything well, which meant my teachers loved me and my peers hated my guts. Finding good friends who also had high standards was hard. I was on sports teams, but I knew that even though I was idolized for what I could do, people didn't really understand me.

Whatever the reason, I started feeling physical attraction to guys when I was twelve years old.

I was really into computers and spent hours surfing the net. One day I discovered pornography. It sucked me in and began the process of destroying my life.

For the next four years, I struggled. I went between absolute guilt and depression to feeling, when I was ok, for weeks or months, like I was on top of the world. I prayed for help and tried everything to keep myself clean. I encouraged my parents to install Internet safety software, then found myself circumventing it the next night at 2 in the morning. And, through it all, I told no one. I knew what I needed to do. I skipped one of our temple trips because I didn't feel worthy. Each interview with my bishop just happened to fall *after* I had already gone through the pain and turmoil of repentance. I tried to make up for it by being super-righteous in everything I did. I thought that I had beaten it and could handle it on my own. And, in all the manuals of the Church that I had available to me as a young teenager (and I looked), there was no real concise information about what you needed to tell your bishop. Seeing the rare woman in gay pornography flashed across the screen instantly made me sick, which meant that I could honestly say I didn't think of them as objects. I

thought that my only problem was with pornography. I didn't even realize how much an understatement that would have been. The objects were myself and other men.

When I turned sixteen, I thought I was finally learning to master who I was. In my patriarchal blessing, it promised me that, in due time, I would be free of temptations. Then, during a routine yearly physical, I was sexually abused by my doctor. The pain and the guilt welled up inside me and made me want to die. I felt like it was my fault - that if I had been a better person, the doctor wouldn't have done that to me. Or maybe it was divine retribution for all the wrongs I had committed in the past. I told my parents and bishop about the abuse, because I was concerned for my siblings. But I could never bring myself to describe it in detail... and everyone forgot about it within a few weeks. Everyone but me.

Some theorists have observed a link between sexual abuse and later same-sex attraction. Whatever the reality, that was enough to break me. My pornography addiction came back, along with everything that went along with it. But I was older now, and the Brethren had begun talking about pornography. Here I am: a righteous, upstanding member of the Church, and inside I hide a terrible sin. I'm a hypocrite. I started suffering from major depression. But that only worsened the problem, since I thought that depression was a sin, too. I mean, I had a perfect family, the perfect life, the gospel, and everything I wanted. What right did I have to be depressed? So I put on a happy face to be true to my beliefs. Another thing that kept people from understanding who I really was. When I was alone, positive thinking worked some of the time. But sometimes I would be so low that I contemplated suicide. In those hours, I asked God to help me. I asked Him to take away my suffering, to heal me, to help me become a truly good person. And He answered my prayers... but not in the way I had asked. He didn't take away my suffering. But He sent me personal signs to show that He loved me... and inside my heart and mind He told me that I could do it. That He knew I could do it. While I cried and cried and prayed and wished that I could be healed, I knew that He loved me... and that He knew I could make it through.

When I first went to BYU, I tried to be as busy as possible. I worked as hard as I could and threw myself into everything. It worked for a little while to help me forget, but the depression and the urges came back. But I could fight them, right? Only this time, they came with the sinister realization that I was physically attracted to men. It had always been that way.

When I went on a mission for the Church, I again prayed that the Lord would heal me. Two years without an Internet connection was freedom. And the Lord blessed me with companions that didn't stir up feelings I didn't want aroused. There was one exception. It was the first time I had been attracted to a real guy. I refused to believe it was possible; and since I had never acted on attraction to a real person, it wasn't hard to tell my mind to shut up. We were just fine, and I hummed my favorite hymn and turned away whenever ugly thoughts came to my mind.

I came home and started dating, expecting everything to turn out perfectly. I would fall in love with a great girl, get married, have a family. But I realized there was something wrong. Everyone else talked about people they wanted to date... from just looking at them. Everyone looked the same to me. The rare occasion when I saw a girl dressed immodestly made me sick. The only way I chose anyone to date was talking with them - and then I would consider them for a first date if they could hold a decent conversation. At the same time, I realized that I was attracted to guys. It wasn't all guys. Just some... and as soon as my mind started wandering in that direction, I turned it off. There is no way that I could be gay. Absolutely no way.

The closest I've come to falling in love was with a girl after my mission. I wasn't physically attracted to her at all (that really bothered her). Other than that, we had a lot in common. But, for some reason, it just didn't feel right. She, and I, just needed to find someone else. I cried for months.

I found myself more and more attracted to guys, and dating became harder. And then pornography came back. I was so distraught that I went to my bishop. I was in a leadership calling, and before our interview I had done the 12-step program for addiction recovery, read everything I could find about overcoming same-sex attraction, written pages and pages on my thoughts, fasted, burned away nights reading the scriptures... When I went to him, I went, feeling, like usual, that I had overcome the issue. I confessed my sins, spoke about what I was doing to change and repent, and then listened. The bishop didn't think that I had much of a problem. He told me what I already knew - when I've done enough to sincerely repent of my sins, the Lord forgives me in that very moment. I had done enough and could move on. I never mentioned my attraction to guys. And he never asked.

And that's where I'll end the memories.

HOW I DEAL WITH OVERWHELMING URGES

Every guy who is attracted to guys knows what I'm talking about when I say "overwhelming urges." It's a powerful physical / sexual attraction to another guy that makes it hard to think about anything else. It can be triggered by anything - a passing brush, eye contact, gym showers or locker rooms, or even just seeing a guy on the street. It's not something you can control... and neither does it come or go even if you will it.

Each time the urges come, I'm faced with two options. Follow them, or try something else to make them dissipate. I know that being with a guy will never fix my problems. And it won't really fix the urges, either - just help them subside temporarily. Then the drive will increase and it'll get worse... and worse. And so, for me, finding something to make them dissipate is the only option.

At this point, where I'm at plays a major role in how I deal with my body. If I'm at home someplace quiet, I kneel and pray for help. Really. I ask God to help me have the strength to control my mind and body, and I just keep praying. If I'm on the street, I voice a prayer to Heaven and try to hum my favorite hymn. For some reason my mind has gotten really good at multitasking, and humming just one hymn doesn't always do the trick. So I try to hum one and think the words of another. If I'm in the shower at the gym, then I have to pull out the big guns. I turn the water ice-cold, trying counting backwards by 14's or doubling numbers, and think a couple hymns. In most cases, nothing works as fast or effectively as I would hope. Ice-cold water does nothing to dampen my drive; humming hymns takes a long time before it even seems to do anything; they're more coping strategies to let my hormones level out than anything else.

Other things that help me are giving service, going out to do stuff with friends, talking with people (not necessarily about my feelings), making food, playing sports, or going to practice music. Anything really uplifting helps.

Ultimately, though, overcoming urges is a test of willpower and faith. Am I strong enough to do what I need to do in order to stay clean? Sometimes it means turning off the computer and not turning it back on.

Sometimes it means dropping to my knees. Sometimes it means literally running from a situation or doing everything I can to change it. It always takes a lot of work. But, after it's over, I feel clean. Strong. Loved. And I know that I am that much closer to God... that much closer to being the man I truly want to be.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE: AVOIDING TEMPTATION

You understand me when I say that overcoming urges, in the moment they occur, is really, really, really hard. Most of the time I don't even think it's possible. The promise of it feeling so good drowns my mind, and my brain literally changes gears and I stop thinking - only wanting, desiring, feeling. Trying a bunch of methods to get rid of it really doesn't come to mind.

That is the absolute worst spot to be in - where I'm on the brink of sin and surrounded by temptation. Stand there enough times, and I definitely fall in. And then the next time I fall deeper and deeper.

Which brings me to the next issue - understanding urges and trying to avoid situations where they could occur. First, let's talk about what happens to cause the urges in the first place. Both guys and girls have hormonal fluctuations. Girls have abdominal pain, guys get a hyperactive sex drive. It's not necessarily a monthly cycle, though - male hormones fluctuate throughout the day, week, month... but realizing that keeps me on my guard. When I have enough hormones in my blood and see the right kind of guy, or even think about him, synapses trigger in my brain that turn on the attraction reflex. It's instant and my breathing becomes more shallow, my mind begins to blur, and I feel stirring. My mind races to come up with as many possible scenarios as possible to indulge the urge, and I have to forcefully take back control so that I don't jeopardize what I really want in life.

And so the key to prevention is two-fold. The first one is obvious, but it's not always very convenient - avoiding situations where urges happen. If I know that I'll get major urges when I see guys in the shower, then I avoid the public shower. Same thing with the locker room or any other place. That can be rough, though, if you're on a team of players or working out at the gym. But it's definitely applicable to avoiding the wrong kinds of Internet sites, the wrong kinds of places, and even using the Internet at the wrong time of night. I've realized where my greatest urges happen, and worked to minimize my contact with those places.

Sometimes reducing temptation may mean making drastic changes to lifestyle and schedule. Once I decided that I didn't want to have the

Internet at home. It was destroying my life, and I wanted to be in control again. I wasn't strong enough to stay clean with a connection in my home. I realized I could forward my emails to my cell phone and use the Internet at work or another public place. So I moved into a new place that had no Internet connection. And life was amazing. Yeah - it was frustrating to have to go find a public place to use the Internet, especially when I actually needed it at night, but the freedom it gave me was worth much more than the discomfort it caused me.

The second way to reduce urges is a little less obvious. I feel attracted to certain kinds of guys. A key in lessening my attraction is becoming un-attracted to them. I know that may sound a bit trite, but it works. I talk to him to realize that he's a real person who is a child of God, or I try to find something about the guy that I absolutely can't stand, and I focus on it until it blocks out everything else. I find flaws in his character, or convince myself that he has a terrible attitude. I pretend that he's totally arrogant or think that he doesn't treat his family right. It's exactly what you shouldn't do with other people when you are learning to love them and serve them - but it's amazingly effective when you're trying to stop wanting a guy. You either see him as a person or blow his flaws out of proportion, and then you realize how much of a fantasy your mind really was creating.

Avoiding temptation - whether by un-learning an attraction to certain kinds of guys or minimizing my contact with them, has helped me have fewer overwhelming urges. And fewer urges means that I have fewer sins. That's a step forward in my boat.

A CURSE? A TRIAL? A BLESSING IN DISGUISE?

For a long time I believed that being attracted to guys was inherently evil. And I was a good kid - I had tried to do everything right... and so the thought that I really *was* attracted to guys was alien to me. For years I convinced myself that it wasn't true - maybe my attraction to girls just hadn't 'turned on' yet or maybe I just didn't understand what was going on in my mind. But then I found a clinical study that described the medical procedure for determining physical attraction. It's sexual arousal. If you are aroused by women, you are attracted to women. If you're aroused by men, you're attracted to men. It didn't take much to realize, using that metric, that I was only attracted to guys.

Since I believed that the attraction I felt was evil, I saw it as a curse - something that God would take away if I were only righteous enough to merit that blessing. And so I became a zealot - being so involved in the Church and religious activities that they consumed my life. It helped - and I became stronger and closer to God in the process. But, though I prayed for years and years to be free of my attraction to men, it hasn't happened. The realization that I wasn't good enough, even though I had tried my hardest, opened the door to depression. I felt like I was worthless. If I couldn't even be good enough to take away my curse, then was life really worth living? There were days that I curled up into a ball and cried... totally alone, helpless, and feeling like I wanted to just give up. But, in those dark hours, I had enough strength to turn back to God and ask Him for help. And, while the attraction and temptation wouldn't go away, He told me that He loved me. He told me that I could do it. And He helped me move in the right direction. I knew I was in the depths of sin and pain, but I knew that God would never forsake me. He will never forsake anyone. And, for me, that was enough to at least brighten the darkness so that I could see a glimmer of hope.

And so began the cycle. I would become a zealot, striving to live a perfect life, but every time I failed, or when life got hard, the depression would return, bringing with it the feelings of hopelessness. I thought about suicide, but the only thought that would come to my mind was that I knew it would damn me. And even though I don't really know what that means, I want to be saved. I want to live with my family forever. I want to have a family of my own. I want to be happy. So suicide wasn't an option.

And life seemed to go in circles - with the downs getting deeper and deeper, less and less hopeful that the pain would ever stop.

The only other way to look at my attraction, from my perspective, was to believe it was inherently good. But following the urges was completely against Church doctrine, whether it involved pornography, masturbation, or having close intimate relationships with guys. I would have to change my morals in order to let that type of behavior be ok in my life. And that, too, was not an option. I know the Church is true. I know that giving in and being with a guy will never make me happy - even though it feels good. And I know that resisting temptation, no matter what the price, will always bring me greater peace and joy than any other alternative.

And so I kept fighting. And fighting. And fighting. And I saw people who had given up along the way. Men who committed suicide and wrote notes to their families telling them of the quiet, desperate struggle they had faced. Friends from school, Church, and the mission who left the Church and actively followed their attractions. Behind the bliss they felt at following their carnal desires, I could see that they had lost the light that had once been in their eyes. They had cut a part of their relationship with God... and that was one thing I couldn't do.

As time went on, I finally began to humble myself so that I could ask God why. It wasn't in hatred or frustration, it was a son humbly pleading with his Father... wanting to understand. "Dear Father, I am in so much pain. I've tried my entire life to be good - to do what is right. Why hasn't this temptation gone away? Please, help me understand. I'll do anything. Just help me do Thy will." And the Lord answered my prayer. He showed me my past - the things I had done, the wars I had fought - and He showed me how I had grown through my trial. I had felt the utter depths of depression... and knew how to lift others. I had realized the importance of reaching out and serving others from the pain I felt of being totally alone. Great temptations had caused me to turn to the Lord for help, and knowledge of how to avoid temptations had turned me to the scriptures - blessing my life and enabling me to help others in their trials. And, perhaps the greatest, as I had privately struggled, I had turned to God and come to better know Him and His love for me, and to better understand myself and my ability to build the kingdom of God.

It wasn't a curse after all. God helped me see that, beyond the incredible temptations, the overwhelming urges, the guilt, and the pain, my

experience was simply another trial. It was an opportunity to grow and to learn and to become the man I could someday be. And, like all things in life, God had allowed me this trial to teach me important lessons I couldn't learn any other way. That realization brought me the relief I had wanted for so many years. Even though I had learned that God loved all His children, in my heart I had always believed that I had been cast off. And now I knew that I hadn't been cast off or forgotten. God truly did love me, and would hear my prayer someday.

In the time since that realization, I've become even stronger. The temptations are still there. The urges are still overwhelming. But I know that it is a test - and that if I do what is right, the Lord will make me into the man I truly want to be. I look back on my life and see the high points and the low points, and I realize that, at the lowest points, when I turned to God for strength, He taught me lessons that have changed me forever. I am who I am today because I am a survivor - not a physical survivor of cancer or a disability - but a spiritual survivor of same-sex attraction. I would never wish my experiences on anyone else - friend or foe. But God loved me enough to let me learn in the hottest, most terrible, painful, awful fires of affliction... so that I could learn to be who I am today. And, because of the relationship I have developed with Him, and the lessons I have learned, I wouldn't trade my cross with anyone.

THE FUTURE IS AS BRIGHT AS YOUR FAITH

Overcoming an attraction to guys, in the world, is a controversial subject. Partly because of the nature of our culture, we never hear success stories. Those who do succeed in overcoming same-sex attraction do it quietly, without fanfare or recognition, while those who fail, fail openly and spectacularly. And the question still stands if it is even possible to overcome at all.

The issue comes to play in two things in life - marriage and the hope of someday being free. I don't know what goes through the minds of men who still struggle and find a girl to marry. I don't know if they are physically attracted to them, or if the relationship is completely platonic, or if they were somehow able to be free of their attraction before marriage. But I do know that, when they make that decision, they make a sacred covenant to stay true and loyal to their wives. And, if they will do everything they can, Lord will bless them and give them the strength to keep their covenants. I think the issue comes when men see marriage as the cure - hoping that, somehow, being married and having a family will fix their problem. The Brethren have spoken about people who struggle with same-sex attraction... and they do not suggest marriage as a form of therapy. Probably because it doesn't work. Marriage is the most sacred covenant we make - and beginning a covenant on a contingency basis is not acceptable. Simply not being attracted to your spouse is not grounds to break it, formally or covertly.

The Brethren also referenced the fact that some people will not have the opportunity to be happily married in this life... and that makes me want to curl up in a ball and cry. There is nothing more that I want than to have a family. A wife that I love, children I can teach and lead. There is nothing more that I want to be free. And the thought that it could bar me from marriage in this life is devastating, especially when I look at how it could impact my current family. Most other factors that affect marriage are clearly visible. Complete paralysis or mental disability enable family members and others to understand and sympathize. But same-sex attraction is a silent, personal struggle... and one that, in many cases, stays completely silent. I've never told anyone in my family about my struggle. Which means that when they look at me and set me up with girls, they can't understand why I can't keep a girlfriend. They can't understand why

I'm not married like my cousins and siblings and mission companions. And so my struggle is completely and totally alone.

I don't know what the future holds for me. I hope that someday the Lord will work a miracle in my life, and I will fall in love with a righteous young woman and we'll be married in the Temple. I hope that I'll be attracted to her in every way and that we'll be able to be united in everything we do and raise a righteous family in the gospel. I hope that someday I will grow strong enough, and learn the lessons I need, so that I can be completely free of temptation and walk in righteousness for the rest of my life. And I have faith that God can do that - that He can work miracles in my life.

But if that doesn't happen, then I will still be faithful. If therapy never works, then I will still resist temptation. If I never fall in love, then I will still do my part to lift and teach the rising generation. And if I am never free of my attraction to men, then I will still stand faithfully in my place, living the principles of the gospel that I know are true. Why? Because it will always be worth it. It will be hard, but God will give me strength to overcome. Wisdom to grow, and the ability to be happy in my journey in life, no matter what my circumstances. I will be faithful, and because of that, I know what the future holds. Perhaps I will have to wait until after this life to be happily married. Perhaps my attraction to men will only go away when I have proven myself to be worthy, all the days of my life. But, no matter what happens, when this life ends I will rise in the Resurrection, free, clean, full of strength and knowledge and with a family of my own. And I will look at the Savior and He will say to me, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest of Thy Lord."

The future is as bright as my faith.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GUYS

In the last few years, I've realized that non-sexual relationships with guys are actually really important. It may sound a bit strange, but being with guys in the right environment makes it a whole lot easier to not look at them as objects for gratification. I look at them and see them as *people*, and as I talk to them I realize they have families, dreams, and struggles just like I do.

No one knows what causes same-sex attraction. But I've found that developing meaningful non-sexual relationships with guys can impact the frequency and strength of same-sex attraction in my life.

Yeah, there are times when I find myself way too attracted to the guys I spend time with. But as long as there are boundaries in the relationship (implicit or explicit - whatever works), we're both okay. And spending time with guys seems to meet my social needs and make my urges much less frequent. Sounds like it's time to make some good friends.

TO TELL... OR NOT TO TELL

Up until recently, I've never told anyone that I'm attracted to guys.

For me, there have been a lot of reasons. The first was that I didn't *have* to tell anyone. When I went to see my bishop to get help with pornography and associated habits, it didn't matter if I was attracted to guys or girls - it was the same process to overcome the issues. And, as I mentioned in a previous post, I've never found anything in a Church Handbook (and now I've read them) that requires that I reveal my temptations to others. Looking at that, I realize that it was because I didn't want to face the facts. Somewhere, deep inside, I still believed this was all just a really horrible nightmare... and if no one else knew, then maybe there was a chance I would wake up and all the urges, temptations, and attraction would just go away.

The other reason is a mixture of pride and fear and stubborn hope. Since I've realized my issues, I've felt like it was my cross to bear - my silent burden to carry. I've always been the teacher, the star, the role model for everyone in my life - and so asking for help is something I never learned to do. I know that some of my family would be able to understand - since they would ask God for help and He would help them. But I know that *I*, even struggling with the issue, took years to finally come to grips with what it was. In my mind, I can see my family members and friends struggling to understand what it means to their testimonies. And I can't afford that. I care way too much about them to let them see a trial that almost broke me.

Some days I've wanted people I could talk to. A therapist to help me out. Friends I can call who really understand. But, whatever the reasons, I've turned to God instead. And, for me at least, it has worked. He listens to my struggles and hears my prayers. He sends me signs that He loves me and is actively involved in my life. He gives me assignments like a therapist would, and we counsel together on how I can overcome temptation. My relationship with Him has developed... and each time He helps me overcome, I feel the power of the Atonement. The Savior really did go through what I am feeling so He could help me. And, for that, I am stronger.

Some day soon I'm planning to talk with a priesthood leader about my struggle. I have a good relationship with him and I know that the Lord can inspire him to understand. He's also probably seen tons of people just like me. Even so, I still don't think I'll be asking for help to overcome it. Instead, I'll be asking for help to reach out and help others who are struggling with the same issues - to find a way to share the message that it *is* possible to live a faithful LDS life with same-sex attraction, no matter what happens. We'll see what happens then.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

In every relationship there are boundaries. There are lot of kinds of boundaries - how many times I can ask my mom for money before she says no and other things like that - but I'm thinking about moral boundaries. The boundaries that define what I will and will not do in a relationship, and sometimes the conditional triggers that go along with them.

Sometimes boundaries are personally set (no verbal communication between the people involved) and they work just fine. That's the case with the boundaries afforded us by civility, chivalry, morality in the Church, and simply being courteous to others. But when I get involved in a romantic relationship - or in a relationship where there are romantic feelings involved - defining explicit boundaries, for myself or out loud, becomes much more important.

There are always boundaries in a relationship. When I'm with someone I'm not attracted to, I really don't want to hold their hand, cuddle with them, kiss, or do anything else. And so I don't. But if I meet a guy and realize that I'm attracted to him, and he wants to hang out, then it might be smart to look at the boundaries I've set. If my and his boundaries are "anything goes," then I may have fun, but risk my soul doing so. But if I set a firm boundary within my morals, then, no matter what his thoughts, I'm safer.

I have to know myself to be able to set meaningful boundaries. It doesn't make sense to set a boundary that deprives me of all emotional or physical contact with others, since that totally defeats the purpose. At the same time, I need to ensure that the boundary is far enough from the slippery slope that I haven't already fallen in if it's crossed without my intentions. And that means that sometimes I have different boundaries for different people. My boundary with guys is this: I will never kiss a guy, let him kiss me, or anything beyond that. We can play soccer, give each other back rubs in a public place, talk, high-five, hug, and sit next to each other while watching movies, but that's as far as it goes. It's my safety buffer. I'm sure I'll never kiss a guy. And I know that if a guy I was attracted to kissed me, it would generate enough shock in my system that I could get out before my feelings took control.

PROPOSITION 8. AND ALL RELATED ISSUES.

This post might garner me hate mail or very angry mail. At least I'm not all that popular, so there won't be much. But I feel that this topic is something that is central to my struggle. Whether or not you agree with what I write, this blog is about how I've come closer to God during my struggle with being attracted to guys and how He has blessed me with strength... and the promises that God has given for those who do the same.

I was still in Primary when President Hinckley read [The Family: A Proclamation to the World](#) during the General Relief Society Meeting of 1995. When I first read the proclamation, it seemed really obvious to me. "Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ." I grew up in the perfect family and hadn't really had issues in life yet. The proclamation fit what I saw around me. Two years later I joined with tens of thousands of Church members who signed their names promising to live by and uphold the principles taught in the proclamation. At the time, none of us knew how hard that would become.

Time went on, and the proclamation resurfaced now and then. I memorized it and it became part of who I was. I could see why it made so much sense to me - because my parents had worked so hard to apply its principles in my family, and the Lord had blessed us.

And then I realized that not everyone had a perfect family. One day in Sunday School I referenced the statement that children have the right to be raised by a father and mother who honor their vows with complete fidelity... and one of my peers almost walked out. His dad had left the family when he was really young, and he felt the statement meant that his mom was obligated to get married again to be a good mother. As a class we talked and realized that the proclamation, while it may be hard or impossible to apply all its principles in this life, is about *eternal* families. Because it's talking about eternal principles, it shows us the ideal that we can shoot for.

The last section of the proclamation reads thus: "We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the

my part to build a world where everyone can receive the blessings of living in a righteous family. And so I promote and support measures designed to maintain and strengthen the Family, as outlined in the proclamation, which consists of a husband and wife who honor their vows, help one another as equal partners, and rear their children in love and righteousness.

I understand what same-sex attraction is. I've lived with it for years and struggled to come to grips with my feelings. I've fallen in love with guys, fallen into the depths of depression, and fallen on my face trying to fit in with the rest of the world. I've felt completely alone, alienated, hopeless, and isolated. But, through all my experiences, I've learned that true happiness comes from living the principles of the gospel, no matter what the cost. God promises that if we will be faithful in this life, we will receive all blessings in the life to come. I don't know what tomorrow holds for me or anyone who struggles. But I know that God will fulfill His promises, in His due time... and that knowledge gives me the hope to make it through another day.

TRUE LOVE

I talked with a friend a few days ago about the meaning of love, and I thought I'd share my thoughts here. Struggling with being attracted to guys has always filled me with the fear that I would never be able to really fall in love with someone... and have them fall in love with me. It doesn't help that I'm a hopeless romantic and movies and novels and Broadway musicals all talk about falling in love; in each love is portrayed, rightfully, as one of the guiding factors in changing lives and improving the world. It's the love that Christine has for the Phantom that finally heals his heart, love that sends Geppetto on a journey to save his wooden son, love that makes it possible to write "and they all lived happily ever after."

But what *is* love?

I don't mean this to be trite - but when I see a guy and feel physically attracted to him, that is a totally different feeling from when I am trying to show my love to my family or friends. The world today stirs them all together in the same pot and claims that *anything* motivated by love is good. But I know that can't be true. I think that understanding love, in all its facets, will give me a key in knowing the truth and creating loving relationships that can meet my needs.

In the last little while I've felt that love was something much more than just a feeling. In Moroni it teaches about the importance of having the right kind of love, and much of Christ's Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple was encouraging the people to move forward in the extent of their love. Not to throw away the old law, but to build upon it and grow. I get the feeling that love is a spectrum that defines all of our relationships with others - sort of like faith defines our relationship with God and truth - where our actions are motivated by the type of love we currently have.

Finding the ends of the spectrum is actually pretty easy. God has a perfect love for us, and so we should try to emulate His love in every relationship we have with others. Satan has a completely inferior love (we could call it hate, but hate is just the absence of love) for us. I think that highlighting aspects of each relationship will help us to see what we really want when we want to love and be loved.

In the most inferior relationships, the determining factor is that you have no intention of helping the other person come closer to Christ. In that case, the relationship is **purely selfish**. Why? Because you believe that true joy comes from *doing* the most pleasurable things. Everything done in the relationship is to preserve or increase your ability to use the other person to achieve your desires. You may be willing to do absolutely anything and everything to achieve them. You may help them to feel temporary pleasure, try to meet their unmet needs, and dedicate an inordinate amount of time and money cultivating this type of relationship. Or you could use blackmail, coercion, seduction, and dishonesty. There are two ends to this relationship. On the one hand, they willingly meet your desires. Then you perpetuate the relationship for as long as they can continue to meet them - perhaps even until death. But once you know, for certain, that they are unable or unwilling to please you anymore, you discard them, the relationship ends, and you seek someone else.

The most superior relationships are strikingly different. The determining factor in these relationships is a **desire for the other person to become the best person he or she can become, and a willingness to do everything in your power to make that happen**. Why? Because you know that true joy comes from *being* the best person possible. Christ spoke about the importance of being kind to your enemies as well as your friends, praying for them that use you, being good to those that persecute you. Walking an extra mile with someone who stole your coat. Hence true love includes **unconditional kindness**. But at the same time, love does not mean that you condone the unrighteousness of others. Doing that would be essentially telling them, "It's okay if you put your hand on the stove. I know that it will burn you, but I think that letting you do what you want to do is more important than warning you about the consequences of your actions." On the contrary, God's perfect love for His children manifests itself in a completely opposite manner. He looks at their lives and **helps them see the consequences of their actions**. Does that mean that He discards those who don't follow His commandments? No - hence the next key - true love **helps others rise from their mistakes**. In fact, true love never stops acting, even when the person receiving it has completely turned away.

But I think the most telling factor in true love is the one mentioned first - **desire for the other person to become the best they can be, and willingness to do everything in your power to make that happen**. That is the greatest motivation, the greatest love, the greatest fulfillment we can find. We can see it in everything God does with us. He allows us

to struggle because He knows that struggles give us the opportunity to grow stronger and happier in the end. He answers our prayers for help and support, enabling us to trust in Him and come closer to Him. He withdraws certain blessings when we sin, but continues to love us and be actively involved in our lives.

So how does sexually expressing love play into this? I think the key is in the motivation - and behind that motivation you can see whether sexual acts are acts of love, or of lust. Simply put, God gave us sexual feelings for the expression of love only between husband and wife. Everything else is lust. It has been like that since the beginning - and it makes sense. The ability to be a family - to be joined as parents - is the greatest stewardship that God has given us. He has given us the ability to be joined as husband and wife, father and mother - to learn to be like Him. Of all the relationships we have in life, marriage between husband and wife is the most important, the most exalting, the most eternal. You will spend all of eternity with this person. It makes sense that *that* relationship would be different, in some meaningful way, from the love you should feel for everyone else on the planet. Within marriage, sexual relations are righteous acts, drawing husband and wife together, emphasizing their ability to be one, helping them to realize the *joint* ability they have to raise a righteous posterity and change the world. Outside of marriage between husband and wife, sexual acts, while still pleasurable, don't elevate men and women to keep their covenants and look to God for guidance. Since they pull you down instead of lift you up, sexual acts outside of marriage end up just being a cheap substitute.

True love is what I want in my life. I know that only true love, in marriage and in my relationships with others, can bring me happiness in life and in eternity. Anything else will ultimately bring heartache. Looking at relationships around me, I can easily pinpoint where they fall on the spectrum of love. One-night-stands aren't very loving; they're not centered on principles of righteousness, and the participants use each other and then go their ways. Long-term sexual relationships between men (or even between unmarried men and women) place physical pleasure above God and the spiritual well-being of the other person involved.

For me, it's obvious what types of relationships I need to cultivate. I need to do everything in my power to help all people to become better and grow closer to Christ, and allow them to do the same for me. That's true love. The gospel promises that true love will bring me happiness and joy,

and so true love, guided by righteous principles, is what I am going to seek. I won't settle for a substitute.

SHARING THE LIGHT

I've been touched by some of the comments I've read and emails I've received since beginning this blog. I knew these messages were needed, but I never thought that it would happen so soon... or that the experiences and feelings I shared would be so personal to the people around me. For a long time I thought I was completely alone. Now I am realizing that we are all in this fight together. We have to stick together, support each other, and stand against the forces of the adversary.

But I am also realizing that I can't do it alone. I can write blog entries, be friends with as many people as time permits, and pray each night for guidance and help, but there are still people out there, silently suffering. People I can't touch, who know that God exists but, like most of us have, wonder if He has abandoned them to live a cursed life forever.

Together, we can change that. It may take some time, but the message of the gospel, of repentance and faith and hope and salvation, is the most important thing we can share. And as our forces grow, our ability to help others rise will grow as well. Look inside yourself. If you've been touched by something I've written, or if the Lord has helped you in your struggles, then please find a way to share it with someone else who is struggling. It may be terrifying to help others, but the Lord will help you find a way. And as you do, I know that the Lord will give you greater strength to overcome your own trials, greater love for the people who surround you, and a greater ability to share the light with the world.

CHANGING THE CHURCH VS. CHANGING THE WORLD

It can be easy, when I've struggled, to focus on the bad experiences I've had, try to determine the cause of those experiences, and warn others against them. And bad things do happen, even in the Church. Inadequate training, lack of understanding, miscommunication, and inherent weaknesses can make it incredibly difficult for Church leaders to meet members' individual needs.

But while individuals may not be immediately able to give the support or help I need, the Church and the gospel - the ordinances, the covenants, the scriptures, the commandments, the Priesthood, and the temple - have never failed me in my struggle. And they never will.

Many people with same-sex attraction look forward to a time when "the Church will change." A few want 6000 years of sexual sin to be completely redefined. Others want prejudice against those with SSA to be a grievous sin. Still others want a chapter in Gospel Principles explaining the reality behind same-sex attraction.

I'm different. I don't want to change the Church. I want to change the world. I want everyone to look out for their neighbors, love them unconditionally, know what it feels like to be in their shoes, be there for them when they struggle, pray for them each night, and support them when they fall. And when that happens, all of us will feel accepted and loved. The Church already teaches all those things; 15 letters read over the pulpit and a complete session of General Conference on SSA wouldn't fix the problem. Enforcing change from the top rarely works in any situation; people change because they want to. And, from my perspective, the best way to help people change is to be a good example, help them understand who I am, and allow them to feel a part of my struggle.

Yes, involving people in my life will inevitably bring heartache as they are unable to completely understand or meet my needs. But as I look to God, follow His guidance, and keep the commandments He has given, I am promised the strength to succeed. Join with me and bring out the good in others. Together, we will change the world.

WALKING IN THE RAIN

It's been raining a lot recently. I love sunny days, but thunderstorm speak to me in a way that sunshine never could. I've also been spending way too much time inside. So I decided to go rain-walking.

I knocked on a few doors and found someone who was willing to just go walking in the rain. We talked about our missions, our love of people, and things we loved about our ward. Lightning flared, thunder roared, and we just walked in the rain.

When you deal with major struggles in life, it can seem to always be raining. Trials, temptations, and struggles make it hard to see the light of the sun that is shining behind the clouds. So what do I do? Cowering under my bed in fear, depression, and confusion doesn't fix any of my problems. Instead, I give thanks for a God who is actively involved in my life, a God who cares about me and gives me the ingredients necessary for my salvation. And then I go walk in the rain.

Yes, I will get wet. Yes, it will be cold and probably lonely. And perhaps I will be walking, alone, for a long, long time. But as I walk, I've found an inner fire that keeps me warm and dry, and a friendship in a God who is always with me, even when the torrents pour. I don't know what the future holds. In my heart I still hope and pray for sunshine. But I'm grateful for the lessons I've learned while walking in the rain.

SCRIPTURE POWER

I was reading my scriptures this morning and realized how amazing it is that stories and parables seem to change to fit my needs as time goes on. Recently this blog has begun to color my study of the scriptures, and I feel a kinship with Ammon and his brothers, going on a mission to share the gospel with their brethren, and with Alma the younger as he prays for relief from the burden of his sins. I can see how turning to the Lord changes hearts and heals souls, and I watch in awe and wonder as the voice of one repentant man leads to the conversion of an entire nation.

The scriptures have an amazing power to change lives. When I want to find guidance from the Lord, I turn to the scriptures and He speaks to me. When I'm struggling the most and the sky is black, I turn to the scriptures and the clouds begin to clear. Yes, sometimes it takes all I can do to simply sit in one place and read. And there are plenty of pages where teardrops have mixed with colored pencil underlines. But, as I read, the Lord gives me strength. Life may not get easier. I really don't think it ever will. But, as I feast on the words of Christ, and turn my life over to God, He makes it possible to live and grow each day.

THINGS I WISH I HAD KNOWN WHEN I WAS 14

- Being attracted to guys does not mean that I am irreparably cursed.
- God judges me based on my actions - not on feelings that I can't control.
- I don't have to be perfect to deserve God's love.
- As I read the scriptures, pray, and live the gospel more fully, I gain strength to overcome temptation.
- There are others just like me - men and women who believe in the gospel with all their hearts and are striving to live it and be happy.
- It won't go away tomorrow. But tomorrow is still worth living.
- I can find peace and be happy as I live according to the light I've been given.
- As I serve others, the Lord will bless me and give me strength.

THE MISERABLE, AMAZING WORLD OF DATING

As all young males in the Church know, the Brethren have commanded us to date. I've read a few recent statements that make me wonder about the universality of that mandate; if I ever have the opportunity to talk with a general authority on the subject, I'll ask if dating is something that *all* men should be doing. For myself, I think that dating girls - as far as developing relationships with others - is important at this stage of my life. Hopefully I'll someday find a girl that I can fall in love with and marry, but, if not, I can still make friends through dating. Add to that the fact that I'm a priesthood leader in my ward and I need to set a good example for other guys... and you get my drift.

Dating girls is rough. It would be rough even if I were attracted to them. But when I have absolutely no desire to touch them, sit next to them, play with their hair, or hold their hand, dating becomes a massive ordeal.

First I have to figure out who to date. Most guys have it easy - they can look at a girl and say, "Wow. That's an attractive girl." And then they ask her out on a date. I, on the other hand, have never thought a girl was attractive. So my first determinant is if she can hold a conversation. Then I figure out what to do on the date, find a time that works in my and her schedule, and actually ask her out. Dates themselves, for me, are totally platonic. We spend the whole time talking, engaged in some type of activity. We go on a hike, or serve at the food bank, or make dinner for each other, or whatever. I'm not a dinner and a movie guy.

When I finally find someone who's interested in spending time with me and can hold her own in a conversation, then dating isn't all that bad. But, ultimately, I end each relationship when I realize that it isn't going to work out. No sparks. And every marriage prep class I've ever taken says that sparks, while not the center of a relationship, are essential for a great marriage.

Is dating dishonest when I know it probably won't work out? No - I'm doing the exact same thing that everyone else is doing - trying to see if there is *any possibility* of a spark. Dating is only dishonest if I pretend to love a girl when I don't. I date to learn about people, to make friends, and hopefully to find a possibility of marriage in the temple. Maybe I'm

running up a permanent dead end, and there will never be a possibility in this life. But I feel it's worth trying. There are a million girls out there - and maybe there is one that is right for me. The only way to know is by dating.

WATCHING THE STARS

The Pleiades meteor shower finishes tonight. I've always thought that meteor showers were amazing natural phenomena - shards of comet tails left behind from ten or thousands of years ago, ripping through the sky, heating up to thousands of degrees as they hurtle through the atmosphere, finally disappearing into nothing.

As I watched the sky this week, I've realized a similarity to my own life. Earth's atmosphere protects it from cosmic radiation and comet shards - but not by preventing them. Instead, it destroys threats as they arrive. If there were no atmosphere, Earth would look just like the moon - cratered, pock-marked, changed by the constant barrage of tiny particles that, over time, have destroyed its surface.

As I live the gospel, its teachings create and reinforce a shield around me. The thicker the shield, the stronger the defenses. Having a shield, though, doesn't mean there won't be problems or temptations. Are there going to be issues? Yes. Will little and big things smash against the defenses I've created? Constantly. But, as long as I've developed the resistance I need, I'll have the strength to resist each fiery dart of the adversary as it arrives in my life... and turn each one into a burst of flame, leaving behind the feeling that God really does hear and answer my prayers.

FHE – FAMILY HOME EVENING

There is definitely something inspired behind the Family Home Evening program of the Church. When I first heard that singles also did FHE, I wondered how that would really be effective. Family Home Evening was for families, right? FHE for singles could only be a poor substitute. Wow was I wrong.

As life got harder and school moved forward, weeks became more rushed, stressful, and ambiguous. Mondays were the epitome of stress - new assignments to work on, homework to catch up on that I didn't do Friday or Saturday, and trying to make a dent in the work load of the coming week. But I could always count on Family Home Evening. A handful of random people who meet each week, share a short lesson, sing, talk, pray, play games, and eat (junk) food did marvels for my ability to concentrate.

FHE has always been my oasis in the desert of Mondays. It's a constant close social activity where I can develop better relationships with others, make new friends, and reach out to help the people around me. It happens every week, and works as a deadline to create a focus in my schedule. If I make time to attend FHE, the Lord blesses me and helps me accomplish everything else that's on my plate.

As I face my own problems in life, FHE is one of the essentials that helps me move forward. I go and feel uplifted each week, simply by being with others. Yeah, sometimes the lessons are mediocre and the activities way below par. But that's not the purpose of Family Home Evening - at least not in my mind. In my mind, FHE simply gives me the assurance that I have a group of people who care about me - someplace I can go to learn, grow, and feel safe.

BEING ALONE

There are times when I feel totally and completely alone, even in the Church. When someone makes a joke in Elder's Quorum that he isn't married yet at 27 because he's gay. When my last mission companion, who I trained, gets married and begins to start his own family. When I try to ask a girl on a date because I know I should, and then get turned down seven times in a row, by seven different girls... and then spend Friday night alone in my room with unused concert tickets, wondering what's wrong with me. When I finally do go on dates, and the girl begins to wonder when I never hold her hand. And when I talk with others and no one seems to understand.

When I'm totally and completely alone, when I feel depressed and like life has me cornered, I turn to God. And He gives me peace. He doesn't take away my temptations, or the trials, or the struggles, or the heartache. He doesn't make me suddenly fall in love with a girl. But He lets me know that He loves me, and that I'm trying to do what's right. And that is enough to strengthen my faith to move forward.

As time has gone on, my relationship with God has improved. In the beginning, I was afraid to talk with Him - afraid that He would rebuke me for the things I had done... But God isn't like that. He does everything in His power to help me to repent - to get back on the right path - and He is always there for me. Whether it's taking a test and asking for help in studying beforehand, or asking for help in finding the right person to date (that works sometimes, but I haven't found an eternal mate just yet), or just asking to know that He loves me, God hears and answers my prayers.

Even when the world seems turned upside-down, when no one seems to understand, I can turn to God, to the Bible and the Book of Mormon, to the things I know are true. Maybe I'll find someone to spend eternity with in the near future. Maybe I'll have to wait a long time. Either way, God is with me. With Him at my side, I'm not alone.

FITNESS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Wow. I am totally and completely exhausted. And *that* feeling is amazing.

Physical fitness has historically been a double-edged sword in my life. Going to a gym and being surrounded by guys and mirrors can easily summon up demons and throw my mind into major temptation. But the endorphin high that comes from exercising also seems to, albeit temporarily, fix some of the problems that I face. If I'm struggling, one of the best things I can do is to go work out - swim, run, bike, lift, or play tag with friends until I'm dead tired. And in that tiredness I just feel tired... and accomplished. No massive, overwhelming urges, just the soreness and fatigue that comes from pushing my body to its limits, and the peace that comes from knowing that I had the force of will to do it on my own.

When I know that going to the gym will be a source of trouble, then I don't go. Instead, I'll go running, or biking, or just do a gazillion pushups and jumping jacks in my apartment (though the latter isn't really all that effective - getting out of the apartment is a really good part of exercise). Even when I don't think that the gym will be a problem, I've learned that situations can quickly degenerate. So I'm always on my guard - trying to keep my thoughts clean. If there are TV's available, I try to watch something educational. I like the round-table discussions on the scriptures from BYU TV, cooking shows, or anything else that will engage my mind in uplifting thoughts. If I'm on my own, or there's nothing worthwhile, then I listen to General Conference talks. I know. It may sound incredibly cheesy. But it helps me work out in the right frame of mind - even when people around me would normally pose a big problem. And Conference talks are really good for the rest of my life, too.

All in all, I think that regular physical exercise is a really important part of the steps that keep me clean. After running for miles or swimming for an hour, I feel amazing. And the Spirit bears witness that I'm that much closer to being master of my body and my soul. Yeah, it's hard. Yeah, it takes a lot of time and effort and sometimes it's painful. But, in the end, I prove to myself that I can choose the path I take in life - for both my body and soul.

GROWING UP TO BE PERFECT

When I was younger I wanted to grow up to be perfect. I thought that if I could just overcome each of my temptations, one by one, I could accomplish my dream. There really wasn't a lot to overcome, anyway... right? I already lived the Word of Wisdom, never swore, read my scriptures, prayed; I thought I did almost everything right. But there were some things that kept coming back - feeling better than the people around me, for example, or simply not following the counsel that the Spirit gave in my life.

Time went on and the challenges I faced changed - presenting new obstacles to overcome. I realized that becoming perfect wasn't as simple as fixing the problems in life - because fixing each problem often reveals another level of achievement that can be attained. And I kept making tons of mistakes, in everything. Amid the changing temptations in different circumstances, my attraction to guys has been a constant companion. And mistakes in that arena can easily push me into depression or absolute despair.

I haven't made perfection yet. I still make mistakes, and there are days when Satan tries to convince me that I'll never be good enough to return to God. But I've realized that looking forward is more important than looking back. Satan wants me to dwell on the bad things I've done; he tries to convince me that I can never change or that God won't hear my prayers. All of that is bogus. Christ completed the Atonement for me - as a sinner - so that I can repent and return to live with God, even if I have done awful things. "Though your sins be red as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." If I've done something wrong, I try to repent immediately - drop to my knees and ask for help in changing who I am. I know that God hears my prayers, always... and, no matter what I have done, He loves me and will bless me and do everything in His power to help me to be happy.

As hard as I try, I'll still make mistakes in the future. I hope they aren't big ones. But, no matter what happens, I have a testimony of the power of repentance and forgiveness. God hears and answers my prayers for help in becoming better even when I've turned away from Him. He helps me see the things I can change and helps me have the strength, faith, and courage to move forward. I don't know what the future holds, but as I

continue to make course corrections and turn towards the truth, I still hope that someday (probably not in this life, but eventually) I can grow up to be perfect.

FAMILY – ISN'T IT ABOUT... TIME?

When I first saw and heard the Church's public service announcements on the importance of the family, I fell immediately in love. The little girl who asks her dad to read her a story, the sword fighting clip on having fun as a family - this is how I see my own family, and how I see the gospel as part of it. The gospel blesses families... and my family is happier by far with the gospel in our lives.

Family can sometimes bring difficulties or baggage. I don't argue with anyone in the world more than my family members - every single one of them. But I'd also say that few people in the world understand me as well as they do, flawed as their understanding is. They want the best for me, and they're willing to do anything to make it happen in my life.

My family has always encouraged me to do what is right - and sometimes that encouragement turns into exhortation. Not-too-subtle messages that I should date a certain girl, suggestions that I need to prioritize better and spend more time being social because I haven't yet gotten married (and younger family members have), or anything else that is on their minds. In my case, I know that my family is involved in my life because they love me. They're willing to move mountains for me. And even though they will probably never understand my predicament, they are a support and a help to me in facing the trials of my everyday.

I'm grateful for a family that pushes me to do the right things, that expects me to make the right choices. Sometimes I struggle under the pressure to be close-to-perfect in every way, but, ultimately, I realize that, for my family, it's not really pressure or unrealistic expectations - it's a manifestation of their faith. They look at me and see that I'm a son of God. They've supported me in the past and seen my successes. They believe that I'm capable of anything and everything - and, in everything they do, their goal is simply to help me soar.

PERSONAL CONVERSION

I love this quote: "The intensity of our desire to share the gospel is a great indicator of the extent of our personal conversion" ([Elder Oaks](#)). As I've progressed in life, I've realized how true that statement is.

When I was little, I knew the gospel was true, but I really didn't think much about how it would apply to other people. I had my family, my faith, and I was happy.

I started going through minor trials in life and realized that the gospel was a major source of my strength. I wanted to share it with others - I knew it would help them. But I *didn't* want to push anything on them. I thought that maybe they could live happy, fulfilled lives without the gospel.

I served a mission and realized that everyone, everywhere, needed the message of the gospel. It was everything to me, it was crucial to their salvation, and so I knocked on doors, stopped people in the streets, and used every outward means possible to share the gospel.

Since I've come home from my mission, I've realized that my ability to share the gospel has only increased. I learned to be a better teacher, counselor, mentor, and friend. And today I can share the gospel in every interaction I have with the people around me - whether through an anonymous blog or being a good roommate.

I can feel my personal conversion growing. When I go to sleep at night, I think about the people who need my help and pray for them. I see symbols and metaphors in the scriptures and my Patriarchal blessing. And the Lord inspires me - helping me know what I should write, who I should talk to, how I can be a better brother, servant, and friend.

THE GIFT OF GOD

I attended a Sacrament Meeting yesterday where two missionaries came home. One had served two years, the other had served ten days; both received honorable releases. It was amazing to see the contrast in their speaking skills, their ability to communicate, and other outward signs. It was heartbreaking to see a newly called and released missionary, whose hopes and dreams had been shattered by something completely out of his control. But as I listened to each of them speak, I realized that both of them had strong testimonies - even though they had experienced totally different things in life.

As I go through life, I see a seeming dichotomy between each of our experiences... and sometimes it can seem unfair. One missionary serves two years and set a course for the rest of his life. Another, just as faithful, never gets that opportunity. One guy who was never interested in settling down falls in love with a girl, marries her, and begins his family before 22. Another guy is 28 and has spent his young adult life attracted to other guys, dating girls, trying to find a girl to marry in the temple so he can begin a family. One guy begins a blog to tell his story - <http://gaymormonguy.blogspot.com> - and has a great experience. Another guy begins a blog ... and then he and the blog disappear only a few days later.

But life isn't unfair. It's perfectly fair - because God creates our lives with the intent to bless us and help us to achieve the highest we can, from an eternal perspective. All things are for the good of those that love God. It is definitely not the same across the board - but that's because God is a perfect teacher. No two students are alike. And while the final examination will judge each of us based on the universal standards of the commandments, the Lord uses different events and experiences in each of our lives to help us get to that point. Everything the Lord gives us is a blessing. Everything - because even though it may seem hard or unfair or painful or whatever, it is designed to help us to grow and learn and be happy. This is the Gift that God gives us - a perfectly crafted experience to help us return to Him, and that includes the highs and the lows... the joy and the heartache. He knows what will help us grow most when we don't know ourselves.

For one young missionary, the Lord calls him to serve for two years. For

another, He calls him home after days. The Lord gives each of us different varieties of family, friends, leaders, talents, weaknesses, trials, temptations, and hidden struggles to help us turn to Him.

What has He given you?

ROMANTIC IDEALISM

I grew up watching Disney films, attending Broadway musicals, and reading fantasy & adventure novels. My family was perfect. I had the Church and I excelled in everything I tried. Mix those all together and you might understand why I've been a romantic idealist for as long as I can remember. It's never been a problem, but romantic ideals are harder and harder to come by in the world today. I'd love to find an amazing girl, sweep her off her feet, and live happily ever after - but more and more people tell me that's not how it happens. I try to believe them; I take marriage prep classes, find similarities with others, determine likes and dislikes, study personality types and compatibilities, try to be as close to the person I want to marry... but in my heart, I still believe that just falling (without the required intellectual decision to fall) in love is possible and that it'll happen to me some day.

Whether or not it actually happens doesn't really matter - optimism doesn't actually guide or influence outcomes. It doesn't have to. Instead, it influences my attitude and my actions - and those influence what happens in my life. My outlook influences how I see the things that happen to me - the things I may not be able to directly control. Being optimistic gives me peace and hope when everything seems to be going wrong. I've tried some of the other outlooks - pessimism, realism, existentialism, nihilism, whateverism... and, at least for me, I think I've found the mix that works best in my life. A mix of idealism, romanticism, and optimism. Together, those give me the tools to be a good brother, son, and friend... so that I can make a difference in the world.

THE GUISE OF ANONYMITY

The Internet casts a hazy mist of anonymity over everything I do. No one is ever watching; there's no way anyone can find out; no one will ever know. I can go anywhere and the only thing that follows me is a temporary IP address. And that can even shift with a proxy. No trace left behind. No consequences, no effects.

In some cases, the seeming anonymity is a good thing. It gives me the ability to write entries in this blog without needing to share my identity with the world. I can speak my mind and share the gospel without having to break down the barriers imposed by reality. You can read this blog without having to do the same thing. But that same sense of anonymity makes the Internet a dangerous place... where it is all too easy to do things I would never do in public, believing that no one is watching... that no one will ever find out.

In reality, anonymity is just a guise. Computers store browsing information in cookies, hidden Flash objects, and search histories. Internet Service Providers keep automatic logs of information that passes through their network. Websites track and store information about everyone that visits them, from computer hardware and software to IP addresses that can be tracked, with time codes, to a home address.

Regardless of electronic privacy, God knows what is happening. And He doesn't keep secrets. There have been many times when, while counseling friends or strangers, I've been able to see into their hearts and know the trials they face - without their ever voicing them. With that knowledge, I can better help them to learn to be happy and come unto Christ.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter who on Earth knows my actions. If no one ever knows who I am, God will still know me. And He will judge me according to the good and bad in my life. He's always watching. The consequences of my actions will eventually catch up to me, which means that, if I'm going to do something in secret, it better be good.

THE TITLE (GAY) MORMON GUY

There are two reasons why the word gay is in my blog title. The first is to make it simple to find my blog. I write to try to help others who are struggling... with the hope that I can do something to make a difference. When I was struggling and trying to find help to resist temptation, I used "gay" or "homosexual" in my online search. I never thought of searching for the phrases "same-gender attraction," "same-sex attraction," "ssa," "sga," or any of the other ways to refer to it. The second reason it's part of the title (and not just addressed in entries) is because that's what the blog is about - living a righteous life while dealing with being attracted to guys.

The gay is surrounded by parentheses because I'm not really gay. (Gay) is not a cute visual euphemism to show that I'm in the closet - because I'm not. I'm just not gay. For me, being gay is not the same thing as being attracted to guys. Being gay goes beyond attraction to *acting* on that attraction. And most men who are gay (openly or closeted) approve of the sexual gay lifestyle, promote gay activism, and live very different lives than my own.

The second word - Mormon - is, again, an easy word to use in searching for my blog. I'm Mormon through and through. Outside of this blog, I never talk about Mormons - they are always members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But, in missionary work, the Church has recently reached out to help people realize that Mormons - members of the Church - are people in every place on earth. I guess I can do that too. I'm a guy, attracted to guys. I live, work, and love life. And I'm a Mormon.

And guy is just a word from my generation. My age is of the in-betweeners - the leading edge of the strange group that is taking over the world and can't decide yet whether to be children or adults. I have no idea when guy turn into men or when kids turned into guys.

So that's me. As it says on the top of the blog, I'm a stalwart member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm also attracted to men.

FRIDAY NIGHT

I went on a date tonight. I met a girl a few days ago and we had a short conversation, so I thought I'd give it a try. We went with another couple (I knew the guy), which ended up being a really good thing, since when we arrived at our destination the place was totally packed. We couldn't get in. So we made up games, played, talked, and walked around in the rain until we were tired enough to go home and eat dessert. It was a good evening. We laughed, got lost, had fun, and talked about everything from movies to psychology. I think I may schedule another one. No sparks yet (I didn't want to shake her hand or give her a hug at the end... so I didn't), but maybe it will happen.

Friday nights have often been difficult for me - in my heart I realize that I should be out dating; at the same time, it's sometimes hard to date. Who to date. Where to go. What to do. What to plan as a backup. Who to ask if the first person says no. When to start. Whether to eat or not. Way too many questions and decisions. Sometimes I just feel like picking up the Friday night shift at the temple. They always need more workers anyway, right? I would totally do it, but it would feel like running away.

Friday nights have become easier as I involve other people in making my plans - going on group dates or double dates, asking girls what kinds of things they'd like to do, etc. And I've learned that asking in advance is a really good idea. Some girls can do the spontaneous thing. Most, like me, don't often have a completely flexible schedule for spontaneity. So I ask a few days beforehand. it works , sometimes it doesn't. We'll see.

DISAPPEARING

One of the worst things about making friends is when they disappear. They're there... and then they're not, ripped away by circumstance, choice, or other change. They move. They take new jobs. They become engaged and stop talking to anyone else. And I feel left totally alone.

I also feel guilty, because I'm obviously not a real or true friend. I know that if I reach out to others, unconditionally and whether or not they respond, then I'm being a good friend. And I try to do that. I spend most of my day and much of my life trying to reach out and help others. But then I realize that, in all my giving to others, I've forgotten to ask for help. I've forgotten to help others see how they can be involved in my life... instead of me just being involved in theirs. And so the relationship becomes one-way... I'm a teacher, a mentor, a counselor. The biggest issue is that I love being all three of those things. Put me in front of a room of people and let me teach, and I'm in heaven. But sometimes I realize that all of my potential friends have become my students, and I'm stuck on a pedestal with no way to get down without shattering into a gazillion pieces. It leaves me with few people who are able to be friends.

And so sometimes I try to not be such a strong motivating force in relationships, just so that people are willing to be real friends with me. Sometimes it works. And then, just as I feel I'm finding a new friend, those relationships suddenly disappear. It's a shock, and then I slowly try to refill the void. What scares me most is the realization that I do the same thing. I move into a world, into relationships, and then suddenly circumstances change and I'm no longer able to do the same things I had previously envisioned. I disappear. People rely on me... and I'm afraid of disappearing from their lives without my knowing. It would be arrogant to assume that my disappearing would cause a global crisis... but callous to assume that no one would notice. What do you think? What would happen if you disappeared?

I LOVE MY WARD

I really do love my ward. Almost everyone is totally new, which means that there are no pre-formed groups, no walls to break down, no one who is better than anyone else. We have Church and everyone participates in lessons. People sit next to each other in Sacrament meeting. Ward prayer has a massive turnout and 30 minutes later, most of the people are still there engaged in conversation. Impromptu game nights, group date ideas, pickup sport games, FHE where everyone comes, massive stake activities, and friends who are willing and able to hold a good conversation at any hour of the day or night. On another note, there are at least a half dozen girls who are interested in me (an unblinking stare during ward prayer is a sign that even a guy like me can't miss), even if I don't return the feeling. At least that gives me a few more potential contacts. I don't have any trouble dating people who want to date me - it may not work out, but it's at least worth a shot. Who knows? Maybe I'll find the right someone and sparks will fly. Either way, I can tell that it's going to be a blast.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES IN OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

I was in a meeting the other day where the presenter talked about the importance of having resources to meet the demands that life creates. She talked about a lot of different resources - physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual - and how those resources could help us face life. I don't think she meant for her lesson to help (gay) guys who are dealing with attraction to guys, but as she spoke I thought about how those resources help me in facing temptation.

Physical resources to meet life include diet, exercise, relationships, sleep habits, and how well you take care of your body. I've been trying recently to make the most of each of those, and I can see a difference.

Mormons, as a whole, are pretty healthy eaters. I mean, we may not be super-health-nuts, but we don't drink, smoke, drink coffee or tea, or use drugs... which means that we are at least one step closer to being in control of our bodies. My interpretation of the Word of Wisdom adds to that trying to avoid added sugars, focusing on whole grains and vegetables, and eating meat only sparingly. When I eat healthily, I have more control over my body - which then translates into more control over my actions in times of duress.

Exercise is a staple in my regimen. Sometimes work or other things get in the way, but I have to exercise to stay sane. The endorphin rush, the subsequent exhaustion, everything about exercise just makes me feel in control of what is happening.

Relationships are sometimes hard for me. I have a hard time developing friendships when I know they're going to disappear. But I push myself, and it's worth it. I make new friends and find ways to help people around me... and, in helping them, I help myself.

Sleep habits. Hmmm. Since I began this blog and decided that I wanted to be super-social (and got a new calling, and work became crazy), my sleeping schedule has gone crazy. It's non-existent. I know that I function way better when I sleep regularly, though... and temptation is way less powerful when it comes during the day. I try to get eight hours of sleep,

but sometimes that just doesn't happen. But if I'm asleep at night, then there are fewer issues.

Taking care of my body... I think I can do better. I mean, I think about it a lot, but there are always things I can do more. I could go to sleep on time, for example. Or find ways to eat more healthily. Or a lot of different things. Whatever I do, as I take better care of my body and develop a store of physical resources, I feel like I learn willpower, and my temptations and urges become a little bit easier to control.

INTELLECTUAL RESOURCES IN OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Intellectual resources have played an interesting role in overcoming temptation in my life. For the most part, by themselves, they don't work at all. New inventions seem to work for a bit, then break down as technology is bypassed or circumstances change. Internet filters are easily circumvented, no matter how much I wanted them to be secure upon installation. Playing mind games, counting backwards by 14's from 1020, or trying to clear my mind or fill it with better images works only so much... and it usually only works for a few seconds or maybe a few minutes.

But, often, a few seconds is all I need in order to actually turn on my brain in the midst of temptation. I can think of things I believe in, of my family, my friends, and the people who rely on me in life. And if I've read the Bible and the Book of Mormon that day, I can remember the things I read, and feel closer to Christ.

I think the most important intellectual resource in overcoming temptation is the ability to deal with new situations. It's easy right now in my life to forget about temptation - when I'm surrounded by people who love me, I'm super-busy in life and Church, and everything seems to be going right. But if everything fell apart tomorrow, then I would need the ability to deal with those stresses... or else my life would start to fall apart, too. And when life falls apart, temptation becomes a much bigger piece of the puzzle. I have to develop habits of reading the scriptures, praying, and helping others live better lives, and then, hopefully, when my own life gets hard, I'll have the intellectual resources to deal with stress, chaos, ambiguity, and an ever-present attraction to other guys.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES IN OVERCOMING TEMPTATION, PART 1

These are the heavy-hitters. Sometimes I try to get by relying on physical or intellectual tricks, but ultimately they end up failing. Spiritual resources, on the other hand, have never failed me. They may not make my trials and temptations go away, but they give me the strength to overcome them, and the perspective to be happy even in the midst.

Scripture study is way more than just reading the scriptures at night before I go to sleep. It's a dedicated study of the scriptures - and requires time, effort, and planning. I have to think about what I'm going to study, or else my study isn't really effective. I find that when I study with the intent to teach others - to help others apply the scriptures in their lives, then it becomes most effective. Whatever I'm studying, I try to read the Book of Mormon every day.

Fasting is another powerful tool - one that helps me realize that I can overcome my physical temptations. Sometimes I just fast during Fast Sunday; sometimes I fast for a few days in the middle of the week. Going without food and water helps me to turn to the Lord - every time I think about eating, I think about God and ask Him to help me in whatever I need to accomplish. The blessings of fasting are amazing - I feel a strength way beyond anything that just going without food could accomplish. It also helps me think more about other people - the people in the world who are starving and suffering. That puts my trials into perspective.

Worship at the temple is essential, at least once a week in my case. I need to talk with God on a frequent basis, and at the temple, amidst the peace and quiet, when I have dedicated a few hours of my time, I find it easier to focus my thoughts and listen to the voice of the Spirit. It's in the temple that I regain my hope and perspective, that I'm able to see how my trials and struggles fit into the Plan that God created for me. I walk in, and may feel awful... but as I walk out, the only thing I can feel is the love that God has for me... and peace that it will all work out in the end if I am faithful.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES IN OVERCOMING TEMPTATION, PART 2

Attending Institute: Sometimes I attend Institute and I feel like I am learning amazing, new things that apply to my life. Sometimes I attend and feel like nothing the teacher says really applies. But even when Institute doesn't seem applicable to my life, the Lord is still willing to bless and teach me. President Monson has promised blessings for attending Institute, and I definitely need them. I've seen them. Many of the sublime spiritual things I've learned were at Institute. They often had nothing to do with the lesson that was being taught, like this entry (I'm writing it at Institute). Sometimes I didn't even know what was being taught. But because I was there, the Lord helped me with the things I faced in my life.

Sunday Worship: I think there's something different between the idea of "attending Church" and Sunday Worship... and the latter is a much more powerful force in my life. Church, for me, is a social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual experience that involves meetings, talks, talking with people, classes... But Sunday Worship focuses everything on the Sacrament, my family, and taking time to reflect on what I've learned during the week. When I make all of Sunday a time to worship, the rest of my week goes much better.

Prayer: This is big enough to be its own post. Prayer is the only thing that has kept me alive during the course of my life. When I struggled with being attracted to guys, overcoming massive depression, and trying to live the perfect Mormon life, prayer was what helped me put everything into perspective. It gives me hope when I am down, and God directs my life in ways I would have never expected. I've talked with friends, and most of them, at one point or another, comment on the uniqueness with which I approach prayer... and the clarity of the responses I get. For me, prayer has developed into a powerful tool to understand the will of the Lord, prevent temptation before it happens, and pull me out of the darkest depths when they descend. When I make mistakes, I try to pray immediately... so that I can make it right. I pray in the morning, at night, over meals, while I drive; prayer is a constant communication with God – not just a short text message that we send before eating and going to sleep. And as I listen to Him throughout the day, He teaches me and helps me be a better servant.

All in all, spiritual resources are the most powerful in helping to overcome my own temptations. If I use these and others, I've found that facing my struggles becomes much more doable. Not that the urges go away, but I have strength, or faith, or whatever it takes, to face it and conquer it one day at a time.

Wow. I'M WAY BUSY.

You may have noticed that I missed a day of posting a few days back. Or that some of the posts are much shorter than others. Part of that is due to the fact that I'm crazy busy right now. I rarely get to sleep when I want to, and I'm exhausted much more than I'd really like to admit. I get home and my entire body aches. Yeah, I do crazy workouts, but I'm not used to the feeling-like-I'm-walking-dead motif. I mean, I try to take care of my body and be a great example to other people... but sleep and stress are taking their tolls on me.

Some days I know what to write here, and some days I just want to go to sleep. But I still come back, because I feel drawn here. I probably will never meet you. I may not ever hear your story. And I may not ever know if my story is helping you overcome struggles in your life. But maybe it is... or maybe someday it might help one person. What if that one person were me? Or my brother? Or my best friend? One person is enough to keep going.

THE DAY BEFORE FAST SUNDAY

Fast Sunday has become a really powerful event in my life each month. Preparing for it in the days prior, I start to think about what the purpose will be in my fast. This month, I'm fasting so that I can be a better person - a better friend, brother, son, and missionary. With life going crazy all around me, I'm realizing that I don't have time to do all the things I want to... or even all the things that need to get done. I guess the only thing I can do is ask the Lord to help me do the best thing now. I'm also fasting for help in overcoming my own struggles, and the ability to help others around me. Step by step, I grow stronger.

For me, Fast Sunday begins when I start my fast. I finish lunch, go into my room, and dedicate the next few hours to God. I don't do the same kinds of things that night - I probably won't attend a movie or go to a concert, instead, I'll spend time with friends, on a date, reading the scriptures, talking with family, or maybe just writing my thoughts. Sometimes I go to the temple. But, whatever I do, it helps me think of the purpose of my fast and prepare for the Sunday after.

I think there's something to be said for being, at times, away from the crowds. Being a good Mormon guy, sometimes I think that I need to constantly be around people - helping them, changing them, enabling them to be who they want to be - but, in order to do that effectively, I need time for myself, away from the rest of the world, when I can focus on doing the same in my own life. Most weeks I only have one day to rest, and even that's questionable with my responsibilities in the Church. But on the weekend of Fast Sunday, I have an extra evening to prepare. And, for some reason, that seems to make a major difference.

...AND LONG WALKS ON THE BEACH

I had a long conversation with a few friends (a guy and a girl) yesterday. The conversations ebbed and flowed, going from the ironies and difficulties of dating to choices in life to how we fit into the Church as individuals. I actually learned some interesting things during the dating dialogue. I don't really have another place to share them, so I thought I'd post them here.

Things Girls Expect in Dating, But Guys (or Just I) Have No Clue

1. Girls send signals that they're interested. Yes, they are the same signals they send when they are trying to be friends, but girls expect guys to be able to tell the difference. Huh?
2. When a guy has gone on a first or second date, and it wasn't an absolute catastrophe from her perspective, she is probably waiting by the phone every moment of the day, watching chick flicks, wondering why he hasn't called yet. If the guy is planning to ask her out, he should call and let her know that, even if he doesn't have anything planned yet. If the guy is planning to not ask her out, he should call and let her know that, too - so she can move on with her life. And girls totally don't understand if the guy doesn't know if he wants to ask her out again.
3. Girls make very fast decisions about whether they would be willing to date guys. It takes minutes, not days, to determine if a follow-up date would be a good thing.
4. Girls are afraid of hurting guys with rejection. They don't realize that dangling it over our heads by missing phone calls (on purpose? just hard to reach?), saying they're busy (not interested? truly busy but still interested? busy right now, but ask me in 6 months?), or whatever else is way more painful than just telling the pure and simple truth.
5. Even though many girls would like to be asked to do something (have the date planned before), the ones who are interested are willing to show it if a guy asks her if she'd be willing to go out. That makes planning dates so much easier - since then you know her unavailability isn't tied to a desire to avoid you.

Things Guys Really Want From Dating, but Girls Are Clueless

1. Straight answers. Rejection doesn't really hurt as much as guys think it does. When they actually get rejected, they recover really, really fast. A guy would rather get a text message saying, "I'm not interested in dating you" than a thousand "I'm busy" or non-responses. If girls are currently tied up, but might be interested in the future, they can put a timeline. "...but you can ask me out again in 6 months." or something like that.
2. Clearer signals. Girls act exactly the same when they want to be good friends with guys as when they want a guy to ask them out. I know. I've ruined dozens of friendships by reading the wrong signals, only to find that my best friend is suddenly (and permanently) avoiding me. And then I see her with another guy. Had I never asked her out, we could still be good friends. Since I did, we haven't talked since. There are other ways to show interest. I think. Dating is complicated...
3. A little help once the relationship starts. Many guys (at least those in the Mormon dating world), after 1-3 dates, will try to understand how interested a girl is. A giveaway from my perspective is calling, inviting me to do something (date or nondate), or deliberately sitting nearby at Church or activities. Guys like to know that girls enjoy their dates and want to continue going. They don't want to date someone who is just saying yes to be nice.

Yeah. I know. Totally ironic place to post dating tips. But I still date. Deep inside, I believe that it'll work out for me. I'll be attracted to and fall in love with a beautiful girl, she'll fall in love with me, and we'll be married in the temple. We'll make the relationship work through thick and thin, raise righteous children, and be an eternal family. It's a lofty ideal. And for some of us it may not happen in this life, even if we are righteous. But it's still the goal I have in mind.

EXHAUSTION. AND CLEANING.

Sometimes I write and the entire process is amazing. Life makes more sense and I feel like I have something to share with the world.

And then some nights I am absolutely exhausted. I have nothing worthwhile to say, and I just want to go to sleep. Tonight is one of them. I try to find excuses to not write. It's a holiday. Maybe people don't read blogs on holidays. Or maybe bloggers take holidays off, just like everyone else. As I said, I just want to go to sleep. But as I'm developing a good excuse to not read, I realize that going to sleep means not reading my scriptures (I haven't yet today). It means that maybe someone who needed to read what I would write today wouldn't have that opportunity. And my mind attaches to those two pieces of potential and going to sleep isn't an option. So I convince myself that I'll read my scriptures as soon as I finish writing, and then go to sleep as soon as I finish reading.

I spent most of today cleaning. The scriptures say that cleanliness is next to godliness. I think it's easier to feel the Spirit (and hence overcome temptation) in a clean place. To me, there's a palpable emotional and spiritual difference between a clean room and one that desperately needs cleaning. That's it. If you're having a rough time, or know someone who is, try cleaning.

I WISH...

... beautiful girls had the ability to turn my head and make my heart race

... I could tell which girls were beautiful

... I could ignore guys on the street, at the pool, at the gym

... my mind would naturally dwell on something benign like gardening or family history

... I were in love

... I knew what would happen tomorrow, in a year, in 20 years

... there were an army of righteous Saints who could fight this battle together

... I knew what I wanted to be when I grow up

... Church events would serve healthy food

... I could help everyone who is struggling in life

... I were better at finding people who need help

... I knew what God wanted me to do

BEING A CHANGE IN ME

For most of my life I've wanted to "change the world."

I grew up in an almost perfect family, with superheroes for parents and inheriting at least some of their awesomeness. I was a star student, champion athlete, great musician... you name it. And then I realized that everyone wasn't like me. Everyone didn't grow up as an Incredible... and suddenly it didn't seem fair that I could sit in on a class and recite back, word for word, what the teacher said, or read a textbook once and have 99% comprehension... when the girl next to me studied for hours just to memorize the quadratic equation.

And so I wanted to change the world - to make the world easier, or more conducive to better experiences for the rest of mankind. If I could address the major issues in the world - hunger, education, health, safety, and faith - then everyone would be free to be amazing.

At the same time, I dealt with my own issues in life. I had unanswered questions that left me wondering, staring at the stars or the ceiling (or both - those glow-in-the-dark stars that never come off...) into late hours of the night, and prayers that went seemingly unanswered though they filled my mind and heart. I struggled with depression, lived through the pain of thinking I was worthless and cursed, and walked the road of repentance and change... all the while hoping and expecting to reach perfection sometime soon.

But perfection never came. I learned one lesson, then the Lord gave me another project to master. After I learned that one, He threw another idea my way. And when I rarely felt like I was in control of my life, the world rocked on its foundations... and the biggest trials of all fell right into my lap. What I had once thought a simple exercise in removing vices and cultivating virtues became a complex mix of trying to figure out who I was and where the Lord wanted me to go.

And I realized that *the world* didn't need to change. I did. Even though I can be pretty persuasive, encouraging, or coercive... people choose to change themselves. And people choose to change when two factors are in place: they believe that change is worth the effort, and they believe that they can do it. Everything comes from those two beliefs. If I lack one,

regardless of if it's true, I'll never try to change. If I have both, regardless of if they are true, I will probably succeed. And my success helps others to see the possibility for change in their own lives.

I've seen a lot of changes in the people around me as I've tried to help others to become better each day. From depression to optimism. From sickness to health. From loathing to love. From uncertainty to faith. Each of those changes mirrors a change I've already effected in my own life. Ultimately, the change I create in the world comes from changes I create in me.

LIVING IN DOUBLE

Writing an (ostensibly) anonymous blog takes more thought and original effort than I had originally imagined. I can't quote myself if anyone else has heard the quote. My signature themes and ideas have to twist and reform themselves into new patterns. And when I have an amazing spiritual experience, I have to decide whether to share it here, or with the rest of the world.

The duality has a couple motivations. The first is for the people in the rest of my life. My family, friends, and long-lost acquaintances have enough of their own problems without having to vicariously experience mine. Maybe that's selfish... and I should share my problems to help my loved ones understand the perspective I've gained. But while people who understand the gospel well might be able to understand that I'm not cursed or carrying stains of a sin in the premortal life (think of the man born blind...), it took me years to realize that being attracted to guys wasn't a curse from God. I don't want to jeopardize their progression... and I don't think it's necessary right now.

The second motivation is completely about me. People think that I'm a knight in shining armor and I try to live up to that expectation. They want me to learn the quickest, run the fastest, and speak words that are consistently inspired. They want me to be proof that it's possible - possible to live an amazing life, receive blessings from the Lord, and be truly happy in a fallen world. In my mind, I think that I *am* proof of that. And I thrive on the attention, the love, and the support that they give with those expectations. So I let people believe that I'm perfect... then they expect it of me and I can count on them to help me make it happen.

Who knows. Someday everyone will know about every aspect of my life... whether in this life or the next, when all our actions will be shouted from the housetops, and the books will be opened and the deeds of men read aloud in the ears of all men. In the meantime, I'll be content with living in double. Not telling a half- or partial-truth, or living two half-lives that both lack meaning... but one complete life with two stories, in tandem, honest and upright in each. My writing style is probably unique enough that, if you really wanted to, you could find out a lot more about me. Or maybe I've told you. In some ways, I guess I already have.

I Love...

...hearing the promises that God makes to me in the temple

...talking with a friend until midnight about anything and everything

...the feeling when God tells me that He loves me

...eating stuff that tastes really good, is really inexpensive, and is healthy

...attending Stake Conference and feeling like the talks were written just for me

...receiving revelation to know how to help a friend in need

...the feeling when everything is finally finished for the week and I can prepare for Sunday

...laughing as my friends and I try to understand each other

...reading comments on my blog

...having candid conversations with God, and hearing His voice

...the awesome soreness that comes from doing a crazy workout

...feeling, for just a moment in Stake Conference, that I'm just like everybody else

...knowing, in my heart, that, as long as I am doing what is right, everything will work out in the end

THE STRUGGLE IS NOT THE SIN

I love to make goals for my life. I think of something amazing I want to be, create a vision, then start on the pathway to achieving it. And I start out well. For a day, or a week, or even a month. But then, almost invariably, I fail.

I've failed more times than I can count in my life. Some failures are somewhat benign - failure to read my scriptures, to reach out and do good for others, or to work out every day. Other failures have a much bigger impact - failure to stay out of precarious situations, or to resist temptations or get out when the situation goes bad.

Failing is painful. And when I fail, Satan tries to convince me that I'll never make it. It's not worth the effort. I'll never be good enough. I've sinned so much that God could never forgive me. And even if He does, I'll never be happy anyway. The lies swirl around me and I find myself with two options - get up and start over, or stay in the gutter and be brainwashed into changing my dreams.

For me, the vision is being married, with a family. When I realize that I've dated yet another girl and I'm not at all attracted to her, and then I find myself dreaming about a guy in my ward, I have the same two options. I can keep moving forward, believing that God will bless me no matter what happens, or I can lower my vision and give up on the ideal. Thankfully, I've always had the strength to get up and start over. To pick up my shattered dreams, put the pieces back into place, and ask God for help.

For guys who are attracted to guys, attraction can be a constant issue. But attraction isn't the same as sin. I make mistakes and repent just like everyone else. If I make big mistakes, yeah, the repentance process takes more time and effort. Sometimes a lot of time. And a lot of effort. But it's still available. It is worth it, I can do it, and the Lord will help me to be happy, fulfilled, and ultimately receive my righteous desires. The danger is in giving up and stopping my progression - believing that following temptation will make me happier than following God. My prayer is that I will always have the faith to keep going.

ELDER SCOTT HELPS TO REDEFINE LDS DATING CULTURE

Quote from the CES Fireside tonight. I hope none of you have stock in the Provo dollar theater.

“If you’re a young man, and trying to get to know a young woman, for Heaven’s sake, don’t take her to a movie!”

FAITH

I have a friend who decided to leave the Church a while ago because he was gay. We knew each other casually in the mission, but at that point I didn't know that he was attracted to guys. After the mission, we lost touch, until a little while later when I read his coming out letter and subsequent decision to leave the Church.

As I read his letter, mixed emotions flared within me. I felt his pain. I knew what it meant to sit in an Elders Quorum and hear jokes that could be offensive. Or to receive dating counsel and advice from someone who, even with good intentions, has no idea what I am going through. And to feel totally, completely, and terribly alone... in the one place I feel like I should feel loved and accepted.

But I also knew that he had a testimony of the gospel. And I have a testimony of the gospel. And anyone with a testimony of the gospel knows that happiness comes through obedience to gospel principles. He knew the Church was true when I had seen him last, and a testimony doesn't just disappear. When the Holy Ghost testifies of truth, it causes a physical change in your soul - spirit and body - that can never be undone. When you receive a witness of the Holy Ghost, you can't forget the truth you learn. And nothing can prove it wrong. The only way to go against it... is to simply choose to stop believing.

So he had chosen to stop believing. And as I continued to follow his life, I saw how the friend I once knew - an optimistic, kind person who always highlighted the best in others - had changed. At first, he expressed the feeling that leaving the Church and having relationships with guys had finally freed him from the chains of conformity, and made him happy. But, as time went on, I saw a different story. He began swearing, drinking, criticizing people around him. And when I talked with him, I could see in his eyes and hear in his voice that he was absolutely miserable.

My friend's choice caused me to look at my own life and wonder what kept me going. We're the same age. We served in the same mission. We have similar likes and dislikes. I've realized that the difference is faith. He dwelled on the things that people said and took offense. I thought about the promises that God had made to me. He dwelled on fulfilling his urges

today. I had faith that God would fulfill His promises to me today, tomorrow, and in the future. He felt like the Church should change to meet his desires. I know that the gospel, no matter what I am going through, has the power to help me overcome all things.

Faith is what caused the pioneers to leave their homes and walk across the plains. Faith moved them from their homes across the sea, through Kirtland, on past Nauvoo, to Council Bluffs and Winter Quarters and to the Salt Lake Valley. Faith pushed them beyond when the prophet called them - to settle in places from Canada to California to Mexico. And when life was hard and they buried their children in the snow, faith gave them the strength to keep moving. To know that God would fulfill His promises.

I don't know what the future holds for me. I know that it probably holds a lot of struggles, a lot of pain, and a lot of opportunities to learn and grow. But I also know that God can be there with me, if I have faith in Him and keep His commandments. And if I know that He is there, that He loves me, and that I am moving in the right direction, then there is nothing I can't do.

WE CAN DO BETTER

At Regional Conference yesterday, Sister Beck spoke about the importance of giving ourselves credit where credit is due. “We are doing better than we think we are,” she explained... “but we can still do better.”

I know that I've fallen victim to the belief that I'm not good enough. Even at the top of my class, the best on the team, and a seemingly perfect life, I feel like I need to do better. I need to do better in my callings, in my home teaching assignments, in my scripture study, in my personal commitment to the Lord and living every principle of the gospel. If I step back and look at my life, the things I've done, and the habits I've developed over the years, I can say that I'm doing pretty well. Most people would probably agree (as long as they didn't know about this blog). But as I get closer and closer to my life, I see discrepancies and difficulties to resolve. And the list of faults and failures goes on... and on... and on.

I'm trying to do better. To have more faith in God, so that I can know that He will fulfill His promises. To exercise more often and eat more healthily (instead of skipping lunch and exercise because I'm so busy), so that I can be a better steward of my body. To study the scriptures, every day, with a purpose, so that I can apply them in my life and bless others. And to live and love every component of the gospel, so I can receive the blessings I need to survive. Yeah, I'm doing ok. But I can do better. And so I'm trying, starting now - today.

TRY AGAIN. AND AGAIN. AND AGAIN.

Today was rough. It started out great, since I had tons to accomplish. For the last few days I've been so busy that I haven't really had down time. So when I got home late this afternoon and realized I didn't have anything planned, it was a bit of a shock. Within moments, temptations and thoughts of things to do (none of them productive or spiritually healthy) filled my mind and started to overwhelm me. There was no one else around; the only hope I had was to pray for help. I uttered a silent prayer and, within moments, remembered things I really did need to do - read the Book of Mormon, work out at the gym, write in my blog, eat something healthy, and prepare for tomorrow.

But the memory of things to do didn't do anything for the massive urges. So I grabbed my mp3 player and started listening to last April's General Conference while eating. It helped, but didn't solve the problem. So I left and went to talk with a few friends. Still not working. Then I went to the gym to work out, killed myself there, came back, showered, and changed. Thankfully, by that time my body was under control. And now I feel like I can go to sleep (and wake up crazy early tomorrow to start all over again) in peace.

I've found that temptations and urges in my life, even though they may be sporadic when I'm crazy busy, are still a part of my life. And knowing how to live with them ensures that they don't take over my life. It's strange - the temptations and urges have gotten stronger and stronger with time, but I've also become more able to live with them and move on with my life. Before, humming a hymn might have worked. Now, singing at full belt is just one of many potential steps to reclaim my mind and body; sometimes it takes everything I can think of before I stop thinking about a guy. But, if I'm really willing to try the right things, to turn to the Lord, and to dedicate my life to Him, the urges *do* dissipate. And instead of feeling guilty and unclean, the experience leaves me strengthened and full of faith - that I can live with this, move forward, and be happy. At least, as long as I'm willing to try and try again.

IN REAL LIFE

So I did it. I talked with a priesthood leader today about being attracted to guys, in real life. It's the first person in my life (outside of the blogging world) I've told. And, depending on future situations, it may also be the last.

The conversation was focused on reaching out to others who are struggling like me. I had a ton of time on my hands when I first began this blog and other missionary endeavors, and as life has become more complicated, I've realized that I lack the publicity and time to really make a big difference in the Mormon community of men and women like me. I physically don't have the time to contact everyone, or chat with everyone, or arrange to meet everyone that I want to check up on. And my divine requests for super powers were denied. So the Lord inspired me to do the next best thing - ask a priesthood leader for advice. Most of our conversation was just communicating... sort of so that he would be better able to understand the things we're going through. But once at the beginning and twice at the end he gave me advice I thought I would share here.

1: Don't fall. Into pornography, masturbation, sexual relationships with other men, or anything like it. If I'm trying to lift others (which is pretty accurate), falling can have catastrophic consequences.

2: Beware of becoming a "leader" in a non-Church-sponsored organization. This is actually pretty cogent advice, as I've been reading the war chapters of the Book of Mormon. I've been contemplating ways to make a bigger difference in the world, and one of the thoughts on my list was organizing an army. And so the advice definitely applied. My hope now is that I can do whatever is necessary to help further the cause through established (and future) channels of the Church... instead of being a visible (albeit anonymous) champion.

3: When you don't have enough time to reach everyone, have faith that God is doing His part. This was the hardest one. I went, almost hoping that he would tell me a way to reach people, be there for them, and enable them to become better Saints and better men. I wanted to know how I could do everything, for everyone. And the realization that I can't still

makes me want to cry. Every night I pray for you - that God will give you strength, that God will help you to learn to be happy, that He will help you feel His love. And every day I try to be the best person I can be. His advice: when you are doing your absolute best to help others, have faith. Know that God is actively involved in the world. Align your will with His, and you will be an instrument in accomplishing His work.

And so I'll continue to stay away from enticing advertisements, questionable emails, and random websurfing. I'll put my recruiting hat off to the side for a bit. And, tonight when I pray, I'll ask Him to bless my family, my friends, and my brothers' (your) lives... even when I'm not there in real life.

DREAMS OF ETERNITY

My greatest desire, since I was a little kid, was to grow up to be a dad. My greatest fear is that it won't happen.

Everything in my life has been focused around becoming a dad. I studied everything possible in school so I could teach my future children. I tried to develop traits that I thought would help me be a better father and husband. And when I entered the dating world, I looked for someone who could complement me - someone who would be able to help me raise a righteous family and make a difference in the fabric of history.

As I said, my greatest fear is tied to it - fear that it won't happen in this life. That I won't ever fall in love with a girl. That it won't ever be the right option. That the words promising the opportunity to be a father in my patriarchal blessing, even though they say, "In this life," might be symbolic instead of concrete.

As I've learned about people around the globe, I've come to a realization. Deep inside each of us, we are all the same. It doesn't matter if we call ourselves gay, straight, Mormon, Muslim, American, African, or anything else; many of us have the same wishes, hopes, and dreams. We want to be loved and accepted by people who understand us. We want to have a family and help our children grow and live better lives than we do. We want to make a difference in the world and understand our purpose in life.

The gospel, the Atonement, and our eternal nature tie us together here on Earth. We all want to return to God someday. And He has given us the tools to make it back to Him. It won't be easy. This may be the hardest trial I ever face in all of eternity (knock on wood: sometimes the Lord is really creative...). But it's worth it. And it's possible. And that knowledge turns my fear back into faith: faith that God will answer my prayers. He will bless me. He will give me the strength to do what is right. And He will help me to make my dreams come true. Someday I'll be a dad, and be able to raise my children to love and live the truth. Maybe it will be soon. And maybe it will be in eternity. Either way, I still hope, believe, and dream.

MUSIC IN THE NIGHT

Some days I feel like the Phantom in Phantom of the Opera. Alone. Isolated. Outcast. And I owe my life, in many ways, to music. When I struggled with depression through high school, music was one of the few things that could truly brighten my day. In the midst of feeling so alone that I wanted to die, I could forget everything and be one with a melody. Sometimes I sang. Sometimes I danced. And sometimes I just listened, sprawled out on my bed, tears running down my face.

In recent years, I've learned that music has another saving power. I used to think that simply thinking of music – reciting the words or humming the tune – would be enough to avoid any temptations. Boy, was I wrong. Somehow, my mind developed the ability to multitask, and I soon found that humming one hymn wasn't enough. But I really believed in it, so I tried to make adjustments. I tried humming one melody and thinking another, or reciting the words of two hymns while trying to imagine orchestral arrangements for a third. And sometimes it worked. The sheer complexity of the task I expected my mind to conquer forced the bad thoughts out. But, in many cases, the positive effects only lasted as long as I kept up the multiple lines of thought. Drop one, and the door is open.

And then I realized the power that music – not just a melody or good lyrics – can effect in my life. I was having a rough day and someone invited me to go to a choir practice. I probably wouldn't perform with the choir, but I knew that staying at home was asking for trouble. So I went. And it was amazing. As we sang, the music all around us, I forgot about everything that had filled my mind. I felt peace... and the feeling lasted the rest of the night.

Since then, I've tried to actually listen to and participate in music, instead of just humming a melody or thinking through lyrics. There's something about pumping uplifting music through my speakers while I drive or listening to a great radio station as I'm typing on my computer. When I'm struggling most, it has the power to help me make it through the night.

STARTING IN FIRST GEAR, AND GOING SLOWLY

I have a newfound distaste for stop signs. And stoplights without left turn signals. And... well, you get the picture.

The opportunity to drive a stick shift thrust itself upon me a few days ago. I was helping a friend and he asked me to drive his stick shift to go meet him and do some errands. He was concerned since I drive an automatic, and it's been a while since I drove a stick shift. But I learned how to drive one during my high school years, so I assured him that there would be no problems.

I couldn't even get out of the parking lot. He had suggested starting the engine in 2nd gear - since 1st gear was too weak, and I was trying to follow his advice. Every single time, though, the truck would give a massive lurch, make awful grinding noises, and then shut off completely. I finally tried starting it in 1st gear, and 15 more tries, was slowly moving out of the parking lot.

A few minutes later, I had stopped at a stop light before the expressway on-ramp. The light turned green, I put it in 1st gear, and the engine promptly turned off. I tried again. Massive lurch, everything shaking, awful noises, and it turns off again. The 3rd through 7th tries were similar failures, and then the light turned red. By the time the light turned green again, I had realized my error - somehow I had put the engine in 3rd gear instead of 1st. Switching to 1st gear made a big difference, and then I could slowly switch to 2nd, 3rd...

Driving for the rest of the day was a mixture of sheer terror and blissful calm. The calm came from simply being able to drive the speed limit, in 5th gear, in the middle lane. The terror came with traffic, having to stop (and start again), and stalling in the middle of large, busy intersections. Somehow the engine would always try to start in 3rd or 5th gear. Or it would change from 1st to 4th. I'm sure it was my fault in every case. Either way, the result was always violent shaking, awful grinding noises, and turning off. Thankfully, there were no major incidents, and I returned the stick shift to reclaim my beautiful, amazing automatic transmission.

I think that my experience driving a stick shift was similar to my experience learning to manage my attraction to guys. Sometimes, after

giving into weaknesses in life, I decided to go all out - 5th gear of spirituality. But even with visions of grandeur and trying to be the most amazing Saint ever, I still struggled and fell - just as often as before. Inevitably, each time I bit off more than I could chew, and the amazing plans I had devised fell to ruin. And each time I failed left me feeling more and more dejected - wondering if I would ever be able to move forward at all.

Looking at my predicament, I realize that I was missing a key part in my progression - starting in 1st gear and moving slowly. I expected instant change in everything I did... and I wasn't willing to fight for small changes that would enable me to move faster down the road. So I turned to the Lord and asked Him for help. Remarkably, the Lord gave me very simple instructions. Study the scriptures daily. Pray with faith. Prepare for and attend Church each week. I felt sort of like Naaman when he was told to wash in the Jordan River. How would reading the scriptures more faithfully help me with an attraction to guys?

But I had already tried shifting into 3rd and 5th gears - making grandiose plans and changes in my life - only to see them fail. So I decided to really, truly, and honestly try it. I dedicated myself to reading the Book of Mormon every single day, without failure and without excuse, to praying sincerely each morning and night, and to taking time each week to prepare for the Sabbath. And it worked. Did it fix all my problems? No. But, over time, I felt the strength of those commitments slowly enable me to move forward into 2nd gear. Then I made commitments to attend the temple each week, keep a faithful journal, and fulfill my home teaching and other assignments. 3rd gear. I began helping others in their own struggles, enabling them to live happier lives, and spending time developing more meaningful relationships.

Now, if I falter, I know that I need to go back and start at 1st gear - develop the basic habits - and then go on from there. With each step, God blesses me and helps me overcome my own struggles. And I keep moving forward.

PEACE

I remember reading a book once that described an intriguing method of meditation. Turn out the lights in a room, sit down, and light a candle. Then just stare at the flame and empty your mind. If a thought comes, don't think about it. Just stare at the candle and let it burn into your eyes and your mind.

The first time I tried that exercise, I felt a bit silly. And it didn't seem incredibly effective. My mind raced in a thousand directions, none of which were the flame flickering in front of me. But I really wanted to understand the metaphor - so I kept trying. After some effort, I was able to clear my mind for about 5 seconds. And the feeling that came with that - being able to control what was happening *in my mind* was incredible. I felt like I was on top of the world. Yes, it was only for 5 seconds. And yes, there were times when I tried again and couldn't even get my mind to clear. But it had happened. It was possible. And I could do it.

I forgot about the exercise until just recently when someone showed me a similar one on the Wii (Wii Fit Plus or something) - you sit on the balance board and stare at the screen, while keeping completely still. In this electronic meditation, the game simulates the distractions of your mind by twisting, turning, and spinning the screen. Once you move, you've lost. But if you can stay perfectly still, it keeps going. In this case, it doesn't matter if you think about something else. As long as you are able to follow the physical directions, the game keeps going. And, the few times I tried, I was actually pretty good.

Now take those two and apply them to living with my attraction to guys. Right now, I don't have the ability to easily control my mind. I know a bunch of coping mechanisms - like singing songs at full voice or going out to talk with someone, but at times I can't keep my mind from wandering or twisting down unwanted pathways. And, for a long time, I felt inadequate because I wasn't really in control of my mind. But God doesn't ask us to immediately control our minds and our attractions. He first asks us to keep His commandments - to control our actions. So I look at my life - at the *actions* of my life - and I realize that, as far as the game goes, I am actually doing pretty well. Considering the shaking, jarring, and twisting that goes on inside my head, my actions are true to the principles that the Church teaches... that same knowledge that God confirms to me

time and time again. I'm keeping the commandments, and that brings me a level of peace.

For right now, I'm focusing on the actions in my life, and slowly learning to be master of my mind. As long as I keep the commandments and turn to God, I am blessed. The Lord helps me in my life and I have peace because I know that I am accomplishing His will. As far as controlling my mind, there isn't anything inherently wrong with being attracted to guys, and so I'm not stressing about finding a way to turn off the attraction - if that is even possible. Instead, I focus on ensuring that it doesn't turn into lust or something worse. I'll probably go buy a candle and practice watching the flame / clearing my mind just so that I have another tool to use when temptation strikes. And, hopefully, someday I can be master of my mind and body. To be able to put off the natural man and become as a Saint, meek, humble, full of love... and completely at peace.

UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL IDEAL

In the Church, I've always learned that families can be together forever. It always seemed to me like a promise of "happily ever after." But that doesn't tell the whole story. Living the gospel blesses families. Families are essential for salvation, and marriage between man and woman is divinely instituted of God. All of that is true. But, all too often, the ideal comes later, or in a different form, than I first expected.

Being attracted to guys is a perfect example. If I never fall in love with a girl, I may never marry in this life. I may never have the opportunity to have children or raise a family or find someone with whom to be sealed in the temple. Does that mean that the ideal doesn't apply to me? For a while, I thought so. And then I realized that the "ideal" in the gospel was not having a perfect family that sits on the front row. The gospel ideal simply outlines the best possible circumstances for each son or daughter of God. Ideal does not mean equal. But it does mean that I will receive all the blessings that God has promised if I am willing to keep His commandments.

Looking at my life, I'm grateful that God loves me enough to allow me to live my own trials. To understand how the gospel interfaces in my life. To learn my own lessons and earn the right to say that I can love and understand people... To gain a testimony of the gospel ideal.

GOOD FRIENDS

Having good friends is amazing. I love having people I can sit and talk to - people who want to sit and talk with me for as long as time permits. We talk about dating, and Church, and work, and life, and everything from psychology to art to science to math to music. We laugh so hard that our faces and stomachs hurt, and throughout the day we remember each other while we're cooking or studying or writing a paper... and then tell our respective stories when we meet up again, starting over from where we left off without a hitch.

I haven't always had a group of good friends I could turn to. For most of my life, I played the part of an introvert. I was totally and completely alone, and I was ok with that. I was just a private person. No one understood me, and no one needed to - God understood me and that was enough. But being attracted to guys is an isolating experience... one that can easily make me feel alone even among the people who love me... because, even though they may try, they can never understand what I am going through.

As I struggled with feeling so incredibly alone, I turned to God for help. His first answer helped me realize that there were people around me who felt the same way. Granted, they weren't guys attracted to guys, but there were girls who struggled with depression, guys who had broken up with a girlfriend, and just normal people who felt alone in a crowd. I had asked God for help in overcoming my loneliness, and He told me to reach out to others. I was expecting someone to reach out to me. It doesn't work that way.

So I developed the skills and ability to reach out - to focus my life on others and help them to feel loved. And, slowly, my own needs were met as I helped others. I felt less alone. I found happiness in helping others feel loved. And I found good friends as I tried to be a good friend myself.

BECOMING SELF-AWARE

One of the greatest blessings I've reaped (albeit indirectly) from being attracted to guys is a powerful sense of self-awareness. Maybe it's just a really bad case of thinking too much, but as I look into my soul and the patterns of my life I find I learn new things - lessons, metaphors, and opportunities for growth. I can see the hand of the Lord in everything, I know when I need Him, I know how His influence changes me... and only recently have I come to realize how great a blessing that is.

I spent a lot of my life completely and totally alone (whether or not there were actually people around me)... and being alone forced me to deal with and understand my feelings, thoughts, emotions, and the things that make me tick. There's something about feeling such incredible loneliness and pain... and then learning how to fight it, to cope, to move on with life, that has given me an incredible understanding of who I am and who I want to be. I still often have no idea what is going on inside my head, and I don't know what the Lord has in store for me in two months, let alone two or twenty years. But at least I have some inkling, and it helps me feel like I am at least going in the right direction.

Looking at other people, it's interesting to see how they become aware of their own needs and reliance on the Lord... how they come to value life and God and salvation. One gets cancer and faces chemotherapy. Another loses a child to sickness. Another faces financial ruin, or personal sickness, or massive stresses. In each case, they have choices. They can break under the strain, become bitter, and turn away from God... or turn to Him, find their inner strength, and become something better than they were.

I used to think I was an anomaly. I hadn't had any major trials like cancer or death or sickness. I had a pretty perfect life. And yet I had the ability to look inside myself and understand the power of the Atonement. Now I realize that even my ability to appreciate the gospel and its teachings came the normal way - burned into my soul through trials. It was this trial.

I know I will continue to face massive trials in life - things so big that they are literally and completely impossible to face on my own. Things so awful that just thinking about them summons utter hopelessness... But not if I have (and use) the ability to understand my feelings and my needs,

cancer patients alive, allows mourning parents to move on, and gives men and women like me the ability to live happy, fulfilled lives as members of the Church - no matter what happens to them. I look inside myself, honestly assess who I am, understand my weaknesses and my needs, and then turn to the Lord and follow His guidance. And as I follow Him, He teaches me more about who I am (and who I can become) than I could ever learn on my own.

“MODERATION” IN ALL THINGS

Whenever I talk to someone about changing their lives to become better, “moderation” almost indefinitely comes up. The phrase “moderation in all things” has become ubiquitous code for “I can do whatever I want and justify it because I don't do it too much and God doesn't want me to obsess with something this trivial anyway and it doesn't really matter and who are you to say that it's too much - everyone else does it, so it must be just fine. You make me uncomfortable just by thinking about it and God wants me to eat this sugar-and-lard-fried-in-oil-and-coated-with-sugar pastry so I can feel carnally satisfied, which equates to fun and happiness and satisfaction in life. Just chill out.”

The question of moderation came up when talking with people on my mission, trying to get them to stop smoking or drinking alcohol. It comes up trying to help people lose weight or develop exercise programs. It comes up when I try to help people understand the principles in *For the Strength of Youth*, or talk about prayer or scripture study. It comes up when I invite people to Institute or encourage them to attend Church activities or even attend the temple. And, more than anything, it comes up when I bring up the topic of healthy food and exercise, and try to explain that our bodies are temples of God (Would you use inferior materials to build a temple? How about in “moderation” - like, say, 5 out of 100 windows made of cheap plastic instead of imported glass?).

Here's my feelings on “moderation,” echoed by [Dallin H. Oaks](#):

“the Savior said that if we are “lukewarm,” he “will spew [us] out of [his] mouth” (Rev. 3:16). Moderation in all things is not a virtue, because it would seem to justify moderation in commitment. That is not moderation, but indifference. That kind of moderation runs counter to the divine commands to serve with all of our “heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2), to “seek ... earnestly the riches of eternity” (D&C 68:31), and to be “valiant in the testimony of Jesus” (D&C 76:79). Moderation is not the answer” (Ensign, Oct 1994).

I agree.

When the prophets have used moderation to talk about commitment to the gospel, it has always been about letting specific pieces of the gospel

eclipse your view of good things - insisting that you have to clean your house, hence you can't go to Church and you don't have time to read your scriptures. It's absurd to say that God wants you to lessen your resolve so that you can live a moderately sinful life, or eat garbage in moderation, or exercise moderation in acting on your carnal urges.

Here's a much better example - Alma 57 (emphasis added):

20 And as the remainder of our army were about to give way before the Lamanites, behold, those two thousand and sixty were firm and undaunted.

21 Yea, and **they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness**; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them

...

25 And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, **there was not one soul of them who did perish**; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.

26 And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, **because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.**

27 Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.

God doesn't ask for moderation in all things. He asks for absolute and unwavering commitment, unchanging resolve, and perfect obedience. He asks us to give up *all* our sins, overcome *all* our personal qualms, and

forsake *all* our fears. And, in return, He promises us all blessings. We will be preserved by his power and inherit all that He has.

Moderation isn't worth it. Hey - I have a hard life. I'm attracted to guys, deal with major issues, and I'm a sinner. I want to be exceptionally happy, live an amazingly fulfilled life, have an eternal family, and be exalted. So I make the commitment to live the gospel completely, and I know that God will help and support me. No moderation on either side. Why? I want the real deal - not just a blessing given to me in "moderation."

BEING DIFFERENT

I've always been different. It's like I have horns growing out of my forehead. Or a halo floating above me. Or both.

I don't really know how to explain the feeling of being different. I don't even know what it is that makes me different. Being smart, or talented, or having a strong testimony can't be that abnormal - right? And yet finding a group of people who understand me and where I feel like I fit in has been a fruitless search for most of my life.

It's not that I can't find people who love me. I have family, friends, tons of acquaintances and others in my life who would be willing to do anything for me. But understanding me... is a totally different thing. Everyone tells me that I'm different. Everyone. Without fail. Even the people who claim that "everyone is different" and "no one is normal" tell me that I'm an outlier. And among the people who love me and try to understand, I still feel like a stranger.

Here's an example that some of you may have experienced: A few days ago, in the middle of a conversation, someone asked me how I could stay morally clean when urges hit me - specifically, how I could date girls and stop at just kissing. If only he knew. I've never wanted to kiss a girl. Ever. I couldn't understand him. I also knew he wouldn't be able to understand why I had never wanted to kiss a girl, so I left out that part, recited part of "For the Strength of Youth," and talked about how I overcome temptations (not to kiss girls, but temptations nonetheless).

That type of thing happens to me in everything. I have unique viewpoints on calculus, on biology, on music, on religion, on politics, on social structures, on faith, and on everything else in the world. Taken one by one, I can find people who understand and hold the same beliefs. But combined together, I'm just crazy different. I'm an anomaly, an enigma, and an oxymoronic impossibility all rolled into one.

Being different is nice, to a point. It sometimes garners me attention. It means that people notice me instantly and, sometimes, I can make waves and effect lasting change. But being different also brings with it the curse

of never fitting in. Never feeling like I'm "one of the crowd" or feeling truly comfortable in a group of friends.

There is one place that I feel like someone understands me. It's in my prayers - whether at my bedside or over meals. The Lord knows me, perfectly, and knows who I was, who I am, and who I can someday become. My goal is to become like Him - and, from that perspective, it doesn't matter if I'm different from everyone else. I just need to follow the counsel of the prophet and the voice of the Spirit. There's nothing wrong with being different as long as I am changing, overcoming the difficulties of mortality, and redefining who I am to come closer to God.

Everyone tells me that being normal is overrated. I don't know. I've never been normal in anything. When I was little, I wanted to grow up to be normal. To have a normal job, live a normal life, and feel like I could fit in with normal people. For better or worse, I don't think it will ever happen. Maybe it's something I need to learn - just one of the facets of my mortality. Whatever the reason, I'll probably always, in every circumstance, among every group of people, be different.

PREPARING FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE

For whatever reason, my life is chaotic and turbulent whenever General Conference comes around. General Conference is in a week. And so my life is chaotic and turbulent. I'm more stressed than I can imagine. I have no idea what the future holds. And I move forward.

Amid the stress and the struggle of life, I'm anxious for the opportunity to listen to prophets speak to me... to change the course of my life once again. Each General Conference since I was 12, I've attended General Conference with questions in mind - questions that I need answered in my life. The answers always come, and they shape who I am until the next time the Lord gives me direction. I'm beginning to form the questions in my mind that I will take with me next week. How can I be a better missionary? How can I be a better friend? How can I live the gospel more fully in my life? (And the normal what will I be when/if I ever grow up?) I expect that (most of) the answers will come.

Simply put, I just take a question with me. I think of the thing that I need to know - the question that is burning inside of me - and I ask the question before I go, and then I listen for the answer. It's really simple. And every single time I have gone with a question, the Lord has helped me come closer to the answer. Sometimes He answers me outright, and it sounds as if the prophet or apostles are speaking directly to me. And sometimes, as I am listening, thoughts collect in my mind and help me better understand gospel principles that apply to my life.

I find that it's easier to hear answers when I'm prepared. I've been taking the time to read my scriptures every day, without fail. I pray each morning and each night. I attend the temple at least once a week. Hopefully, when Conference comes in seven days, I'll be prepared to hear the things I need to hear... to become a better person, to become a better friend and missionary, and to live a happier, more fulfilled life.

TAKING CARE OF MYSELF

In my fast today, I asked the Lord to help me be a better servant. To know what I could do to be more effective in helping people around me, fulfilling my calling, being a student of life and a better friend. I went to sleep last night exhausted, but convinced that the Lord would help me find the answer.

This morning I slept through my alarm.

I woke up to sunlight and knew I had missed the first of my meetings. A quick check of my phone revealed two things: 1 - It was definitely 8:10. 2 - I had somehow turned off the alarm in my sleep. Five minutes later I was out the door, dressed in a suit and tie, wondering if anyone would even still be there.

As I drove and shaved (electric razor - I'm not *that* crazy), the Lord had a candid conversation with me - one that had begun during my short morning prayer.

"Mormon Guy, you want to be a better servant, right?"

"Yeah. So I can be a better missionary and help the people around me."

"You need to take care of yourself, physically."

"But I don't have enough time. I don't have time to sleep right now - and people who need me are more important, right? I try to exercise and eat healthily, but it's hard. Things just chip away at my time. It's all I can do to stay spiritually strong. I read my scriptures every day, pray, and attend the temple. Where am I going to find more time?"

"You wanted the answer. You need to take care of yourself."

And then I realized why I had slept through my alarm.

I haven't been getting enough sleep lately. I don't have time to make healthy food. And I find myself working until 11:30 at night, then realizing that I never went to the gym and it just closed. It's time to reset my alarm clock - to re-prioritize my time.

The issue isn't just being able to accomplish everything in my life. In my mind, I still believe I'm Superman. The biggest issue is ensuring that I take

time for myself, along with giving away my time to everyone around me. Sleep, healthy food, exercise, and time to relax. When I take the time, I'm able to be more effective and accomplish more.

So I made the promise. I'll get eight hours of sleep each night. I'll eat a healthy breakfast and make food to take with me for lunch each day. I'll exercise six times a week. I'll take time each day to relax and unwind - time when I pull myself away from the demands of life and can simply think about who I am and who I want to be. I promised to take better care of myself, and, in return, the Lord promised to help me become a better servant, a better friend, and a better son.

SCRIPTURE POWER!

... keeps me safe from sin.

I love Primary songs.

The first time I heard the song "Scripture Power" was years after I had graduated from Primary. Someone had asked me to come help set up chairs in the chapel, and I overheard the children in my ward singing as they prepared for the Primary program a few days later. The words of the song were incredibly compelling and have stayed with me since then.

Because I want to be like the Savior and I can,
I'm reading His instructions, I'm following His plan.
Because I want the power His word will give to me,
I'm changing how I live; I'm changing what I'll be.

Scripture power! Keeps me safe from sin
Scripture power! It's the power to win
Scripture power! Every day I need
the power that I get each time I read.

I'll find the sword of truth in each scripture that I learn.
I'll take the shield of faith from these pages that I turn.
I'll wear each vital part of the armor of the Lord,
And fight my daily battles, and win a great reward.

Scripture power! Keeps me safe from sin
Scripture power! It's the power to win
Scripture power! Every day I need
the power that I get each time I read.

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In the last few months I've found greater meaning in my personal commitment to read the scriptures (especially the Book of Mormon) every single day without fail. And the strength it has given me is amazing. I feel uplifted, guided, and loved when I am reading them. And, somehow, I feel that what the prophets wrote thousands of years ago... was written for me, in my life - even the part of me that's attracted to guys. In the light of the scriptures, everything becomes possible. Yes, it's hard to live a faithful life, keep the hope that God will fulfill His promises to help me have an eternal family, and deal with constant issues each day... but it's possible. And, with the perspective of the scriptures, it's also possible to be happy while doing it.

I don't always find the time to read for half an hour, or even 20 minutes. But I find time to read, no matter what. If I get home and it's 1:30 in the morning, I take the time to read my scriptures. My secret? Every time the Lord reminds me to read my scriptures, I stop whatever I am doing. Every single time. No matter what. It doesn't matter if I am exhausted or already in bed or at work or whatever. I go read my scriptures. And the scriptures are a part of who I am.

I ask the Lord to help me remember, and He does. I take them with me in the morning and sometimes there is a lull in the frantic pace of my life - and I read under a tree or in my car. I get to the temple and there's a wait, so I read while waiting. It has become easier with time to find / make time to read.

It almost sounds odd that just reading the scriptures can bring happiness when life is hard. But that's what they do for me. They fill me with a sense of peace and hope - and the fear and anxiety that surround my trials disappear. They give me perspective, and open my mind to true revelation from God. Reading the scriptures, every single day, is worth it. The power that they bring is worth losing another 30 minutes of sleep, being late on homework (or sometimes late to work), or even missing part of a conversation with friends or family. Reading the scriptures each day is worth more than anything else I could be doing... Scripture Power - *every* day I need the power that I get each time I read.

MOMENTS OF PLENTY

There are times in my life when everything seems to be going right. I lose my ever-present stress, my attraction to guys seems to all but disappear, and life is amazing. The moments are sometimes short and sometimes long... but no matter how long they are or when they arrive, I feel peace, hope, happiness, and faith. I call them moments of plenty.

When Pharaoh had a dream in Egypt, the Lord instructed him to gather during the years of plenty to help his people thrive during the years of want. They gathered for seven years, building storage barns and undertaking an incredible effort to ensure that they would have enough during the years to come. When the famine came, they were ready... and also able to help other people affected by that famine.

The gospel follows the same principles. When I gather during the moments of plenty - recording my thoughts, taking time to recognize the Lord's hand in my life, and establishing positive habits - then living and thriving during the moments of want becomes possible. I have a store of memories, inspirational thoughts, promises, and blessings that I use to bless my life and the lives of those around me... and those memories help us survive whatever trials may be in store.

This evening I had a moment of plenty - a few hours where I forgot the stress of my everyday and simply enjoyed life, people, and living. I wanted to record it here. I know that life will work out, and that the Lord will bless me and grant me all the blessings I need to live with Him someday. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but tonight I am simply happy... living in a moment of plenty.

JUST A TOUCH OF HIS ROBE

There's a story in the New Testament I always thought I understood. A woman with an issue of blood spent her life and life's savings trying to find a way to be healed. She worked with doctors, physicians, and people from all over the world... each who willingly took her money, leaving her poorer and poorer. Finally she was left with nothing. And then she heard that Jesus was walking through the streets near her home. "If I can but touch the hem of his robes," she thought, "I will be healed." And so she covered herself, pushed through the crowd, and reached out to catch the edge of His robe. In that moment, her pain disappeared. The issue of blood stopped. Christ turned, and after speaking with His disciples, spoke to her. "Woman, be of good cheer. Thy faith hath made thee whole."

I had always thought that this scripture was for people with great physical trials - that their faith would have the power to heal them if they just had enough and would just show it. Later, I thought that it extended to all those who struggle with major difficulties and trials in life - a promise that He would someday heal us. But I now realize that Christ wasn't speaking about touching His robe or asking for a miracle in life. He was teaching her, and all those following, a lesson on faith.

The true miracle of this story didn't come when the woman touched His robe. And, while impressive, the true miracle was not when the issue of blood stopped. The true miracle was the change in her heart - a willingness to submit to the will of the Lord and faith that He would bless her no matter what happened. It came because she had kept her faith, through difficult times, when everyone else in the world told her it was hopeless. It came because, though she had been deemed "unclean" by her ailment for decades, she held fast to the principles she knew to be true. It happened because she had done everything possible and finally given her life to the Lord. She changed her perspective - from one of expecting that money and power could heal her... to placing her trust in the Lord. And the healing of her issue of blood was just a symbol of the greater, more lasting change that had happened within her heart.

I used to think that simply doing everything I could would help me. That I could do it on my own. Then I realized that I needed to rely on the Lord, and expected Him to take away my grief. Now, I turn to Him and willingly place my life in His hands.

I don't know what tomorrow brings. But I know that God loves me, that He is involved in my life, that I can be happy and fulfilled in this life, and that, someday, if I am faithful, I will inherit all the blessings He has promised me. If the Savior stood beside me tomorrow and I could reach out to touch His robe, I would. But, if not, the greater miracle has already happened in my life.

A LIGHT INSIDE THE TUNNEL

When I was younger, trying to understand my attraction to guys, I wondered if I would ever see a light at the end of the tunnel. The only things I could see were pain, isolation, depression, guilt, and fear. I prayed for help getting out - to speed my inevitably painful journey - and for help in seeing the end from the beginning.

As time went on, instead of only praying to be free, I turned to the Lord for help in overcoming my difficulties in life. I spoke with Him about my hopes and dreams. I pled with Him about my trials. I listened as He taught me sublime truths about eternity. I recognized the sum total of my life's circumstances and asked Him to help me become the person I was meant to be. And, slowly, as I looked at my surroundings in the tunnel of despair, I began to see light. But it wasn't a pinprick of light at the end, promising that deliverance would soon be nigh. It was a softly glowing light all around me - light *inside* the tunnel. Inside the tunnel? Aren't tunnels always dark? And yet, in my moments of deepest despair, I saw shards of gospel symbolism in my pain. In my moments of greatest temptation, scriptures came to my mind, and the names and faces of people who needed my help... who needed me to be worthy to give a Priesthood blessing. As time continued to go on, the light grew brighter, until it was able to show me the way, warning me of dips and trenches and chasms in the path.

I'm still in that tunnel. Living with my attraction and all its accompanying facets is still hard. It's a struggle that faces me almost every single day... and this tunnel may last for a very long time. But that's ok - because I can see the light. The light of faith, hope, peace, and love is here, inside the tunnel, beside me. And it's proof that the Lord of Hosts truly has descended below all things. In the everyday battle of my life, the Lord is walking, here inside the tunnel, at my side.

IN THE PRESENCES OF OTHERS

Sometimes being around people is exhausting. And sometimes it's amazing. Tonight was amazing. I talked with friends, laughed, and had a great time. And at the times when I felt like tired of talking, the times when I really just wanted to go home and go to sleep, I turned to another person and began a conversation... and that conversation gave me the strength to start another, and another.

Being an extrovert when, inside, I'm still an introvert at heart, is both draining and invigorating. It takes everything inside of me to stay at a social gathering – until I've begun a conversation. And once that happens, I feel at ease... until the conversation inevitably ends. And then I feel like I want to go home again.

But I don't go home. I stay, talk with more people, and have a great time. I meet new friends, teach others about the gospel, and find ways to bless the lives of the people around me. And then I come home, think about it, maybe write about it, and then finally go to sleep.

I think that there is great strength in social activities in life. Being with people – meeting them, lifting them, laughing with them, simply spending time with them – has a powerful influence on me. And when they are good people, my life is changed for the better... just by being in their presence.

THE 180TH SEMI-ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHURCH

I'm sitting here, listening as the Tabernacle Choir sings, "We Thank Thee, O God, For a Prophet"... and thinking how incredibly thankful *I* am for the gospel in my life, for the Prophet Joseph Smith, for a living prophet today.

I'm grateful for everything in my life. For the incredible trials, for the amazing heights, for the things that I can do, for the abilities I have to touch the lives of people around me. With the gospel in my life, I see a greater perspective. I find peace in living the principles of the gospel and receiving blessings from Heaven. I listen to the Spirit... and the Lord speaks peace and joy to my heart.

Ultimately, the greatest reason I love the gospel, and for which I'm thankful, is the pathway that has been given. The commandments that come with promised blessings... which blessings are what keep me alive from day to day.

Like Elder Holland in his talk, I am grateful for everything in this Church. Yes, we can do better. But I am grateful for the blessings I have seen, and the possibilities that the gospel creates for me.

...and love to obey Thy command.

PEACE

That's what I feel. I went to General Conference yesterday and, like every single time, it changed my life. I know that God loves me. I know that He is actively involved in my life. And I know that I am moving closer to Him.

Last night during Priesthood session I had an amazing realization. For most of my life, I wondered if there was something that, if the Lord asked me to do it, I wouldn't be willing... or something about which I would be afraid. For a long time, I was afraid that I wouldn't serve a mission - that there would be a massive world war that would preclude my service. Then I was afraid that I would never find someone to fall in love with... and never have a family. In both cases, I realized that the Lord would bless me. I put my faith in Him, and chose to believe that He would take care of me... and enable me to be happy and fulfill His work no matter what circumstances faced me in life.

My greatest fear, though, has always been my good name. It's the thing that I hold closer than anything else - the knowledge that people think highly of me. For years, as I honestly looked at what I would be willing to freely give up... giving up my good name and my influence on others was the one thing that tugged at the back of my mind. Maybe He would never ask me to do it. But what if the Lord asked me to do something that alienated me from everyone else - everyone I love?

As President Uchtdorf spoke about pride, I looked inside myself and asked the same question: if the Lord asked me to do anything, would I willingly and faithfully follow His promptings? And, for the first time in a long time, I can honestly say yes. Without fear. Without trepidation. Without wondering what would happen. Simply with the faith that He would take care of me and I will be blessed.

I can feel something stirring inside me - an awakening that has come in the years that have enabled me to be willing to do anything. I don't know what the Lord will have me do. I don't know what the future holds. But I do know that He will guide and bless me... that, no matter what the circumstance, I will be happy following His commands.

MORE THOUGHTS ON GENERAL CONFERENCE

I love the acoustics of the Tabernacle. And the hard benches. It makes it so much easier to hear the speakers and stay alert. I think I like it even better than sitting in the Conference Center itself - but maybe that's because I usually end up sitting on the sides anyway.

Either way, the inspiration I gained at General Conference was amazing, and already I am seeing a change in my life.

I went to conference wondering what to do with some of the pieces of my life. While I was there, a friend gave me some random, unsolicited advice. He had been driving down the street and felt strongly impressed to tell me to follow my dreams and do things that I love. The advice was well-timed, as today was easily one of the worse days in the last few weeks of my life. I'm in a rough situation right now, and I wondered whether I should stick it out through the pain or just leave. As I pondered the options in my mind, a third, better option came to mind. Try to fix the problem. ...and now the problem is that much closer to being fixed for me and the people who will follow in my footsteps.

I find that the Lord sees problems with a much broader perspective than I do. Where it may seem like an issue has only two solutions, He helps me think of a third. And His choice is almost always better. Where it seems like finding an answer is hopeless, He simply guides me in the direction I need to go. And when I feel like there's no reason to move forward, He lifts me and assures me that I am loved. Yeah, life is hard. And even following the guidance of the Lord, it's hard. It may even be harder. But it's worth it... because it changes my life every single day.

PRESIDENT PACKER'S TALK... FROM A (GAY) MORMON PERSPECTIVE

President Packer had only spoken for a few seconds before I knew there would be backlash. Everything he said was directly applicable to me... and to my brothers and sisters who live with same-sex attraction. As I listened to his talk, I was torn in two ways. I knew his message was true. But most members of the Church who live with same-sex attraction don't need fire and brimstone. They already know that acting on their temptations is wrong... and they respond much better to hope, love, and support in order to gain the faith to change. In the moment, I, like thousands of others, felt like President Packer was telling me I just hadn't tried hard enough. That I wasn't good enough. And while I knew from the Spirit that those were not his intentions, I could already guess how the rest of the world - who heard the talk without the guidance of the Spirit - would react.

The reaction was immediate and vehement, from all corners of the world and seemingly every walk of life. From the Church and without. From men, women, family members, and hundreds of others. Some simply disagreed with his statements; others wished for violence to befall him. Everyone seemed up in arms.

I just re-read President Packer's talk from General Conference. As I read, I noticed something interesting. President Packer was a professional teacher. His talks are meticulously formatted to have opening, supporting, and closing sections that build on one another. In recent years, he has meandered a bit, but there's still a format.

In his opening remarks, President Packer talks about the importance of the family, the powers of procreation, and foreshadows to the rest of his talk:

"To be entrusted with the power to create life carries with it the greatest of joys and dangerous temptations."

So obviously he's going to be talking about pornography, adultery, fornication, and homosexual relations. That's all covered in the dangerous

temptations. However, the main theme of his talk is pornography, as can be seen when he switches to the body of his talk with this statement:

"In our day the dreadful influence of pornography is like unto a plague sweeping across the world..."

then gives a number of other statements:

"The effect of this plague can be, unfortunately often is, spiritually fatal."

"Pornography will always repel the Spirit of Christ and will interrupt the communications between our Heavenly Father and His children and disrupt the tender relationship between husband and wife."

"The priesthood holds consummate power. It can protect you from the plague of pornography—and it is a plague—if you are succumbing to its influence."

Then came the phrase that ignited everything:

"Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and the unnatural. Not so. Why would our Heavenly Father do that to anyone? Remember, He is our Father."

Taking apart this statement in context gives it a bit more meaning. Simply living with same-sex attraction does not make you impure. Church doctrine is clear in that respect. So what did he mean by these "inborn tendencies toward the impure"? Aside from pornography, it is tendency and temptation to **act** on attractions outside of marriage. President Packer was not claiming that we could change homosexual attractions... he was simply stating that each of us has the power to choose to overcome or give in to temptation.

He then goes on to quote Paul to explain why he was so definite in his statement - "God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

He continues by explaining the Church's continuing position in moral politics:

"Regardless of the opposition, we are determined to stay on course. We will hold to the principles and laws and ordinances of the gospel."

And finishes his talk with this injunction:

"the simplest and most powerful prevention and cure for pornography, or any unclean act, is to ignore and avoid it. Delete from the mind any unworthy thought that tries to take root,"

President Packer gave a clear, direct, and concise talk on pornography and other sexual sins. I don't know if he realized that everything in his talk could also be applied to same-sex attraction... or how painful that application would be. But I know that his final statements were heartfelt and true:

"I promise that ahead of you is peace and happiness for you and your family."

"And I invoke the blessings of the Lord upon you who are struggling against this terrible plague, to find the healing that is available to us in the priesthood of the Lord."

As I read the talk again this evening, the Lord confirmed to me that I'm on the right path. I'm doing what I should be. I'm moving forward. And that is what matters.

Ultimately, as I go through life, it is my responsibility to listen with both my ears and my heart - to know when the Lord is speaking to me - and to follow Him. Then President Packer's promise will come true in my life. I will find peace and happiness... and the strength that comes through Christ the Lord.

THANKS FOR PAYING IT FORWARD

Wow. Yesterday there were 1200 new visitors to (Gay) Mormon Guy. Welcome. And thank you. I'll write today and answer every comment, but I wanted to say thank you to everyone who is doing what I can't - posting on facebook, writing on other blogs, or simply sharing the message with people outside of my influence.

This blog is my way of paying it forward - sharing the truth and blessings God has given to me. I've wondered how I could touch more lives... how I could take the message and get it to the people who need to hear it... and I'm grateful that each of you is willing to help. May the Lord bless you and inspire you as you pay it forward... as you reach out and share the light of the gospel with the world.

OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON PRESIDENT PACKER'S EDITS

I learned something interesting last night.

Scott Trotter, an official spokesman for the Church, commented on the edits that were made to President Packer's talk:

"The Monday following every general conference, each speaker has the opportunity to make any edits necessary to clarify differences between what was written and what was delivered or to clarify the speaker's intent. President Packer has simply clarified his intent."

I knew that the General Authorities did that for talks given in other places before publication, but I wasn't sure if the same principle applied to General Conference. Looks like it does, and that probably explains why there are a number of times I remember hearing something in Conference that didn't show up word-for-word in the transcripts. Hence the importance of "go home and re-read the talks from Conference" - it has a dual meaning. Re-read them so that you remember the principles taught, and re-read them so that you more clearly understand the intent of the speakers.

A VOICE OF FAITH

Thousands of people protested outside the Church Office Building Thursday evening. I wasn't there. But I understand the pain they feel and their desire to be loved. I understand because I've felt the same way. In response to their silent protest, I share my voice - a voice of faith.

God is my Father. He loves me. Before I was born on this Earth, I lived in His presence.

As my Father, God wanted me to be happy. He created a plan where I could come to Earth and learn to apply eternal principles that would bring me happiness and enable me to grow and return to His presence.

I was different from everyone else in Heaven. But, then again, everyone was different. Each of us had different needs, different talents, different areas that needed refinement in order to gain true happiness. And so God created unique experiences for each of us, and for me - the perfect blend of talents, trials, and temptations to motivate me to change and become the person He saw in me.

I came to Earth without the knowledge of my Father, but He promised me that He would be at my side. He gave His power to prophets, and through the power of the Priesthood I can receive eternal blessings, hear the will of the Lord, and make binding eternal covenants with God. But, perhaps even more important, I can have the Holy Spirit at my side wherever I go, guiding me and helping me to navigate my unique experience in life.

Life is hard. I've felt totally and completely alone, and sometimes wondered if maybe the Lord gave me something that was too hard to bear. There have been times when I've been in excruciating pain, alone, depressed, and betrayed. I curled up in a ball and wanted to die. And yet God was still there. Through my tears, I could see His hand and hear His voice. "I love you. I'm here. You're on the right path." When I prayed and followed His counsel, He taught me eternal principles. Principles that, when applied, enabled me to be stronger than the temptations and trials around me... and gave me the faith to move forward.

I know that, no matter what happens to me in life, I can be happy. I can live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and God will bless me. He will strengthen me, and He will change me into the man He saw before I ever came into this life. Will it be hard? Of course it will. Painful? Incredibly. But the promise that accompanies those whose diligent faith leads them to obey His commandments and turn to Him for guidance is clear. "For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end, they are received into Heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness."

I know this is true. More, I choose to believe it, and to apply it in my life. To the testimony of the prophets and all who testify of Christ, I add my voice of faith.

BUT IF NOT...

In the April General Conference of 2004, I heard Dennis E. Simmons of the Seventy give a talk titled, “But If Not...” In his talk, he shared the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego before the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar. When given the choice to bow down before the king’s idols or be cast into the furnace, they responded with a voice of true faith:

“If it be so [that you cast us into the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

Faced with one of the greatest trials of their lives, these men knew that God had the power to deliver them. They believed He would. But even if He didn’t – if the miracle never happened – they would rather be burned alive than forsake their faith.

In my life, I’ve often wondered about this question. I know that God has the ability to do anything. He has the power to help me fall in love with a girl, be happily married, and raise a family. And I truly believe that He will. But what happens if it *doesn’t* happen? What if I am incredibly righteous, date regularly, do everything I should... and yet the road to life opens out before me and I realize that I am standing in the furnace – that marriage and raising a family will never be an option in this life?

For a long time, I wasn’t willing to think of that possibility. The Lord would save me... and any other thought was a lack of faith. Now I realize that true faith, as shown by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, is more than simply believing that God will grant an instant miracle when I reach a level of righteousness... so much more.

I realize that I may live with same-sex attraction for the rest of my life. I may never have a family in mortality. The miracles I want may never come. But I know that, whatever happens, God will take care of me. Things will turn out in the end. With that knowledge, I am committed to live according to the light of the gospel no matter what happens in my life. True faith is not contingent on results. True faith is more than just believing that God can and will empower and deliver us in life. It is acting on that belief whether or not He does.

OFFICIAL CHURCH STATEMENT: GOODWILL CAN PREVAIL

For those interested: the Church recently posted a YouTube video, written transcript, and media-quality .mov and .mp3 clips, each expounding Church doctrine on same-sex attraction and asking people all over the world to reach out with love to those around them.

Here's the link:

<http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/article/church-mormon-responds-to-human-rights-campaign-petition-same-sex-attraction>

I am so grateful to be alive today.

HOW CAN I HELP MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

As I go through each day, I pass people on the street. I see them all around me. People. Brothers and sisters. I didn't always think about people. But as I have seen the Atonement take effect in my own life, I've come to realize the truth in an insight given by the prophet Joseph Smith:

"A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race" (History of the Church, 4:227).

Many people have asked me, "How can I support a friend or loved one who struggles with same-sex attraction?" In His last quiet conversation with Peter, Christ gave the formula that I now try to follow in my life:

"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

The first piece is **Preparation**. Each day, I pray for help so that I can be a better person. So that I can be converted, have the Spirit with, me and make a difference wherever I go. I read the scriptures every day without fail. And I ask for the opportunity to help others, and the courage to act on those opportunities. When I am prepared, the Lord is able to inspire me to know what to do and what to say (and how to say it)... and I am more in tune with the Spirit so that I can see the needs of others.

The next piece is **Action**. When the opportunity comes to do something good, I do it. Whether or not the Spirit inspires me. In anything. The Lord intends that I become more like Him – and so the question I ask myself is not "is this prompting to do good *from* God?" – it is "is this prompting to do good *of* God?" Whether or not it is from God doesn't really matter (see D&C 58:27, Moroni 7:16).

I don't have a lot of time, so I choose actions that will affect the people around me. I could write a personal letter to the prophet, telling him that I support the things he says... but that doesn't make the world a better place. Instead, I could send a letter to a high school teacher thanking her for her example. Or call a distant relative and just talk. Or simply spend more time with my family and friends. Or share an inspiring message with family and friends. I choose actions that will bless the lives of others, and usually that means that I reach out to people. To me, people are more important than projects or programs. Always.

The third piece is **Love**. The motivation for everything I do *should* be love. Sometimes it's because I'm tired, or hungry, or whatever else. But, at the heart of helping others, is love. Using that love to shape my words and actions enables me to bring the Spirit into difficult conversations... and to love people unconditionally. My goal is to love all men, no matter what choices they make.

The last piece is **Sharing the gospel**. True love inspires me to help others find happiness. I have seen so many blessings from the light of the gospel... and so I share my testimony and reach out to the world. It takes courage to share the gospel, especially when there is a chance it could be rejected or there's a lot of pain involved, but I know that following its light will bring blessings and happiness. Whatever it costs, it's worth it. There are lots of ways to share. Sometimes I blog. Sometimes I just talk with a friend, face-to-face. And sometimes I post on Facebook, Twitter, and every other social network known to man.

Together, the pieces of supporting a friend or loved one who is struggling make the word **PALS**... Because the way that I support someone who is struggling... is just to be a friend. If I am true to my principles, do good for others, love others unconditionally, and share the good news of the gospel, I can help my family, friends, and strangers... no matter what their trials in life.

THE MANNER OF HAPPINESS

Years ago, when I struggled with depression, I wondered if I would ever be happy. If I would ever feel content or at peace with my decisions and choices in life. I've always had everything the world could ever want – influence, intelligence, talent, money, honor, and fun – and yet none of those, when weighed in the balance, were worth anything at all.

And then I realized that I was looking in the wrong place.

In 2 Nephi 5:27, Nephi summarizes ten years of life, including wars with his brothers, thus:

“And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.”

In Alma 50:23, in the midst of more wars between Nephites and Lamanites, there is a similar statement:

“But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni.”

And finally, in 4 Nephi 1:16, after the people lost everything they had ever known:

“...surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.”

The people in these scriptures had nothing. Some had lost their families, others their friends; most lived in abject poverty. They had seen gruesome wars that changed their lives forever. And yet, somehow, they had unlocked the greatest treasure of eternity. They had found true happiness.

When I was struggling to see the good things in life, I often listed the good things that God had done for me. I counted my blessings, outlined the talents and gifts He had given me, and named the people who loved me and supported me. I tried to see difficult things in life with an optimistic spin.

But, as time has progressed, I've realized that true happiness in life doesn't come from blessings, talents, gifts, or even people. I could have all those things and feel awful. True happiness is linked to my knowledge of God and my actions in life.

“And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41).

Today, my life is amazing. I've learned the truth about happiness – that it's based on making good decisions in life. Today I'm truly, sincerely, and completely happy.

My life is not amazing due to the things I am given by circumstance or others. Life is amazing because of what I *do* with what I get. Because of how I think and see the world. Because of the changes I have made. Because of who I am.

FINDING THE ONE

“If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray” (Matthew 18:12-13).

Over the last few days I’ve prayed about the topics I should address here. This blog, which was once a quiet place where each comment could expect a personal reply, has become a source of knowledge for a far broader audience than I ever imagined. The change is welcome, as my ability to make a difference in the world has grown... but I wonder. How can I meet the needs of a changing audience and also ensure that (Gay) Mormon Guy remains what it was intended to be – a haven where men and women who share my story can feel the Spirit and hope in their hearts?

There are hundreds of comments on my blog right now and a hundred more that need to be moderated or edited and reposted. Most of them are from good people who want to live better lives and understand their fellow men. And then, hidden amid the showers of praise, are the stories of men and women who have felt the Spirit here, changed, and now strive to live according to the principles they know to be true. The man who was struggling with same-sex attraction and, in his moment of need, found an ad posted in the personals section of Craigslist. The woman who had stopped attending church and was going to remove her name from the records. The man who was going to commit suicide. The wife who read each post, then learned the next day that her husband lived with same-sex attraction. These are the people for whom I write... the men and women who need the message most.

The Good Shepherd spent His time ministering to the people around Him. I can post a message of faith each day, but there are billions of people in the world who need the gospel. Even when I spend hours searching for people who need this message, my efforts are a drop in the bucket.

And so I’m asking for your help. Will you take the time, each time you read here, to share your testimony with someone who might need your

help? To seek out someone who is looking for the truth? To share the light and knowledge that the gospel has brought into your life? As you read, ask the Lord for help in identifying people who are searching for light, and then follow the promptings that the Spirit gives.

I guess another reason why I am asking is because sharing my own testimony is the greatest thing I've ever done to overcome my trials in life. I know that, if I am struggling in life, sharing the gospel will help me no matter what trials I face. When I share the truth, the Lord blesses me. I can touch a brother's life and help him come closer to Christ. I can find the one and rejoice with him. And together, we will walk the path to return to the fold.

LIKENING THE TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHETS... TO ME

I've been looking at my life recently, wondering how I could come closer to Christ. Now don't get me wrong. I love my relationship with God. But part of that relationship is always trying to get better – never being willing to be complacent about anything. (Wow. I feel another blog post coming. Complacency...)

But back to the subject. My days are pretty normal. I wake up, maybe post comments here, work out, leave for the day, then come back between 4 – 5:30 to post some more comments, write a blog entry, maybe go on a date, read my scriptures, talk with family, do something in the evening, post the last set of comments and maybe write some replies, and go to sleep. Not a very majestic lifestyle.

It's not that I want to do more – I mean, my life is just as busy as everyone else's. I just want to find ways to do better things in life. For example – I really want to listen to all of General Conference a few more times. I watched President Packer's talk again a few nights ago with a friend who hadn't seen it, and I was amazed at how many things I had missed the first dozen times I watched, read, and listened to it. His message was truly inspired, full of hope and faith, and easily related to tons of trials in life. But I just haven't made the time yet. I haven't gotten around to putting it on something to take with me to the gym. And I don't keep a set of headphones that I could use throughout the day to listen.

So I've decided. If I want to be able to liken the teachings of the prophets to my life, I need to have them on my mind and in my ears. It's like the commitment to read the scriptures every day, without fail. I'll just make the effort and the Lord will help me to find a way to keep it. I'll load General Conference on to everything I have and take it with me throughout the day to listen whenever I have down time.

I have so many resources to turn to in life. So many things that the Lord has given me to help me grow and become a better person. So many sources of inspiration. I'm sure I can trade a few minutes of web-surfing or idle banter each day to listen to a prophet. When I do, I know the Lord

will help me to find greater faith and understanding... by likening his words unto me.

LIVING ON BORROWED LIGHT

I love understanding the world around me and applying knowledge to life. I've studied psychology, philosophy, human biology, natural sciences, history, languages, and everything else that lends itself to a humanities background. Most of the time, the truth I learn in the secular sphere interfaces pretty well with what the gospel teaches. Sometimes, though, popular theories and social pressures seem to contradict what I know to be true... or at least what I thought was true. It's moments like these – breaking down the mental models and shattering the knowledge schemas – that enable me to better understand who I am, where my loyalty lies, and when faced with important truths from differing sources, what I really, *really*, choose to believe.

I think the first time it happened was when I learned that dinosaurs lived millions of years ago. I couldn't have been very old, but I still knew that the scriptures taught that, until after the Fall, there was no death or imperfection on the Earth. The Earth fell for the sake of Adam – to become a place where he could grow and learn – so where did dinosaurs fit in? The thought of Adam and Eve living millions of years ago, with dinosaurs, seemed a bit absurd. I wondered what the explanation was for the discord in logic.

After reading whatever was written on the subject, and thinking that most of the theories or conjecture from both sides was also a bit absurd, I made the decision that it didn't really matter to me. It still doesn't. Where dinosaurs fit in doesn't affect how I live my life each day or the choices I make, so I can wait to sort out the pieces there.

But there are some things that *do* matter... topics that are a part of me and change my entire outlook on life. Same-sex attraction, and how it plays a role in my life and God's plan for me, is one of those.

Helaman 3:33-35:

“And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the judges there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church—*not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God—*

And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more

humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction.

Nevertheless they [the faithful] did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, *which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God*" (emphasis added).

There are people on both sides of the discussion who could definitely show more love. But, regardless of outside influences, as a member of the Church who lives with same-sex attraction I have to choose between listening to my heart... and listening to my soul. Some psychological authorities say that happiness only comes through "following who you are," "accepting yourself," and "not living a lie." Other voices in the community say that someday the Church will change its doctrines. With so many clamoring for attention, and with an issue so close to heart, simply relying on the words, or even faith, of others doesn't work. I have to turn to God and understand it for myself.

I've prayed to know the truth, and God heard and answered my prayer. And, from that prayer, I can bear testimony that God lives and that He loves us. Because He loves us, He gives us commandments to help us to be happy. As I found myself with my back against the wall, I had two choices: follow the world, or turn to God, put my faith in Him, and yield my heart to His teachings. In a time like this, I can't live on borrowed light. No one can.

...AND NOT TO BE ACTED UPON

I got this comment last night and it has been making me think. I thought that I would just share my thoughts, inline.

Hey, I have been reading your posts and I thought you could help me with problems I am having. I hope you read all of this, I have tried to put my heart and soul into it. Also, if anything here is offensive to you, i am not deliberately trying to do so.

I grew up in a strong and stable Mormon family. All my life I have had anxiety issues and depression issues. I realized early on that I was attracted to guys. I always was taught that it was wrong and evil, so I denied it and covered it up. my teenage years were full of depression, I didnt like myself, i thought that God didnt like me either. I still dont know if he does.

I spent a long time wondering about that. It seemed like a dichotomy - if God really loved me, why would He curse me? Had I done something horribly wrong to merit suffering and feeling so incredibly alone? I don't know all the answers, but I do know one thing: no matter who you are or what has happened in your life, God loves you.

In my darkest moments, when im curled up in the shower hyperventilating (i have severe panic attacks) i cant say that i felt the holy ghost comforting me. I can also relate to your being depressed and wanting to commit suicide, but not going through with it because it was also wrong.

I have many problems with the church, some of them being about church culture and how everything is run, but i want to get your perspective and ideas on what it means to be gay and mormon, specifically in my situation.

I will be very quick to point out that the Church is different from church culture. The Church is the power of the Priesthood, the blessings of the temple, the scriptures, the gift of the Holy Ghost, personal relationships with God. Church culture is everything else, and is created by the people who profess to be a part of the Church. It even happened in the Book of Mormon. Either way, the Church is not the people, nor the people the Church.

One of my issues is one of shame. I know that if i went into my sacrament meeting and told everyone there that i was attracted to other guys, i would be whispered about in the halls of the meeting house and that i would be called into the bishops office. I would probably also hear from my parents (i am away at an lds school) resulting in long arguments and probably a disowning.

Dont you think that due to the social atmosphere of the church and the taboo that the church sets on "same sex attraction" is what leads to teen suicides?

I was a teenager, too. And while the pain of isolation, loneliness, and feeling worthless and taboo can all be factors, we can only judge our personal actions - not the intents or actions of others. I can only tell my own experience. When I struggled most, it wasn't because I felt unloved. Love is preached from the pulpit every day in the Church. The reason I struggled was because I hadn't yet learned to turn to God for my support... and because I hadn't found that support and understanding anywhere else. If someone had written a blog like this and I had read it, it may have changed my life. Hence why I'm writing now. But I didn't take my life as a teen... and it was the doctrines of the Church and the Plan of Salvation that kept me safe. Those same doctrines enabled me to counsel a dozen friends who had decided to end their lives... and, thankfully, help them come closer to Christ and regain a desire to live.

Dont you think that church members should show more respect and love to others, in following with jesus' teachings?

Of course I do. So do the Brethren. And every single priesthood leader or parent in the Church. Anyone who claims that imperfect Saints should be complacent, saying, "All is well in Zion, yea, Zion prospereth..." can read the Book of Mormon for perspective on that part of the pride cycle. And so we should do that. At the same time, our actions shouldn't be based on the choices of others. If everyone in the Church went apostate, should that influence my testimony or my actions? What if people in the Church go apostate... and stay inside the Church? What if they make mistakes or grievous errors or purposeful sins? Ultimately, my choices and my actions and my destiny is my own... not someone else's to decide.

I know that the common excuse is that "the church is perfect, but the members aren't" but i think by now that is kind of a cop-out. I think that if more of the church was geared to teach kindness and love and respect that there would be more understanding and dialogue on these issues, instead of resulting in people becoming inactive or running away or killing one's self.

The focus on repenting is not "them." It is me. Talking about others and how they should improve doesn't ever actually improve the situation. Yes, the world is full of sinners. But I can't repent for someone else or change his heart. I can only change my own heart, and reach out to touch the people within my circle of influence. If I am more willing to be kind, show love, and respect, then I can make a difference, and inspire others to make a difference... and from that, change the world. The scriptures talk about acting, and not being acted upon. As much effort and pain and whatever else it requires, I take responsibility for my life, my actions, and my destiny.

I know that in my case, whenever confronted with questions about why i hang out with girls a lot but never date any of them or why i would rather watch "what not to wear", i would always make up excuses. I would always avoid and kick up dust to end the conversation asap. I wish that i could tell them, but i know that if i do that they will never look at me the same again. i know that my mother takes a very strong stance on homosexuality (a very negative stance) and i have had a friend kicked out of her house because she told her parents.

Another issue i have is that many members think that they have a monopoly on goodness. I hate how when members that i know express disgust, hatred, pity or have a feeling of superiority when they see people of other cultures or of different faiths. Shouldnt we be a self actualized church? shouldnt we, in about 180 years of "progress" have learned that hate and fear and intolerance are unacceptable?

I used to love people less because they didn't love people as much or as freely as I did. Then I realized how incredibly ironic my feelings were. I was judging the people around me because they were judging others, and refusing to tolerate them because they were intolerant. That sounds like circular logic. I looked inside myself and realized that I, like they, needed to simply love people - even the people who didn't love me or tolerate me and who judged me without context - and help them to make good decisions. But, no matter what choices others eventually made, I still needed to

love them. The Church is made of millions of people who are constantly changing. While the Church has lived 180 years, none of its members has, and so every generation has to learn the same principles. The best way to teach them... is to be an example... to love them and make a difference one person at a time.

In the early years of the church we were on the receiving end of hate and fear and intolerance. Shouldnt we have learned from the past by now? my mother always tells me that my ancestors were lynched and murdered for their beliefs, and now we are doing the same to others.

it brings me to tears thinking about all the other people that have gone through what you and i have gone through. i wish that every time i was in the pit of despair (so to speak) that i could feel the spirit comforting me. i wish that living on my parents borrowed light had ignited a fire in me. i wish that i could share my situation with more people, without judgement and looks of disgust.

I cant see the way forward. I dont know what i want. I dont know what i should do.

Please help

Sincerely,

lost

The fire is still within you, brother. It's within each of us. You light the fire by doing the simple things. Reading the scriptures. Praying to God each day. Keeping the commandments. Showing love to others. And sharing the light that you've been given.

You've already begun sharing your story with the world. But your story doesn't have to ostracize you. It's the testimony that you share in Sacrament meeting, telling about your personal relationship with God. It's doing your home teaching and helping someone feel the power of the Spirit. And, as time goes on, the Lord will enable you to touch the lives of the people who need you, sometimes without your even knowing.

The way that I moved forward was by turning to God. I wish I could

answer all your questions, solve all your problems, and fight all your fears, brother. But there is One who can, and who is there to help you live each passing day, no matter what the people around you do or say. Know that I am praying for you.

Mormon Guy

I HOPE THEY CALL ME ON A(NOTHER) MISSION...

I'd go in a heartbeat.

I thought I'd reply to two suggestions at once - (1) tell about my own mission, (2) should guys who are attracted to other guys serve a full-time mission?

My mission was amazing. I served in the best mission in the world. Really. And of my slew of companions, some continue to be friends to this day. Many of my areas were renowned for their people – and notorious for a lack of the traditional markers of ‘success’... but I was definitely an outlier in that respect. With the Lord, my companions and I found people who wanted to learn about the gospel and make covenants everywhere we went.

Serving a full-time mission allowed me to practice gospel habits and skills in a structured environment. It's like an apprenticeship program for becoming a teacher in the Church and a friend to neighbors and acquaintances. Everything I practiced in the mission field I can continue to use today. Following a schedule. Studying the gospel with people in mind. Praying for others, by name. Praying for miracles and having the faith to act on their happening. Talking with everyone and helping them become better people. Serving. Communicating with family and friends regularly. Keeping a journal. Helping people apply the gospel in their lives to face trials and temptations. Listening to the Spirit. Learning to love others, including companions, no matter what choices they make – seeing others as sons and daughters of God.

I am not exaggerating when I say that I think that serving a mission is *the best thing any worthy, able young man can do. And that he should do it.* The Church agrees. Specifically on serving missions, you can find this statement:

“...merely having inclinations does not disqualify one for any aspect of Church participation or membership... In this life, such things as service in the Church, including missionary service, all of this is available to anyone who is true to covenants and commandments” (<http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/official-statement/same-gender-attraction>).

I know, for a fact, that dozens of young men come into the MTC wondering if their inclinations bar them from the blessing of serving a mission. Others never submit their papers and feel the same burden.

Do we bar missionaries who suffered child abuse from serving? How about those who have lost family members? Do we ask those who were converts to the Church and have amazing stories of success to stay at home?

The greatest missionaries in the Church are those who understand the power of the Atonement in their lives, who have experienced the healing and comfort that comes from having a personal relationship with God, who have seen the blessings of living righteously in the face of temptation and trial. If you are worthy and able, serve a mission.

The mission didn't make my trials disappear. But the habits I developed brought me closer to God and gave me strength to face the trials that came after my mission and the years since... and in the years since I've had hundreds of missionary experiences that rival and surpass the experiences I had on my mission.

I was never released from the calling of being an elder in the Church... only reassigned to serve in a new capacity. And as a member, my ability to share the gospel only increases with my understanding and ability. The title of this post is "I Hope They Call Me On A(nother) Mission." And I guess, when I look at the people I can serve in the world, He already has.

WHEN DAYS ARE ROUGH

Usually I'm incredibly optimistic. On most days people around me - family, friends, and even total strangers - can tell that I'm in love with life. But there is opposition in all things... and today was definitely proof of that.

It started out with major mistakes I made on projects over the last few days and the repercussions those mistakes are having on my life. It was amplified during multiple discussions throughout the day... which each brought up the question as to whether my current pathway is really the right fit for me and everyone else involved. Other people in my life decided that today was a good day to list all the things they didn't like about me, some suggesting (all-too-simplistic) methods to overcome massive obstacles in my life. And then I logged on here and found a comment from a guy who lives with SSA that read:

You are a fraud. I will not waste one more moment of my time reading anything you write.

I think I want to put my head in a paper bag and go to sleep.

I don't have any idea what tomorrow will bring in my life. Probably more frustration, anxiety, and pain. But, as much as I'd like to wallow in self-pity, there's something inside me that is, right now as I write this, trying to help me see a bigger perspective. Isn't *this* what life is all about? The Lord puts me in difficult circumstances so that I can learn and grow and someday rise above the things that currently pull me down. He gives me the strength and perspective to live through it one day at a time. Someday, I'll look back on the frustration I live with right now and think, "Mormon Guy, wasn't that an amazing learning experience? Would you trade the things you learned in life for anything in the world?"

Looking back right now... on the things that I've learned from the trials of yesterday and years past... I wouldn't trade the lessons I've learned for anything in the world. Somehow, God knew me well enough to create a life uniquely for me. From the talents He gave me to the trials I face, everything is custom to me. He knew what experiences I needed to have the chance to grow and develop into the man He sees in me. I guess, from that perspective then, today wasn't such an awful day after

all. Yeah, a few minutes ago I felt terrible. But while sitting here I've felt the simple truth that God loves me. I'm going in the right direction. The Lord is involved in every intricate aspect of my life. He wants me to talk with Him - to learn from Him - and to keep moving forward. ...and that's enough. When days are rough and the future is uncertain, I can stick my head in a bag or press forward. It's my choice. I don't know if tomorrow will be better, but no matter what happens, I am still in control of my destiny. The future is as bright as my faith.

ANOTHER (NOT-SO-HIDDEN) WEAKNESS

I'm definitely not perfect. Far, far, far from it. All of you can probably tell. And any of you who may meet me in real life will know it for sure. But I'm trying. And hopefully I'm getting better.

Same-sex attraction isn't the only major issue that I battle on a daily basis. In fact, for most of the day in most of my life it doesn't even occur to me. It doesn't put stumbling blocks in my ability to create meaningful relationships with acquaintances or friends and it doesn't color how other people think of me. And, in most cases, it (along with everything else that came with it) helps when I try to empathize with others. When I look at my daily struggle, in most instances, being attracted to guys definitely takes a sideline role to other, more pressing factors.

The biggest weakness I have was elaborated by President Uchtdorf in General Conference - on his recap of the famous talk, "Beware of Pride." ...and it's something that I'm working on. I loved his talk, and wrote dozens of things that I need to implement in my life. But it's a constant struggle... and I often wonder if I am totally losing the battle.

Every day I feel like I've been overly blessed. I look at the perspective that the gospel has given me, my family, friends, and opportunities in life, and I think that life is wonderful. But alone, of myself... without God to stand by me? I would be nothing. Really. All my blessings come from God. He is the One who saves me and lifts me up. And the message I share here isn't really mine, but His. Sometimes I'm not very good at communicating that. I'm still learning how to share it in a way that everyone else can understand.

The reason why I choose this subject is because every recent negative comment has been based on the commenter feeling that something in my blog was arrogant or proud. Mentioning that my companions and I were successful in the mission. Talking about my ability to overcome weaknesses. Inviting people to share their own success stories.

One commenter was right when he mentioned that, of all the comments, the negative ones stick most. I don't think that is a bad thing - negative comments always contain something worthwhile. They're always sincere, and heartfelt from people who read a post and truly felt the way they did...

and reading them and praying for guidance helps me to see the areas where I can improve.

So I'd like to apologize. When I say anything at all that seems proud or arrogant or whatever, please tell me. I'll probably change it, and your comments will help me be a better person. I'm sorry for anything I've written that displays any of those feelings. And for those of you I've turned away, I hope that I can regain your trust.

HARD WORK

There is something incredibly appealing about hard work. The kind that makes me sweat and my muscles burn and my breath run shallow. And it's more than just endorphins or feeling a rush of adrenaline. It's a spiritual feeling that I've done something well.

This week definitely entailed hard work. I have blisters on my hands and my body is incredibly sore. I sleep like a rock. And yet, at the same time, I feel more enabled than anything. Right now, I feel like I could do anything. Maybe that's the power of hard work - it empowers me to do and accomplish more in my life.

Hard work isn't restricted to digging postholes or laying pipe, though... everything in life is symbolic. And if I look at the sheer effort required in physical labor, it makes me suddenly cognizant of the amount of effort that it could take... or *should* take to develop a personal relationship with God, or to receive answers to prayers, or to accurately speak or write with the Spirit. If it will take a long time and a lot of effort to develop that relationship, am I willing to make the spiritual effort?

This afternoon I was sitting in Sacrament meeting, thinking about my life. Wondering about how I could improve and what I need to do better. Each Sunday, as the Sacrament is passed, I bow my head and pray for each of you... and for the men and women in the world who desperately need the gospel and don't know how or where to find it. The people who are in excruciating pain inside... and have no one in the world to heal their wounds. For the men and women who live, like I once did, wondering how their own trials and struggles fit into the Plan that God has for them. Today I got an answer. I felt an incredible wave of love wash over me, and heard the Spirit speak to me, simultaneously hearing the words that were given to Enos and Moroni in their similar prayers:

"I will bless them. I will not leave them alone... because they are mine. I will protect them and teach them as I have taught you... because I love them as I love you... and because they are mine."

With tears streaming down my face, I realized that, at least in part, I am coming closer to the Lord. I'm finally turning to Him for guidance and trying, truly to accomplish His will. And I've finally laid everything before

Him - my sins, my fears, my pride (still working on it), and my inhibitions. The first speaker got up and my conversation with the Lord continued:

"Welcome back, Mormon Guy. You're finally fully on the path - both feet moving forward."

"Yeah. I've taught people about this feeling for years. But how many years did it take *me* to reach this understanding? I'm just getting there now? To be able to say that I honestly and truly follow God and that He is guiding my course? So many years... and yet, somehow, He was always there, waiting for me."

"I am always waiting. My hand is always outstretched."

I know that God lives. That He sent His Son to live, die, and live again for me. That the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is the true Church of Christ here on the earth today... and that if I am willing to put in the effort, I can make it in this life. It will be hard work. It will be the hardest thing I will ever do - much harder than any other alternative. And it will take my entire life. But He is always waiting. And I will be happy, successful, and receive all the blessings that God has promised me... if I choose to receive them... by my actions, hard work, and my faith.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Some questions from the Topic Suggestion page, with a few of my answers: (probably a recurring post as more suggestions filter through)

Are you single?

Yes. I'm not even in a serious relationship with anyone, so I'm even single in that sense. But being single doesn't mean I attend a single's ward. Or that I don't.

What types of things do you do to content yourself when there are VERY few friends and activities to do?

I used to rely on other people to structure my life for me - to schedule activities and reach out and be my friend. Then I realized that everyone else was doing exactly the same thing - waiting for others to take the initiative. Now I try to take it on my own, and find people who are passionate to help me make things happen. It means that I'm almost never without friends or something to do.

But sometimes it does happen... and then I go to the temple or read the scriptures or write for hours on end. Or work out for 6 hours straight. Something worthwhile and intense.

Are the other members of your congregation aware of your feeling and intentions in the future?

Unless the Lord Himself has told them, no.

How do you feel when comments from other bro's and sis let you know that they suspect gays of recruiting their children or stalking them?

This world is not a safe place for raising a family, no matter who you are or where you live. I would rather have parents in the Church have a overly heightened sense of awareness about the circumstances around their

children than to be on the sidelines or apathetic. If *anyone* were stalking my family or friends, I would be concerned.

Now, there is a difference. Assuming that spending time with people = stalking or recruiting is a long shot. But, at the same time, who am I to judge them for judging others? I would be doing the exact same thing I can't stand in their conduct. My code is to enable people to see the good side in all things, and to think the best of others. Most of the time, that focus can change their views and help them much better than any argument or presentation of facts.

When did you first realize you were attracted to men?

That's a complicated question, if you've read my very first post. In retrospect, the signs were there long before I was a teenager. But I didn't put a name to it, and understand it for what it was, until after high school.

How did you come to the understanding and perspective you have now? Did you ever feel like giving up on God? Or have you always been blessed with such incredible faith and courage?

Whatever I have, I gained from turning to God. Have I ever felt like giving up? Yes... there have been times when I curled up in a ball, crying, wanting to just die from the pain and disappear forever. But, somewhere deep inside me, I knew that God was there for me. I knew that He loved me. And I knew that, no matter what happened to me, if I followed Him, everything would work out for the best. I look at my life and I believe the greatest blessing God gives me is the lens through which I see life. And I guess that's the answer - by the grace of God. Why me? Why do I understand the gospel and the next guy over struggles to see a purpose in life? I don't know exactly why, but I know that God is in charge. And that He will never give up on us.

I'm dying to know how old you are.

If I told you my age, I might alienate readers for being too old or too young. I usually don't want to know how old people are - it makes it way too easy to pass judgment on them. And sharing my age would take a shot at my anonymity.

Does your family know? If they do, do you talk openly like you do on this blog? If they don't, is it easier to deal with if no one knows? Do close friends know?

No, my family doesn't know. I wrote a post on that once. And yes, it is much easier to deal with alone (at least in my case). I can make my own goals, turn to God for my support, and grow in my own way. I'm not sure that my family could understand, and they already love and support me. In the best case scenario, nothing would change. Worst case, someone loses his or her testimony because they don't understand it like I do.

Some of my close friends know, because I've told them. But only because they needed to know that I understood them. It's not a burden I would give to someone else just because I needed a shoulder to cry on. I used to wish that were possible, but now I look to God for all of my support... and He's enough and to spare... and then I find others to lift along the way.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, PART 2

If I were your bishop* what would you want me to know or understand before you came to talk to me about SSA for the first time? (* by "your bishop" I mean that very generally, as in, the bishop/relief society pres/EQ pres of someone in a similar situation to yours)

I can't say what would be the best things to know for everyone. We're all different, and even among the men who live with same-sex attraction, our struggles and trials vary. But I can tell you what I wanted someone to know when I first spoke with a Priesthood leader about this. Thankfully, he had been prepared.

- Therapy may have potential benefits in certain situations. But therapy doesn't usually fix spiritual problems.
- I am not just going through a phase.
- I am absolutely and totally terrified while I talk to you. Not of you, but of how telling you, or miscommunicating, could jeopardize our relationship and how you think of me.
- My struggle with same-sex attraction is not going to go away just because I reach a certain level of righteousness. It might change over time. Or I may live with it, faithfully, for the rest of my life.
- I need you to listen to me, affirm me for the good I do in the world, and simply love me.
- Don't give me advice unless the Spirit compels you to do so or I ask point-blank.
- Pray before we begin, and always keep the Spirit.
- Ask me searching questions. Be specific. Look me in the eyes. Help me know that you love me, and make me answer difficult questions. If I am coming to you as the first person, I probably need to confess my sins and repent of them.
- Let me talk.
- Focus on helping me repent of my sins and helping me see the love of God in my life.
- I am trusting you more than I could ever explain; you must never, ever, ever tell another soul.

- I am not deficient in the gospel just because I live with SSA. I can still serve with the young men, and probably will have a greater ability to understand their trials. And I want to serve - to do anything I can to help others rise from their pain.
- Bear testimony about your own life. Let the Spirit witness to me which parts apply to mine.
- Don't ever bring this topic up, mention it, make reference to it, have me speak on it, or anything else. If I want to talk about it, I will. Just listen to me and support me in choosing the right.

How do you feel about the media, or when you watch tv shows and movies? Almost everything has a gay or lesbian person portrayed.

I'll be totally honest. I don't make time for pop culture. I don't watch TV or most movies. I just feel like there are things that are so much more worthwhile in life. There are sometimes good things portrayed in the media, and even some good movies and TV shows. But I prefer being with real people or creating my own story in my own life. As far as the portrayals of people in the media, few seem truly real-to-life. And the real-life stories make me feel compelled for a few moments, then disappear with the next commercial.

When peers (in church, specifically) make tact-less remarks about gay or SSA stereotypes, how do you handle it? How do you find the balance between maintaining a tactful discussion and keeping your own privacy? Do you ever fear that you are showing too much of yourself?

I've found that the answer is to always engage in every conversation as a voice of reason - to see the good side, to always push people to do what is right and think the best of others.

As far as speaking out, usually people are more teachable in smaller settings and when they are listening, not when they are the center of attention after a tactless remark that makes half the group laugh. From that perspective, it doesn't make sense to immediately object to gay jokes or speak out when I know that it will distance me from the other person instead of enabling me to make a bigger impact. Instead, I make a note and, later on, when I can see he is listening, voice a compelling comment on the importance of loving everyone, no matter who they are and what they choose. Will it immediately lessen the amount of tactless remarks?

Maybe not. Will they still be painful? Yes. But simply helping others by teaching good principles (as the Church does) helps them to think more, to develop the right traits, and slowly the number of tactless comments will lessen on their own. If the Spirit directs, then I'll give direct feedback. If not, I try to teach correct principles and be a good example. That's the only effective long-term solution at my disposal.

Do you think/know if your co-works, peers, casual relationships know/can sense your same gender attraction? Do you think the girls you date have any idea? Either way--is this hard for you?

No one knows unless I've told them. And no, it isn't hard, because it means I can be myself around them - just someone who is trying to choose the right.

Lastly, how do you feel about the stereotypical "gay" men--fashion and styles specifically. I know you do not equate gay with SSA (which I like!), but do you feel the need to wax your eye brows and use the clinique mens facial line? (I'm doubting it.) How do gay stereotypes affect how you connect with others?

I have absolutely no sense of clothes fashion whatsoever. So that is not usually an issue in communicating with others; it's just not a topic I often talk about. And I think I am doing pretty well at subduing my lifelong obsession with body image in favor of "my body is a temple of God." (side note: from my observations, obsession with body image is much more common than obsession with fashion. Fashion is sometimes just a subset of body image)

As far as my feelings on the matter, I don't think there's anything wrong with fashion, style, or buying specific brands. It's like being up to date on the latest pop music or the most recent news - totally acceptable as long as it doesn't hinder your ability to keep the commandments or distract you from the more important things in life. In my case, though, I would rather write my own story than read, hear about, or buy clothes that tell someone else's.

THE MIRACLE OF FORGIVENESS

Repentance would be so much easier if I were perfect. But I'm not. And this post is for those of you who have felt like me - standing before the throne of God, wanting desperately to return, and having nothing to give Him but my ever present sins and struggles. And feeling like there is no way back.

There have been times in my life when I felt totally unworthy to even speak to God. I've been so blessed in my life - I should know better than to sin. I should know better than to make stupid mistakes. I should be stronger than the things that pull me down. The Lord has given me so many things... and yet the mistakes I make are the same ones - over and over and over again. For whatever reason, I turn against Him. I go against a prompting of the Spirit, knowingly. And then, in my despair, I feel as if I shouldn't even talk with God - that He wouldn't want to hear from me when I've turned so completely away from His presence. I feel the Spirit leaving... and just let the feeling of warmth disappear, then curl up in a ball and cry. The guilt sets in, the pain and depression comes back, and I wonder if I have made any progress at all in my life.

I've learned since that these moments - the moments when I feel furthest from God - are incredibly powerful moments when, if I turn to Him, He is willing to teach me and help me find a way out of the struggle I am facing. Yes, I'll need to repent. Yes, it will take time for me to be worthy of His Spirit again. But it's worth it. And He will always help me feel His love when I am willing to return to Him, confess my sins, and forsake them.

And so I've begun a practice that has helped me in my life - something that makes repentance actually happen, and keeps me closer to God. Whenever I feel like not praying, I pray. Whenever I feel like praying, I pray. And when I find myself feeling the guilt that follows sin, I pray. It's sometimes really hard... because if I've just made a massive mistake I feel worse than the dust of the Earth. And I am. But He still wants to speak with me. He hears my prayers. And, even though I don't merit His blessings, He continues to bless me in every aspect of my life.

It amazes me that God continues to forgive me when I've made so many

mistakes in life - when I've had so much knowledge and turned away from the truth. It amazes me when He gives me second, third, fourth, and fifth chances to choose the right, or when He helps me to find a path out of a temptation I shouldn't have been facing in the first place. The only thing I *do* know is that He loves me. And He always will, no matter what I do. And, because God loves me, He will do anything to help me choose the right, follow the prophet, and return back to the pathway of righteousness. The miracle of forgiveness, in my opinion, is more than just the peace that comes when you are finally at the end of the path. The true miracle comes in the courage, faith, and hope that God gives me as I find the faith to pick up the pieces of my shattered dreams and move forward from wherever I am, hour by hour, day by day.

SIMPLE INDULGENCES

I think it's really important to find ways to splurge in life on things that are inherently good. To find things that I value and enjoy... and that, perhaps I wouldn't normally do, but sometimes feel the desire to do anyway. Like going to sleep tonight without writing a lengthy post here. I could spend the time writing, and maybe something good would come out. But I've been going without a break since early, early this morning (it's after midnight) and tomorrow is another busy day. So I'm going to pray, go to sleep, and post tomorrow.

In the meantime, there are 89 other posts you can read (or re-read) tonight or tomorrow morning; maybe one will match what you need to hear. You can try using the search bar or the tag list (I've been trying to tag posts with topic headings, but many of them don't have tags yet) or just read something at random. But that's enough writing. I really *am* going to splurge and go to sleep without writing any more. Really.

TO NEVER BE ALONE

"...that they may always have His Spirit to be with them" (Moroni 4:3).

I think that, as a society, we are becoming more and more alone. It would be easier to never look up from the sidewalk, to not stop by to see a friend and say hi, to ignore a person I know in the grocery store if he is ignoring me... or to never even acknowledge the presence of a stranger on the street, even when I walk two paces behind him.

I remember once walking down Main Street in Salt Lake City - going South just next to the Courthouse. It was probably 9:30 at night and a woman was a few steps behind me. I slowed my pace and cheerily began a conversation - sharing a bit of my day and asking how hers went. She stared at me, then gave a somewhat guarded answer. I kept talking, and within moments she was smiling and laughing. Then she looked at me again, this time with disbelief in her eyes, and asked, "Is everyone here this friendly?" She explained that she was visiting from out of state, had never been to Salt Lake before, and had only had a few hours to walk the city. She further explained that in her home town the only people who would ever start a conversation, in the middle of the night, with someone of the opposite gender, were somewhat unsavory.

Her question caught me off guard. I countered by remarking that I didn't live in Salt Lake, either, so I wasn't completely sure. We parted ways and her question stuck with me. I realized that I have absolutely no clue how friendly people are... because, in my mind, it doesn't matter.

At 14, while struggling with a massive inferiority complex, depression, accidents, perfectionism, high school academics, sports teams, and the ubiquitous same-sex attraction, I turned to the Lord, and, from Him, learned a lesson that eventually changed my life.

I wanted to feel loved, appreciated, and understood. And similar to the time-worn Christmas saying, "giving presents is better than receiving them," the Lord told me that if I wanted to feel loved, understood, and appreciated I needed to spend my life loving, understanding, and appreciating others.

I'll be totally honest. In my heart I knew that God had spoken to me. I needed to take the initiative for my own life. I needed to be a better friend and reach out to others. But in my head it sounded completely absurd, and that it wouldn't work. Everyone else had best friends without even working at it. Everyone else looked like they were understood, loved, and appreciated. And how would helping others help me have more friends?

I tried it for the next few years of life, and my prophecy came true. I was a friend to others but had few friends. I organized my own activities, but was rarely invited to those of others. I was a counselor to others but had no one I could counsel with. And amid the crowds I still felt empty, misunderstood, and alone.

I went back to the Lord and asked for help. Again, He told me to go outside of myself and love others. So I tried again, and returned feeling empty, worthless, and alone. Finally, I went back again, willing to do anything. I had tried to be a friend, to counsel others, to be an example, to do anything I could. And yet no one truly understood me.

And when the Lord told me to love them a third time, He reminded me that *He* would love me - and that nothing else mattered. If I would keep His commandments and do all I could to help His children return, He would be my constant Companion, my Friend, my Counselor. He would love me, and I would never be alone. In the end, no one else could ever perfectly understand me anyway - because only He had suffered my pains and seen the entire scope of my life.

It's true. The greatest blessings of love do not come from being accepted, honored, and loved by others. They come from doing those things myself. And so now I strive to love others - to reach out and be a part of their lives. Yes, I have friends and family members who support and encourage me. Yes, I appreciate their love and admiration. But, at the end of the day, when no one else can ever truly understand the workings of my soul, I talk with God. With Him, I feel loved, understood, worthwhile, and whole. He is my Friend, my Father, my Counselor, my God. And with Him at my side, I am never alone.

ON BEING REAL

I recently received this comment. It, and how it affects me, has consumed my mind in the days since.

...

I started reading your blog before the general conference posts which brought thousands of people to your site. I liked your posts a lot more before. They were real, specific, less preachy and more vulnerable. This allowed me to feel a little more connected to you as a person.

I don't really check this blog anymore because I know what I'll find. Some great spiritual comments, advice to focus on God and rely on him, and a lot of general statements... and then pages of comments (usually from adoring girls, telling you how great you are, and how much they needed what ever you said.) This is fine, but it no longer is helpful to me...

Like you have mentioned before, we don't need people to teach us or tell us what's right, that's what the Savior is for. However I feel this is what you are doing.

I am glad people are growing closer to the Savior through your words, and hope it continues. I would just remember the counsel your Bishop gave you along time ago... be careful of your influence and how it influences you.

I'm a prideful person and maybe I'm just projecting my own feelings on to you. I could see myself coming home from school/ work and sitting down to my computer to see what blog comments I got today. The positive ones would make me feel good, like I'm making a difference. I would feel grateful for the Savior for helping me and restate that I'm doing this to help others to Him. I would read negative comments, and think that there may be some truth to that and try to correct the problem. I would then think of another post, conscious (you're a bright guy) of the words I used, basically able to predict the comments I'll get. Maybe you do this, maybe you don't... but you know you have your faithful followers who will believe pretty much whatever you will say, and will think "look what's he's doing, he's right, I'm going to do that to, what an inspiration."

Okay now I'm rambling, I know that and I'm sorry. You're trying to help people and you are. So good job. I just want to let you know what would help me as another guy struggling with SSA who is also faithful to the Lord and his Church.

I want to know why life is extra tough for you? (you claimed it in your title) What does a bad day look like for you? What are you afraid of? What is going on in your life that you can't explain? What brings you hope and what destroys it?

I want to see a real person again.(Booos from the crowd) Guess what, you're not perfect, let us see that and don't try to sugar coat it. (When you have claimed imperfection recently it like you're doing it to even be more likable.)

There are people here who think, "Oh he's so wonderful, he's so humble, I'm sure he makes mistakes, but they're so endearing I'm sure. He's an example, he's doing his best... oh if more people could be like him, etc. etc."

You know you are helping others and continue to do it... it's just starting to sound a little condescending because you make it sound like you have it all figured out and now just need to endure. I'm probably wrong. I hope I am. I hope you are really as humble as you make yourself sound.

I hope something I say has helped you.

- Anonymous

Whoever you are, thank you. Thank you for being willing to share your feelings, your thoughts, and your frustrations to help me... for the courage that took, and the love that I can feel from you. I've wondered recently if this blog is still the place I wanted it to be, and your words did help. A few comments recently asked how readers could help me and 'people like me' – how to help people who seem, on the surface, like they have it all put together. *This* is how you help them. You're totally and completely honest. You share your true feelings. You realize that they still

need lots of help... and you try to help them in any way possible because you love them.

I haven't shared much of my life here recently because I'm afraid of sharing something that would be a red flag for my close associates – some who read this blog and even post comments. I value my anonymity so much that I've even edited past posts to remove random shards of potential personal information. But I can see the importance here of being a real person, even if I never share my name. And so I'll try to answer some of your questions... and include them in the future. And hopefully something I can say can again resonate in your heart.

Some days I wake up with the fear that I have sinned so greatly that the blessings that God has promised me – in my Patriarchal blessing and personal revelations – won't ever happen. That Satan has robbed me of my birthright for a mess of pottage. I'm afraid that, because of my choices and my actions, I'll be alone forever... that it will be my fault... that I won't have a family, will never fall in love, and will never return to God. And that I'll never be able to make amends – that I am totally and completely lost. I'm even crying as I write this.

And the reason why I am so afraid is because it could happen. I've felt the despair. I've seen the darkness. God will always fulfill His side of the promise. If I choose to do what is right, He will bless me. But what about when I don't make the right choices? What about when I'm falling asleep at night, and the Spirit tells me to read my scriptures... and instead I look at pornography? It's happened before. I'm still recovering. And though my ability to resist has grown, the urges seem to get stronger and stronger with time.

Sometimes I feel like I am on top of the world – and I feel like I finally have everything worked out in life – that I have mastered my temptations and I can move on to the next stage in life. That God will fulfill His promises because I am keeping His commandments. But I still fall. And when I fall, I feel as if I've betrayed my only Friend for nothing... that I am living in a dark pit of despair from which I'll never return. And that perhaps I've crossed beyond the point of no return – the spot beyond which I could never return back to God and receive His blessings. That is my fear. And when I fall, *that* is a bad day for me. I am wracked with the pains of a damned soul, I feel like a complete and total hypocrite, and no

amount of listing my accomplishments or numbering the people I've helped can lift my spirits. I look around at my outside world and everyone expects me to be a shining example, to live a great life, to share a smile and a comforting word and something profound that I've learned. People ask me for advice, for prayers, for blessings, for guidance in helping them to share the gospel with others. Thousands of people read my posts each day. And realizing that I've lost my ability to communicate with God and do His will, even temporarily, by an action of my own choice, is the worst feeling I have ever felt... and, in the end, I feel totally and completely alone.

Since I began this blog, I can't remember a worse time in my life. I've gone through weeks of being homeless, unemployed, friendless, and stressed beyond anything ever before. There have been days at a time when I didn't have time (or a place) to sleep and weeks when life felt like it would cave in and destroy me.

Through it all, when I follow God, somehow my life feels better. But when I don't, when I try to go alone and turn away from Him, my life is awful. My talents, blessings, and everything else in my life disappear in an abyss of darkness, isolation, depression, and despair.

Do I know everything? No. Do I have it all figured out? No. Right now I don't even have a job or a direction in life. I don't what is going to happen – if I'll ever get married, have a family, or even if I'll be able to stay faithful and return to live with God.

But my life really isn't awful. Because the one thing I do have *is* God. And that's why I write so much about Him... and I leave the rest alone. Even now, as I listen, inside my heart the Lord is still speaking to me:

“In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer... For the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee” (Isaiah 54:8,10).

Even when I sin and turn from Him, He is always waiting for my return. And there is no point of no return - as long as I am willing to repent. Even if I never marry or have a family in this life, the Lord will still keep His promises: “Neither let the (guy who is attracted to other guys and is never able to get married and have children) say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the [men who struggle with SSA] that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:3-5).

I don't know what will happen in my life. But the only thing I have left to hold on to is my faith – my knowledge that God will keep His promises as He has in the past... if I am willing to sacrifice everything to do what is right. Even with the gospel, my life is rough. Without it, my life would be impossible. And so I only hope that I'll be able to keep the faith... and that, somehow, the men and women like me will find the same shard of hope that lights my life.

FAME, FORTUNE, AND FEELINGS ABOUT THEM BOTH

Half a dozen reporters have asked me to share my story on TV or appear in public. Some of them promised national fame, others promised fame while preserving anonymity. And others just wanted a story... some way to attach a name, face, and voice to Mormon Guy.

I've thought about each offer. Each one came from someone who felt that the message needed to be shared, and was trying to do his part to share it. And, on that level, it would be an amazing way to share the message with thousands of people.

But it doesn't feel right.

If I were being showcased for an amazing voice or outstanding accomplishments, it would be different. But I'm not outstanding or amazing... and I'm not a poster boy for living the gospel. I'm not a leader of an underground movement. I have absolutely no authority or official anything on the subject. I'm just another guy who lives his life and shares his testimony on a blog. And, at least in my perspective, I shouldn't be plastered on TV when there are so many unwritten stories of men and women so much better than I am. Yes, we need more uplifting newscasts. But it doesn't come from shining a spotlight on one person - it comes from shining the light on the message of hope and peace... and the influence that Christ has in our lives. We don't reward or honor people for paying their tithing, fulfilling their Church responsibilities, or keeping the word of wisdom... and with good reason. Who is good but God alone?

I didn't start writing this blog to become famous. And, as much as I love each of you, someday I'll stop writing here. And when that happens, or before, I hope that you realize that this isn't about me. Maybe something I said resonated with you, once. Maybe the Spirit taught you something. But ultimately I'm not the teacher here. I'm not the example. Christ is - and I hope that comes across in the things that I write.

I'm not a voice in the wilderness, crying for change. I'm not saying anything that is really unique or amazing. Mine is a story of imperfection and failure, sin and suffering, repentance and again seeing the light. I'm just telling my story - and, while I'm an individual son of God, truthfully, I believe that anyone could tell the same story... and does, by simply living according to the light of the gospel, no matter what life brings.

JUST A GOOD DAY

Today started out awful. I definitely did not want to get out of bed, leave home, or do anything on my pages long to-do list. I did it anyway, and the day just continued to get worse. By noon I had a massive headache and I wanted to just disappear. So I did something a bit out of the ordinary. I called a friend and we just hung out for the evening. I didn't let myself think of all the things I need to do, I didn't worry about anything at all... And right now I feel like I can face another day. I'm grateful for friends in my life. And I'm grateful that tomorrow is another day.

LEARNING TO LOVE

Questions: *Have you ever fallen in love with another guy? Is there a moral way to express the love you feel for another man within the doctrine of the Church? How can people use the word 'love' to mean so many different things?*

I've been thinking a lot lately about the meaning of the word "love." It's amazing that so many people can use the word and yet present it in so many contradictory settings. The scriptures definitely teach that men should be full of "love"... But what does that mean? And, maybe more relevant here, how does same-sex attraction influence love... if at all?

So what are the things that typify love? A desire to be near someone else, to understand the workings of his mind, to listen to his voice. To see him laugh and smile and to help him solve the problems of life with new ideas or just a listening ear. To see him grow and progress and become the person that God sees in him - and the person he truly wants to be in his heart. And, ultimately, to realize that my vision of that future may not be exactly what God has in mind... Or even what he has in mind, and being willing to help him in any way possible.

Have I ever been in love with a guy? Yeah. So in love that I called him multiple times a week, visited him at his apartment, played sports with him, and found myself thinking about him throughout the day. In this case, I was also his home teacher, which made it easy to see why I'd be interested in how he was doing... but in the Church there is no ban of being a good friend. We never did anything that would arouse passion. This was the only guy who knew that I was attracted to him (that's a long story and circumstances were way too unique to post and keep anonymity). As far as his "returning" my love, it didn't happen. We were friends and that was all - and even then our friendship was mostly one-way. Then he got engaged, fell off the face of the planet, stopped really participating in anything, and I cried for a week. Not because I had lost a lover... but because I had lost a friend.

It would be dishonest to say that part of my mind didn't constantly barrage me with the desire for a much more physical relationship. But I knew where that would take me - if not with him then alone somewhere else with dark fantasies that leave me with nothing worthwhile.

So, the big question: what is love? And what defines its righteous expression, especially among guys who are attracted to other guys?

I think that different levels or types, or expressions of love each have three different facets:

1. A desire for present happiness.
2. A desire for future happiness.
3. A desire for eternal happiness.

Every expression of love denotes a hierarchy among each of the facets.

Now, it's obvious that the right way to express love is pretty simple to see when all of the facets line up. If something you can do will increase someone's present, future, and eternal happiness, then it's an obviously valid expression of love. Man finds woman, they find happiness in being together and want to be happy for all of this life and the next. They're sealed in the temple and spend the rest of life working to fulfill that dream.

But what about when an action requires subjugating one facet to another? In my opinion, *that* is where different types of love appear... and where the controversy over love erupts. A one-night stand holds present happiness over future and eternal. Gay marriage holds present and future happiness over eternal. These are types of "love" - but, at least in my opinion, any love that subjugates eternal happiness to the present is not true love. The only true love is where desire for eternal happiness outweighs future, which outweighs present. That's the love that God shows to us, and the love that we should show to one another. He has sent us to a fallen earth, jeopardizing our present happiness, and given us the ability to sin, jeopardizing our future happiness, for the possibility that we will repent and return to Him happier than otherwise possible. He's willing to put anything on the line to help us grow... and He has.

So what are valid expressions of true love? I believe that true love follows true principles, and that anything else doesn't truly show love. True love, or charity, as it's called in the scriptures... comes from valuing someone else's, and my, eternal happiness over everything else. Being willing to sacrifice personal and even future happiness for their eternal wellbeing. Does being attracted to other guys affect that? Yeah. It means that I will never indulge in fantasy with other guys. It means, if I don't find a girl to marry, that I may never get married in this life. And it means that in everything I do, I try to help others be *eternally* happy - to develop the

perspective and knowledge and habits necessary to help them in the life beyond this one. I have plenty of guy friends. We do all sorts of things together. If I'm overly attracted to them, then I have to make sure that I'm careful of what I do for my own sake. But, otherwise, I treat them like everyone else - someone to love, lift, inspire, teach, and comfort through the perils of life... a brother on the pathway to happiness.

THE LORD WILL FULFILL HIS PROMISES

In my Patriarchal blessing it promises me that I'll fall in love with a young woman who will fall in love with me, we'll be sealed in the temple, and have a happy, righteous family in this life and in eternity.

Some days I look at my current life - I've fallen in love with guys, but never with a girl - and I wonder if maybe I need to put my faith simply in the Lord, and I've interpreted His promises wrong somehow. And then the Lord kindly and lovingly reminds me that He made the promises... And that He intends to keep them. That He will keep them, and fulfill them in His own due time.

I think I feel somewhat like Abraham did, wondering how the Lord would make of Isaac a righteous generation when he was on an altar... Or how Zacharias felt when the angel told him his old wife would have a son. I don't know how the Lord will fulfill His promises to me. I know that, however it happens, there will have to be miracles involved. But the Lord can do miracles... And I guess He will for me... again, in His due time.

Those are my thoughts. Trust in the Lord, and He will fulfill His promises, no matter what they may be, as I do my best and put my faith in Him.

ENOUGH

"For it is not needful that a man run faster than he has strength."

The one thing that could keep me from receiving the blessings of God is my own unworthiness. Unresolved addictions. Attachment to impurity. An unwillingness to give away my sins to God. For the most part, I'm doing okay in those respects. But unworthiness is more than just not doing bad - the Lord expects me to be anxiously engaged in good causes. He opens various doors and prompts me to run through each.

Some day, maybe, I'll see patterns in the pathways I am running. In the meantime, I keep running faster and faster... I only wonder if I'm running fast enough.

LIFTING ME

"I think a post on fellow-shipping members with SSA would be great. When I look around my family ward and think who I should reach out to, it is usually people in my same circumstance in life. So, in my case, I know how to befriend and serve young couples, young mothers, etc. So, if you were in my ward, how could I fellowship you? Should I encourage my husband to befriend you, befriend you myself, ask you to join our family for FHE or a dinner? Do you want to hold my baby? Do you want me to set you up with my single friends? What would make you feel most welcome at church from married couples?"

"I just learned that my friend's daughter is lesbian. What can I say to her if she wonders about how her daughter will be accepted in Church?"

I might be in your ward. And even if I'm not, two or three of my brothers or sisters probably are. I can't tell you exactly how to best fellowship every type of person. Every person who faces trials has different needs. But I can tell you how I have been blessed and fellowshipped by the people around me... the people who, in almost every case, had no idea of the impact they were having on my life. I'll say it again and again: The Church is the perfect place for me as I struggle with being attracted to guys... because it is through the teachings of the Church that I have come closer to God and found true peace.

I have a friend who, one day, just knocked on my door and asked if we could be friends. I didn't know her, but she had felt like she wanted to be friends with me... and had no idea how to begin. It may sound like her approach was a bit awkward, but that day had been terrible... and her knock on my door was an answer to prayer. Only moments before she knocked, I had felt so incredibly alone, and had prayed for someone - anyone - to simply spend time with. My roommates were as close to antisocial as you can get in an LDS community. I dropped everything to spend time with her whenever she wanted a friend. And as we talked, I felt useful, loved, and worthwhile. Did she understand me, completely? No. But she valued me as a person and a friend.

Another friend got my phone number the first time he met me, and called me each week to let me know when Family Home Evening took place... invited me to birthday parties for people I didn't know... encouraged me to play flag football or ultimate frisbee with the group each Saturday... and

I reciprocated with invitations (and often a ride) to attend the temple each week.

Should you encourage your husband to fellowship me? Yes. Should you fellowship me? Yes. Do I want to be involved in your family? Yes. I love kids - I would love to hold your baby and rock it to sleep. The last time I heard a baby cry in Sacrament meeting, I wished I could go, hold her, and rock her to sleep out in the foyer while her mom and dad sat in peace and silence. I appreciate when I'm invited to family dinner, FHE, and everything else... even if I'm not in your ward. I love to laugh, play board games, talk about the world and the gospel, and eat good food. And even though being around families creates a powerful, and sometimes painful, contrast to my own current life... it fills a need in my life.

Now, the last question - do I want to be set up with your single friends? It doesn't really matter if your single friends are the most attractive females in the world. I've never been attracted to girls. It seems, from my perspective, that relationships that "don't work out" return to the state before you began dating. If we were total strangers before, then dating makes it pretty likely that we will remain total strangers forever. But if we develop a friendship and become good friends, then (at least hopefully) we'll stay good friends regardless of what happens romantically. Don't just introduce me to someone and say she's really cute. Leaving us in a room alone is more likely to destroy any chance of relationship than anything else. But introducing us... over and over again, and then letting the relationship move forward on its own, will allow us to become real friends - not just blind dates.

Of all the things you could do, opening your home and your life to me makes the biggest difference. I feel lifted when I lift others... and so you enable me by letting me help, even when you could do it on your own. The greatest trial I face is feeling alone, and feeling worthless... and when I am with people who love me and value me, I can almost forget my pain. For me, the Church, the temple, and my family are the only places I have ever felt accepted and loved. The only place where I knew that I was really a valued member of the group, and not just an outcast that someone had allowed to take part. Treat me like a brother. A friend. And realize, that, beyond the things I face, I'm just another person who needs a friend, an opportunity to serve, and to be lifted by the word of God. And when I have those things, it's easier to remember that I, too, am a son of God.

THE THINGS I CAN'T DO

When I first began this blog, I had no idea what I would write about... or if anyone would read the things I wrote. I still have no clue what to write about. But, at least part of my reason for writing is the vision I have had - something I've seen and want to make real in the world.

There are lots of things that could change in the world - things that would have helped me as I faced the reality of being attracted to guys in my teenage years... and yet weren't available then, and some of which still aren't available now.

The first was a reliable, understandable source of doctrine as it relates to the topic. I read every handbook the Church I could find, including segments of the General Handbook of Instructions, trying to understand exactly what I was supposed to do with my struggle. I wanted to know why I felt the way I felt, if there were other people who felt the same way, what I was supposed to do about it, how I was supposed to repent, if it would ever change, and how all the principles of the gospel and the blessings of the eternities applied to me. Ultimately, I wasn't able to find the information I felt I needed in anything I read, so I turned to God... and slowly learned from Him. Today, there are a few more resources for understanding the doctrine of the gospel as it applies to same-sex attraction, and efforts to compile them at Mormon.org and other locations have so far been worthwhile... but there are still tons of people who don't understand how the gospel applies in their lives.

The second was a personal connection and example. For years and years, I thought I was the only person in the world who struggled in the Church with this issue. Every other temptation seems to be talked about from the pulpit and in the classroom, from lying to cheating to stealing to staying out past curfew with a girl. But there was never any mention of my trials in Sunday School, never any mention in success stories in the Ensign, New Era, or Friend. I felt like I didn't exist... or that I was an anomaly - something that shouldn't be - in the society of the Church. I just wanted someone I could talk to who could show me that it was possible to live my life and be faithful in the face of my trials. Someone I could confide in, who would truly understand my pain, not just stand on the sideline of my life. And yet I had no one. I finally turned, again, to God, and learned that He understood my pain, could inspire me to become better, and

could help me carry my grief when no one else in the world seemed to understand.

And the third need I felt was a way to share what I had learned with the world. If I had a breakthrough and kept myself from suicide, I had no one to tell. If I felt the love of God and better understood how I could apply the scriptures to my life and my predicament, there was no one who would understand the story. And so I kept those things in my heart and tried to share simple things I had learned about the gospel, apart from the circumstances in which I learned them. When I got up to bear my testimony, I spoke about the love of God... not sharing the story that had prompted it.

I'm just now realizing that the three things I wanted from my participation in the Church were, ironically, nourishment of the word of God (doctrine as it applies to my life and my circumstances), friends (people to love, who understand my circumstances, and will help me to achieve my goals), and the ability to serve (and share the blessings that God has given me along the path). That's exactly what President Hinckley said that *all* members need in order to thrive in the Church. I had pieces of all three - plenty of callings, plenty of friends, and plenty of doctrine. But there was a piece of each, as it applied to same-sex attraction, that I could never find inside the building... and instead found by going to the Head of the Church - to God Himself.

Here on this blog I guess I wanted to try to fill parts of those needs - to try, somehow, to be an influence in someone else's life. To fill my need to share my story to lift and inspire others. To create a personal interaction with someone - to become friends, in a way, to lift and teach one another. And to try to share the doctrine that I've learned with the world.

But there are things that I can't do. I can't be a source for doctrine... because I'm not a Church official. Anything and everything I say is just that - something I've said. I can't answer questions or requests for advice with authority; I have to simply say, "This is what I would do." I also can't be a friend to everyone. As universal as my story may be, I get emails every day from people who don't feel like they can relate to me. I'm being honest. This is who I am. As much as I wish I understood everything that was going through everyone's heads and could meet their needs... I realize that I don't understand your problems and maybe you don't understand

mine. It's an inherent problem with being only one person... and not having experienced the pain, trials, and sufferings of all men.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty is that, since this blog is not part of the Church, there's no way to reach the people who are struggling most. The 14- and 15-year-olds who are struggling, or the 18-year-olds wondering if they should serve missions, or the returned missionaries who are wondering what to do with their lives when the two dichotomous societies are tearing them apart... have no way of hearing about the message (except through Facebook... which was an answer to prayers).

Maybe someday there will be another official resource in the Church designed specifically to help us apply the gospel in our lives, to our struggles. An anonymous online question-and-answer page where we could learn official doctrines and promises of light and hope and how they apply to our lives and can help us to find peace. A forum full of stories of men and women who are living the gospel while facing the things we face, people we can talk to who could help us see perspective... people who understand what we are going through because they've been there. And an opportunity to lift and serve others through our own examples and testimonies... inside the community of the Church, where we could find friends, opportunities to serve, and the ability to be nourished by the word of God.

I don't know if that will happen. But I do know that, even though we as a people are still growing, God makes up for our deficiencies. The teachings and examples of members of the Church helped me develop a relationship with God and then to turn to Him in my times of need... and He has helped me to thrive even while the people around me weren't yet able to meet my needs. I hope that someday we, as a people, better follow the teachings of the Church... and reach out more to befriend, teach, and serve one another. But I am grateful for the lessons I've learned anyway... and maybe that's what I needed to learn, and what each of us needs to learn - the faith to turn to God when conditions aren't ideal and to let Him make up for the things that we, and others, can't do.

FRIDAY NIGHTS: TURNING GRIEF INTO GOOD

Since my mission, I've always loathed Fridays.

Part of it is probably looking at everyone else, with girlfriends and boyfriends... Or even big groups of friends to hang out with. The internal perfectionist in me won't let me think of doing anything but a date, which means that when I *don't* have a date there is nothing planned... which is not a good thing.

But sitting at home wishing that I had a date isn't really productive. In fact, it's probably more likely to end up going downhill. So I've realized that I should probably have some type of backup plan. And while I'm not condoning skipping "Friday date night" on a regular basis, I definitely find peace in finding a soccer game at the indoor gym (there are pickup soccer games at UVU at one of their indoor gyms almost every night), going to the temple (last session begins at 8), or just spending time out in the world *without* a date. I've learned to turn to something better as time has gone on... and many of my current skills find their birthplace in Friday nights when I wondered if I would ever do anything worthwhile.

I don't hate Fridays anymore. Well, not as much. Yeah, I wish I were in love and had a date I could spend the time with tonight. But I don't. But anything beats being here and potentially putting my eternal salvation at risk. Hopefully I'll find a date for next week. And while I'm working on it, tonight I'll get out of my room, go into the world, and do something good.

REFLECTIONS ON WRITING HERE

Recently I've been thinking about this blog and how writing here affects me. On the one hand, writing takes time I could be spending learning some new skill, developing better relationships with my family members, dating, doing yard work... On the other hand, writing here gives me a chance to reflect on my life and, hopefully, make a difference in the world.

For the last 100 posts I've written about how being attracted to guys colors and influences my life. Sometimes it isn't hard to find something to address. Wedding receptions where I somehow catch a thrown garter. Conversations with bishopric members and family members who are trying to set me up with total strangers... but sometimes I wonder if I'm doing the right thing by writing everything from the light of being a (gay) Mormon guy.

I mean, a few months ago, the only time I thought about being attracted to guys was in the moment - when I felt attracted to a guy or very not attracted to a girl, when someone asked me about love, or when someone set me up on a bad blind date. Now, it's starting to become part of how I view the world and things that happen to me... I see the world in a different light, and I am constantly composing how I could explain my feelings here. And it concerns me... because, at least to a point, my attraction is becoming more and more a part of my life. I've prayed for guidance, and I'm planning to talk with some of my priesthood leaders and ask for direction, but right now I feel like I'm still doing the right thing. The Lord prompted me to begin writing here, so I'll wait for His call as to when or if I should stop. It crossed my mind, though.

I'm still wondering what I should write here... whether I should just write whatever comes to mind, and let myself just write without a given topic, or continue on the topic of living as a member of the Church who happens to be attracted to guys. At least until right now. Laugh. The Lord is amazing. I was ready to take time to ask Him tonight... but He's begun to answer prayers before I even have a chance to take it up with Him. And He just answered. At least for the foreseeable future I'll be writing about the namesake of my blog. And I'll let the Lord take care of everything else.

SUNRISES & SUNSETS

I took some time this morning to just walk outside, long before the sun was up. It was snowing, and the wet snow left a thick, clear coating on the sidewalk, while rare cars cut pathways through the slush and sprayed the even rarer passer-by. Trees dripped and swayed, clouds swirled, wind howled, and the world seemed caught under a dark, wet, cold cloak.

And yet I didn't notice the cold or the wet, and only passed a cursory thought on the inch of slush beneath my feet. Maybe it was because I was busily engaged in life, or caught up in thought. Maybe the morning rush of adrenaline made me numb to the world around me. Or maybe I had seen it before, and I knew that, by the end of the day, the sun would come out, the snow and slush would melt, and even leaves would crackle in the arid warmth that still exists in mid-November.

Now it's close to sunset, and the prophecy has come true. Newly fallen leaves crunch beneath my feet; the snow has disappeared from all but the most shaded nether regions of the world; and the coat I brought with me this morning makes my arm sweat as I carry it out to my car. What seemed an impossibility simply happened as a course of events... bringing hope and peace and comfort in my life.

When I find that life is hard, and I am wallowing in the valley of despair, there are two ways that I find inspiration. The first is to look back - to count my blessings and give thanks for all the things I take for granted in life... and the Lord helps me know that He will bless me as He did in the past. The next is to look forward - to realize that valleys, by definition, lay between mountains... and the Lord promises me that He will help me rise from my trials. The sun may not come out tomorrow. Even if it does, it doesn't mean that tomorrow will be any easier. But that's ok... because, as I turn to God, recognize His hand in my life, and have faith that He will bless me, the Lord becomes my light. "...and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."

I KNOW. I'M CRAZY. BUT AT LEAST I'M NOT BAD CRAZY

A few weeks ago I wrote about how I wanted to find a way to put the scriptures on an .mp3 player and take them with me wherever I go. Well, I finally did it. And today while lifting weights I listened to the entire Book of Mormon. (Tomorrow I'll start Ether) I know I'm crazy. But I have to be crazy. It's the only way I stay spiritually safe in the face of trials.

As I looked around me at the gym, I wondered what everyone else was listening to... and realized that I had absolutely no clue. Maybe they're listening to Chopin or Beethoven, or the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, or the scriptures. Or maybe just whatever workout songs are playing over and over in their heads.

And I realized how easy it is to judge people by their outward appearances. Anyone who saw me wouldn't guess that I'm listening to Moroni tell a story of destruction... Just as sometimes I look at people around me and instantly type them by what I can see on the surface. It's not a bad thing unless I'm unwilling to learn more - to break the type cast and become a friend. Maybe the person who is overly quiet in Church meetings is learning something amazing from the Lord. Who am I to judge another? "Judge not unrighteously... For with that judgment with which ye judge, so also shall ye be judged."

FRUSTRATION WITH GIRLS

Sometimes I feel like dating is totally not worth it.

I try to date frequently. I make friends with girls, ask them out (it usually works better that way than the reverse), spend time with them in a variety of situations, try to be totally upfront and honest with them (I am asking you out because I want to see if this will work for us and because I enjoy spending time with you), and, for the most part, have a good time. And I really, truly believe that there is at least one girl out there that I could fall in love with. And yes, I've written posts on what it means for me to fall in love.

But sometimes trying to be honest, straightforward, and kind... backfires. A girl I've been dating asked me about our relationship yesterday... wondering if I had found the attraction necessary to move forward into the next phase of dating. My answer? Not yet.

Since then, it's like our relationship (and friendship) fell off the face of the planet. No more text messages wondering how I'm doing, no more letting me know about things in her life, no more invitations or any communications from her end. I feel like honestly sharing my feelings instantly deactivated any desire on her part to play an active role in "us"... and it's frustrating. I can't tell her that I'm attracted to guys, because I don't want to date someone who pities me... And that's probably what would happen if I told her right now. And I don't feel like it's the right thing to do. If we were close to marriage, I would tell her. But right now marriage isn't even a possibility.

On the other hand, I can see exactly why she would withdraw, at least partially, from the relationship. When you invest too much of yourself into someone... and they don't return that love, then it's a lot easier and less painful to simply withdraw. To cut it off so that it doesn't consume your life. It takes a lot more love, faith, and courage to continue loving someone, and showing that love, when you realize that your love may never be returned. I guess that's one thing that I think that this trial has taught me - learning to love people who will never return it in the same way. I mean, when I fall in love with a guy, or become really good friends with a girl, then I'll do anything for them... and I'm okay if they never

know, never show it back to me... and I find ways to help them meet new people... then give them goodbye hugs at their weddings, keep in touch, but let them create their own lives, usually without me as a part. But if they called me out of the blue I would still do anything.

I just wish people would be willing to invest everything in everyone they meet. To be honest and share their feelings and really, truly care about people - beyond whether or not he or she will be an eternal mate. We weren't sent here to find a spouse and then die, but to live and work and love the people around us... and to help them to rise with us. I guess I'm just frustrated. But I can see already ways that I can change... ways that I can be more honest in showing that I care about others. And that's pretty much all I can do - change who I am, and then hope that my example makes an influence on the people in my world.

OVERWHELMING DESIRE

I've tried not to think about this blog for the past few days. I didn't read emails or check comments or draft posts in my head as I went through each day. I just wanted to better understand why I'm writing here - what keeps me here when I feel like, maybe, I would be better off disappearing and never coming back... and if (Gay) Mormon Guy became a short blip in the history of the blogging world.

Part of it is for me. Getting emails from all over the world giving or asking advice helps me feel connected with the world... and helps me feel like I'm making a difference. Having to be honest here and share my deepest feelings keeps me out of trouble, too - I feel like I've had more strength to resist temptation because I don't ever want it to impact my ability to write and be honest here.

But I was sitting in Church today and one of the speakers talked about men who had experienced a change in their hearts... And thereafter became missionaries who never fell away. But that wasn't the part that hit me - it was when he spoke of Alma, after all his missions, returning home... and finding it impossible to not go out and preach the gospel. Or Nephi and Lehi, who leave government positions for the opportunity to preach to the Lamanites. Or the sons of Mosiah. Or Paul. Each of these men felt the changing grace of the Atonement of Christ, saw the blessings of living the gospel, and spent the rest of his life sharing the news with the world.

As I was sitting there, the Lord helped me realize that, at least in part, I'm somewhat like those men. I'm definitely not a prophet or a leader, but I've seen the blessings that the gospel has brought in my life. I know that the gospel blesses individuals and families, and that following its principles will bring eternal happiness... and I'll spend the rest of my life sharing that message.

AND WANTING TO DIE

My life is a roller coaster... and somewhere near incredible spiritual experiences, whether before or after, come the lowest of the lows. The points when I see, in perfect clarity, everything that the world takes for granted and that I would give anything to have. The days when something inside me tells me that, for all the good I do, I'm worthless... because the sins of my past have robbed me of the blessings of eternity.

I know it's a lie. But right now I feel awful. Burned out, discarded, lost... and, most of all, powerless. Powerless to keep myself from hurting people around me, powerless to take my life in my hands and live the dreams I've had since I learned to dream. And sometimes, tears running down my face, I wish I could die and at least this trial would go away.

I'm lost, confused, powerless, and ground into the dust. Nothing I've done in life seems to matter. And maybe that's where God wants me... humble enough to turn to Him for guidance and peace. I know that God loves me. I know that He will do anything to help me be happy. And I know I can keep moving forward, and tomorrow will be better than today. Or at least God will give me the strength to live and the faith and hope to be happy.

Today was a good day. It was an awful day. Maybe that's another meaning for great and terrible day of the Lord... but I know that the Lord will fulfill His promises. I don't know how or when. But I know that He will if I continue to do what is right. And that knowledge and peace makes life worth living.

DEAR FATHER...

For the last twelve hours I've been a wreck. My heart feels like it is being ripped out of my chest as I realize how much pain I feel... Mingled with wanting, so badly, to do what is right and to understand the purpose of my life. How can it be possible that I feel this way? I finally left life behind and came here to pray, to cry, to ask for help in living another day. I haven't cried this hard in years and I just want to be happy. I just want to do what is right.

The sun came out. Dear Lord, please help me. Help me to grow. Help me to understand. Why am I in so much pain? ... I'm grateful for my life... for the people who inspire me... help me to be grateful for all things... to understand them and learn from them. To become a better brother, servant, and friend. Help me be grateful for the pain, for the tears, for the anguish and loneliness and grief that has burned itself into my heart. Even though it be a cross that raiseth me... Help me reach out to my fellow men, to be my brother's keeper...

And, Father, help the people in the world who are in pain - the people who are alone, without families, outcast from society, depressed, and hopeless. Help them to feel loved... and help me to help them. I can't do much... but please help me. Help us. We're so lost and alone, afraid and worn from life. Please help us to be happy, to lift one another, to become the men and women Thou seest in us.

BLIZZARD

Wind, snow, swirling clouds and biting cold... And yet I look at the world and see the crystal snow, the beauty, the snow banks drifting across the road. It's amazing how life can change... when nothing on the outside is really any different. Yesterday I felt like dying. Today I have a new lease on life. Nothing has changed. Life is still going to be hard; the snow is still cold; and I know the pain will come back. But at least now I have one more battle won, one more mountain climbed, one more memory to hold as proof that God loves me and is involved in my life. Somehow the swirling, twisting clouds disappear... leaving behind a winter wonderland. I haven't yet seen the clearing of my own clouds, but with the passing of each tempest, I find I have greater strength to weather the coming of another storm.

GRATEFUL TO BE A (GAY) MORMON GUY

This is, by far, the worst trial I could ever imagine. I've been in places where people were starving, in the heart of violent gangs, standing among friends who have been diagnosed, and then slowly died of cancer. I've seen people murdered and families ripped apart from feuds, others who fell from riches to abject poverty. And while I have no way to tell how those trials influenced others, living with an attraction to guys is the hardest thing I could ever imagine.

Some days I hate myself. I feel like I shouldn't exist and that somehow, God has forgotten me... and usually I blame myself for His forgetting. I feel inconsolably alone, and filled with constant grief and guilt for my mere existence. Everything the Church teaches seems to go against the feelings inside me... and it seems like there is no one who could ever understand. I feel like God will never answer the prayer I truly want Him to hear... And I wonder if God will really keep His promises...

But it has been worth it. In my isolation I have gained a love of the Lord. In my pain I've learned to pray. And the relationship I have with Him is something I wouldn't trade for anything... not even to be free of my pain. Somehow the Lord knew it all would happen this way - that my pain would push me to make a choice - to turn to God or to turn away from Him. And, for that, I am eternally grateful.

I'm grateful for the perspective that I've gained that allows me to face trials with a happy heart, and to help others face their own.

I'm grateful for the empathy that I can have through my pain - which could come no other way.

I'm grateful for the commitment and zeal that has come from trying to overcome temptations - the super-spirituality that can accompany this and other massive trials in life.

But, most of all, I'm grateful for who I have become in this fight. For the truth I have learned and the skills I have gained. For the knowledge that I am a child of God, and that He hears and answers my prayers... and that, someday, I will be saved through His grace and return to His presence.

I still don't understand everything in life. I don't know why I feel the way I do. But, at least in my case, I'm grateful for the trials, the pain, and the blessings they have brought into my life. Someday I will be perfect, and I'll understand and recognize the hand of God in all things. But, today, I am grateful to have been a (Gay) Mormon Guy.

STRENGTH TO BEAR MY BURDENS

...that ye may not feel them...

I listened to Elder Oaks in his October 2006 General Conference talk - He Heals the Heavy Laden... and something inside of me is calling out for me to give the Lord complete control of my life - to trust Him completely and fully. In my case that means enjoying a short vacation from life instead of brooding over the major issues that currently seem to face me. Becoming more carefree. Living life and actually enjoying it. Sometimes I think way too much about life and, in some cases, it makes it hard to enjoy when I see things I didn't need to see or understand.

The Lord is willing to carry my burden. I just need to allow Him to carry my load - to give Him permission to help me be happy even if He doesn't take away my trials. Am I willing to allow Him more fully into my life? It may still be a while until the clouds clear and I find an eternal companion... but in the meantime I think it makes sense to just move forward. Spend time with girls and guys. Find things I enjoy and do them just because. Don't stress about falling in love with guys instead of girls - I'm not going to do anything against the commandments; the Lord will give me strength to carry my burdens even if He never lifts them from my shoulders. ... And maybe it's better that way. I think I'd rather be strong in the face of affliction instead of having all my trials disappear.

A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

I was in the temple with a group of youth the other day, helping officiate while they did baptisms and confirmations. Everything seemed pretty normal until we got to baptisms. Then it was pretty apparent that two of the other men wanted to baptize and wanted everyone else to stand by the font and witness. Being a witness in the temple is an amazing responsibility and opportunity, and I really enjoyed it. But as time went on and I realized that no one else would have the opportunity to actually perform baptisms, I felt a bit put out. *That* feeling shocked me - was I really feeling a sense of entitlement in the temple? I looked inside myself and realized that yes, I was. For whatever reason, I felt entitled to do the things I wanted...

Another opportunity to baptize came up, and another man literally jumped from his seat to take the spot. Something inside me felt awful... and yet I stayed. And thought, "Maybe tonight the Lord is trying to help me not have a feeling of entitlement. Maybe He wants me to be happy with my lot in life... even if it never changes." So I changed my perspective, and witnessing the baptisms on the side of the font became an incredible opportunity.

Then, as we were about to leave, the coordinator came out and asked me to do a few additional baptisms, then more, then more... and as I was baptized and performed baptisms in the temple that night, the Lord reaffirmed the promise that He has given me so many times. "I love you. I haven't forgotten you. And I promise you that someday, your prayers and your righteous desires will be fulfilled. You'll fall in love with a woman, raise a righteous family, and find fulfillment in your life. I promise you this..."

It will take time and effort. But it will happen.

And nothing else matters.

HOPELESS ROMANTIC

So I've decided. I'm not going to stress about falling in love with guys and I'm not going to stress about not falling in love with girls. I'm going to live my life, enjoy it, learn to love and support people, and let the Lord fulfill His promises according to His timetable.

I've found myself thinking about a guy, constantly, over the last few weeks, and I realized that I had a decision to make. Completely avoid him and cut off all starts of a lasting friendship for fear that I would put myself or him in jeopardy, stay friends and worry about what to do and what not to do, or just enjoy life, keep the commandments, and make a new friend. So I'm not worrying about it anymore. If he thinks I'm strange, then he's probably right. I hold too much of myself back in relationships because I'm afraid of hurting people & afraid of being hurt. I think I'm just going to move forward and follow the guidance God gives me. If I make a friend, then I'll make a friend. If not, that's ok, too.

The bigger decision is to not stress about the timing of falling in love with a girl. I believe that it will happen since my Patriarchal blessing promises it. But recently I've been waiting on the Lord, constantly wondering when it will happen... when He seems much more interested in the other aspects of my life. In many cases, the Lord has given me the ability to make my own miracles. In this case, I am waiting on Him, and I think He is using the experience as an opportunity to teach me patience.

So that's my decision. Don't worry about falling in love, at all. Follow the guidance of the Spirit, love people freely, keep the commandments, and have faith that God will fulfill His promises, everything will work out in the end, and, if I've made the right choices, I'll live happily forever after. Yeah. I'm definitely a romantic.

RISE UP, AND RUN

Be of good courage, for thy sins are forgiven thee... That thou mayest know that the Son of Man hath power to forgive sins, rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

I can tell when the worst temptations are about to hit. It starts with a feeling of unease, followed by something that is between a mix of incredible stress and depression. It hits when I'm alone, with nothing planned and no one around to save me. And at that point, I realize that I have a choice. Stay alone, do nothing, and let it hit me full force and probably carry me way beyond where I want to go (and set off at least a week of depression as I try to regain my feet again), or rise and run away as fast as I can. I don't always run... even though I know I should, and *that* is what concerns me. The Lord warns me. I know when life is going to get hard and the trials begin to overwhelm me. And yet, sometimes, I don't listen. And I fall on my face, only a few steps from the last time.

I'm not perfect by any means. And often that irks me... I've been blessed beyond anything I could ever dream, and yet I still haven't fully integrated the teachings of the Savior in my life. Do I not believe Him? Am I just lazy? Stupid? Falling to temptation is never worth it; the road to Heaven is steep enough without jumping off of sheer cliff faces.

I know that I'm not hopelessly lost. I still move forward every day. Most of the time, I listen when the Spirit tells me to run, and then I start running. Yes, sometimes I still fall. Flat on my face, in the mud, and the Lord holds out His hand to help me stand, just as He did to the woman who washed His feet with her tears and the men who lay crippled by the side of the waters of Bethesda or in a home on their bed. I, too, have fallen, too many times... and I can't rise alone. His hand is outstretched... but not to take away my struggle. To help me learn to stand, with Him as my strength. To help me realize that it takes more than faith to rise up and walk...to rise up and run from temptation... more than anything I could ever do alone. Maybe that's another meaning of the promises the Lord has given in the scriptures... That as I turn to Him, He will give me the strength to run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

FAITH IN THE DARKNESS

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil... For Thou art with me...

The last few days have been rough. My mind is split in a thousand directions and life itself seems to be smashing me. I could deal with it if the stress came from outside - if everything outside were the only things going wrong. But they're not... And my insides feel torn apart and caught between a dozen conflicting paths of action, none of them going up.

It's times like these that are the worst for me. I eat junk. I don't go work out. I pull away from family members and am curt with friends. And as the egoism grows with the depression that is coming, I turn away from the world and focus on the pain and anguish that seems to thrive on devouring my dreams and shattering my hopes.

It never seems to actually get easier. Life doesn't grow any less painful. And yet somehow I find hope and peace. Usually, in my case, I find it in helping others - in going service or finding someone who needs the light of the gospel... and sharing the faith that has made me whole. It happened tonight - a friend texted me and asked for help, and something in our short conversation made life seem so much more livable.

I know that tomorrow will be another day. It might be even worse than today. But, at least right now, I have peace. I know that I'm going in the right direction. I don't know where I am going... or when I will get there, but life is a journey. I may not be able to see my destination, but the pathway is lit by starlight... the hopes and dreams of a hundred billion angels watching me, praying for my wellbeing, cheering my successes and mourning my grief. Some day, I'll be able to walk in the light of day, and the valleys will open up behind me, each one telling the tale of a crucial lesson learned. I don't know when that day will come. But, at least for right now, I'll keep walking with faith.

BEING A MEDIOCRE FRIEND

The last few days have been a constant roller coaster of emotions. Gospel conversations with friends that leave me feeling like I am on top of the world. And then, when I need to be lifted, my guy friends ignore me... and leave me wondering if I'm just totally deficient as a person and a communicator. I rarely ask for help, for people's time, for anything from others. And the moment I get up the nerve to ask, to become vulnerable in a relationship, I lose everything.

I think the reason why my life takes extremes is probably two-fold. There's probably something happening inside my brain that I can't control... some mixture of chemicals that makes me think some days, honestly, that I am manic-depressive. The other is that I probably think too much. I read into everything that people say, do, don't say, and don't do. Who knows - maybe there's a good reason that my friends have seemed to be avoiding me. Maybe they're just really busy and only available during the times I have dates or other plans. Or maybe they don't realize that I need help - I never need anything, so maybe they feel their efforts would be better spent with someone else. Or maybe they just don't want to be friends... which is the thought that is consuming my mind right now. What am I doing wrong in life? What do I need to change? What mortal flaw do I have that makes me an untouchable as soon as I start to actually make good guy friends?

I think I'll ask. I'll ask God in my prayers tonight what I need to change to be a better friend and I'll ask my friends (or at least the guys that have been my friends) when I see or text them next. Already I know at least part of the answer God will give me - loving people isn't about having my needs met, but about helping them to be happy. Something in my character or personality makes it hard for people to be my friend... but that doesn't mean that I need to abandon them just because I feel abandoned and alone. I may be a mediocre friend, but at least I'm trying. And hopefully, someday, the Lord will consecrate my efforts and it will all work out in the end.

CAN I TELL YOU ONE THING?

Life is awesome. I'm not kidding. Nothing around me is going right, but God loves me and I feel peace because I am trying to do what is right. What more could I ask for?

EXERCISE: ONE OF THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

So exercise is probably one of the greatest blessings in my life right now. I can go out running, or to the gym, and hours pass by while I'm listening to the words of the prophets. Download the scriptures, download a few sessions of conference, and nothing can stop me... and there's nothing else I should be doing more. Listening to the scriptures while I exercise is actually a powerful motivation to exercise in the first place - because I know that God will bless me, I'll feel better, and whatever hormonal imbalance is causing me to have a hard day will be (at least temporarily) overshadowed by a long-term adrenaline and endorphin rush. Pretty awesome from my perspective - keep the commandments, take care of my body, make it easier to get personal revelation and overcome temptation, all in one!

What I'm learning recently in life is the importance of finding ways to see the gospel in everything around me. I guess it's just another way of "always remember[ing] Him, that His spirit may be with [me]." At the gym, at work, at church, at home, with friends, and everywhere I go. When I'm looking for gospel symbolism, and trying to see the hand of the Lord in my life, life is great, I'm a better friend, my depression lessens, and it's easier to be the person I really want to be.

I know that people probably think I'm crazy. But I've never cared what other people thought of me. I never believe anything someone else says unless I know for myself - either through a personal witness from God or having done a whole lot of research. It means that sometimes I'm a bit stubborn... but it doesn't mean I'm unwilling to change. I like to think the opposite - I like knowing what is right, and following it, more than I like being right for the sake of my ego.

Thanks, Father... For exercise and for an experience where "all things denote there is a God... Yea, all things do testify of Him..."

NOTHING REALLY MONUMENTAL

If you took the last few days of my life and smashed out all the everyday stuff, there wouldn't be much else. No life-changing realizations or goals reached that have been just out of reach... just living life as it comes and being willing to turn to the Lord. I've found that trying to avoid the guys I like, at least for a bit, helps me clear my mind and now there's definitely a lot more to life. Not stressing about the girls I don't like gives me the same simple peace, and there's not much else to say. But I think that works. Most of life is spent moving on the same track instead of quickly changing, and it's not like life is monotonous, just there isn't much to say. I could be totally sleep-deprived and have missed something monumental, but I'll check in my journal another day.

I think that my attitude during the doldrums is a good indicator of the attitude of who I really am - hopefully not sleep-deprived, but willing to work to make myself an instrument in the hands of God. His grace is sufficient to save me if I am willing to turn my hands, heart, and mind to Him... if I am willing to show that commitment and truly become more like Jesus Christ.

REACHING OUT, LIFTING OTHERS

You know the feeling when life seems so awful it isn't worth living? When something about your trials makes everything seem totally worthless, no matter what you've accomplished? I've been getting that feeling more often recently - I'll go to the temple, have a great experience, feel amazing, and then, sometimes without anything really important taking place, life will seem terrible. Looking back on it, I'm a bit frustrated that nothing or little things could cause me to obsess in life... or that they would have the ability to suddenly derail an incredible experience. But in the moment there wasn't anything I could do. I read the scriptures, pray, exercise, eat healthily, get enough sleep, take time to meditate, give service, spend time with family and try to make friends... Most of the time I'm incredibly optimistic. But then the world falls apart and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm not trying to lament - I mean, right now I feel fine - only explain what it is that goes through my mind when those times hit.

Historically, times like that - when I felt like nothing in life was worth doing - were quickly filled with anything possible. If I was smart, it was running or working out for hours at a time, practicing music, giving service, cleaning someone else's house until I drop dead from exhaustion. But sometimes I wasn't so bright, and the time wasted away with surfing the net looking up stuff I really wasn't interested in or shouldn't have wanted to see... and went downhill from there.

I've found the best way to deal with those situations is to ensure they never happen. Take time to make massive commitments of my time, be anxiously engaged in a thousand causes, and keep life scheduled to the max. Serving others in some meaningful way is the best that I've found, the only issue is finding people to serve and finding ways to serve the people I already know and love. Some people make it hard to serve them. I'm probably one of those people...

Sometimes I feel like I wish I could live safely without having to make a list of things to do, but that's my life... and it's worth it if it keeps me out of trouble.

COMPLETE HONESTY

A good friend learned that I recently stopped dating a girl; we had been on enough dates that our families knew about it and we at least knew each others' favorite colors... When she learned that I had been the deciding factor, and not the girl, the questions started. "I think she is a really nice girl, and really cute, and you guys seem to fit well together... What about her didn't you like?"

I wasn't really sure what to say. I've made a covenant with myself to always be completely honest, and finding an answer that accurately conveys my feelings and yet doesn't bare my soul seemed a bit hard. "I just felt like it wasn't going to work out - I'm not attracted to her." And then the dreaded question came... "What about a girl makes her attractive to you? What kinds of girls are you attracted to?" and the Spirit of the Lord to the rescue, being able to explain my feelings without destroying my life: "I don't know..."

When I look at my struggles in that light, it almost sounds like a completely different issue. I'm trying to find a wife; attraction is important but not the most important factor; I'm just don't know who I will be attracted to, why, or under what circumstances. Oh. And, at least right now, I'm attracted to (very few, but some) guys, and for whatever reason I have a hard time developing close relationships with others...

BEING SOCIALLY “SELF-SUFFICIENT”

Social life is so awkward and strange. When I need friends, I could easily come off as needy, and people who I'd like to know feel they don't have the time or desire to invest in a relationship. When I don't need friends, and have an established social circle, I find that circle ever widening as people want to be a part. The two extremes move further and further apart, with an impassable divide in the middle... and somehow I find myself switching sides more often than I thought possible.

Moving from social butterfly to recluse is actually pretty easy to manage. My friends get married, I move, or suddenly change of circumstance means we see less and less of one another. I'm not very good at keeping in touch, even though I try, and so friendships disappear without a trace, no fanfare... Only the rare reunion. It's happened plenty of times. I feel like I have friends, people I can talk with, and people I could call at a moment's notice, and then they disappear. It's probably my fault, but I haven't been able to determine why it happens or how to prevent it yet. It just happens, and it leaves me on the other side of the gap - feeling like I have no one to talk to and no really good friends in life.

And so enters the tenet of social self-sufficiency. I've never been able to pull off the “I'm shy” motif; people think I'm just too good to talk with them. And so the only way to make friends is to act as if I already have them... which requires social self sufficiency. Being socially self-sufficient means that I'm ok being alone... indefinitely... and giving in relationships even when I feel like I need others for support. Leaning on others doesn't seem to work in my case; I need to reach out and lift them, and then they will be willing to lift me. So I organize events and make clubs, set up games and try to involve everyone - essentially doing what I wish someone would do for me. And then something miraculous happens. The Lord meets my own personal needs or He helps me to gain friends who can. I still can't say that I have super-close friends... But at least I can say that I am trying to be a friend to those in need. And, ultimately, that's more important. Yeah. I'd love to have someone to really, truly confide in - someone who shares my dreams and hopes and understands my view of the world. Someone who would be there for me in an instant, and for whom I would give my life. Maybe I'll have to wait until I find a wife to find a friend like that, but in the meantime I have the Lord. He is my strength and my help, the Friend who has been through it all at my side.

When no one else wanted to, or could, understand, He was always there for me. And He always will be.

I guess that's what the Lord expects of me and why He puts me in situations that require social “self-sufficiency” - so that I'm more reliant on Him and so that I continue to reach out to others. I'm really not a super-social person; if I weren't constantly feeling friendless, I probably wouldn't care much about others. But since I have the same experience, it means that I'm willing to put something of myself on the line to meet my own needs... And also help others in the same boat. I give unto men weakness that they may turn unto me... and if they will turn unto me I will make their weakness strong unto them...

ANONYMITY

I think the Lord was definitely on to something compelling when He said, "Let not thy right hand know what the left hand doeth..." Christmas time, for me, is the epitome of helping others & serving... it gives me an excuse to do absurd things for others that, during any other season, they would probably try to reject. But since it's Christmas, and I can be anonymous, I can help others and find incredible joy in being the only one who knows... only me and the Lord who helped me think of the ideas in the first place.

It's the same thing here, with my blog at (Gay) Mormon Guy. There have been days when I've wanted to impress someone by saying, "I write stuff that thousands of people read"... but thankfully my self-imposed anonymity has kept my ego from inflating. I probably would not do well as a celebrity or movie star - I thrive way too much on praise and attention from the people who know me. I guess the Lord knew what I needed in this case, too, and it works.

In the last few months a few different groups have called for the "abolishment of anonymity" on the Internet. In the name of heightened international security and antiterrorism, every action I ever take would be logged, assigned to my personal account, and searchable by whoever happened to have access for whatever reason. Part of me can see the good in such an idea - there would be no more late night chat rooms where you say things you really didn't want to... fewer people who transgress their morals thinking no one else could know... Ultimately, any of the sins and vices that thrive on anonymity... and most do... would take a hit. But at the same one, it would close down a valuable and vital form of free communication - the ability to speak and not have retribution from those who know you.

I don't think that we will ever require all Internet users to validate who they are. Maybe in an opt-in program for families and others it might be plausible... But other than that, I think that there is still much good to be done with only the angels as witness.

FALLING OFF THE PATH, WALLOWING IN THE DUST

The last few days I haven't really been doing everything that I should, or can. I wake up early in the morning, feel like I should go to the gym so that I can start the day on the right note, and promptly fall back asleep, the covers still pulled around me. Maybe I should move my alarm clock. Since I haven't been to the gym, my listening to the scriptures has been cut as well. That one hasn't been a total failure, though - I just take my .mp3 player with me throughout the day and listen as I drive, eat, or any other time I'm alone. Like right now.

In past years I most likely would have bemoaned the fact that I fell out of the habits I had begun - and the bemoaning would make me depressed and feel awful about myself. I definitely still feel bad about not doing the things I want and should do, but for some reason don't. But recently I've realized that guilt, and feeling contrition for my own inadequacies, are tools... and nothing more. The Lord gave me the ability to discern between right and wrong, and the Holy Ghost to enable me to chart a new course so that I can change, not so that I obsess vainly. Fretting or obsessing about my inadequacies just makes me feel inadequate, and sometimes the depression that results prevents me from actually changing.

So this morning I woke up early, felt like falling back asleep, and then prayed for help. Somehow, God helped me and I mustered the strength/faith/willpower and got out of bed. I went to the gym, worked out, listened to the scriptures, and wrote this post, and it's before 8:00. The rest of the day is open before me and I feel great. And like that, I'm back on the path. Today's gonna be good.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Some of my friends are college students, and they're not very responsive during the time of finals. Some days I wonder if they have completely dropped off the face of the planet, or, much worse, if I've done something to merit their running away at top speed without saying goodbye. I'm pretty sure that I'm not a bad influence in their lives, and I think way too highly of people to make assumptions about them. So, instead of dropping them when they become unresponsive, I've decided to be better than just a fair weather friend... and assume that people still need to be loved even when they don't reciprocate.

It's actually pretty obvious... I mean, being a good friend means being a friend through thick and thin. Don't hate me for not completely understanding and implementing this.

I ASKED GOD TO KILL ME TODAY

A priesthood leader told me this morning that I was a creep and that he essentially never wanted to talk to me again. I usually try to develop relationships of trust with my leaders because I've been in their shoes... and sustaining means more to me than just doing my home teaching and fulfilling my calling in the ward. But I really hadn't done anything different here than with anyone else - I talked to him when I saw him in and outside of church, let him know about activities and social events so he could pass it on to quorum members, and accepted his invitations to serve, attend the temple, play sports, go to another institute class...

So when he told me this morning that I was a creep, it hurt way more than I ever could have guessed. I'll be honest. I am in constant need of friends, and I am constantly somehow pushing them all away. Everything I do seems to backfire and turn all my efforts into dust... and I'm left totally alone, friendless, and depressed. I cried for hours this morning, talking with God and trying to figure out what I am doing so terribly wrong. And I don't know. I don't know at all. And I haven't known since I was 12 years old and realized that my "friends" all had better friends... but I never did. I don't have the best relationship with my family members, because we have a really hard time understanding one another. The few times I've tried to talk to them about anything they've been kind enough to listen... but they can't empathize and the suggestions they make belie a complete misunderstanding of what it is I face.

I felt so incredibly frustrated this morning. What a hypocrite, to preach about the importance of unity and then discard someone who has asked for your help. Part of me wanted to shout - to show him how much pain his words were causing to a guy who lives with depression, feels like he has no friends, and turns to Church leaders as His one source of friends... because they have the obligation to love and accept others unconditionally. And part of me broke into tears that lasted long after I'm sure he forgot about his words. Maybe he was right. Maybe I am a creep, and he and everyone else that tells me I'm socially inept are right. And the others, and I, are all wrong. I can't judge people. I don't know his circumstances or who he really is. The only thing I know is that he felt uncomfortable around me, creeped out, and didn't want me to talk to him again.

I've been trying to do everything right in life. I do everything I can to keep the commandments, be a good example, overcome my temptations in life... So where am I going wrong? While I was sobbing a woman came up to me (I have to get out of my house when I'm depressed or life is really bad) touched my shoulder, and said, "I hope life gets better for you." Total and complete strangers understand and love me. But the people I love and care about find ways to distance themselves from whatever emotional leprosy I carry.

The Lord told me not to worry... and to just move on with life. To not judge others for anything they do or don't do... and to simply love them. At least He doesn't think I'm a creep. And He reminded me that I should be relying on Him - not on others - to fill my needs. Only He truly understands my pain, because He has felt it, and overcome it so that I can be happy and have peace. Obviously my request to die was denied. He asked, instead, that I give up my pain, my sorrow, my grief, my anger... and let Him give me peace. I realized that I had asked for peace but wasn't willing to give up my pain without understanding it. Dear Lord, give me the faith and courage to believe and trust, even when I don't understand and everything seems to be going wrong. And, in moments, my tears dried and I felt peace.

I still don't know what to do, or what I am doing wrong that pushes people away from me. But I still have a testimony of the Gospel. I'll still be active in the Church even if I can't confide in... and have trouble admiring or trusting... my priesthood leaders... because my relationship with God is my own, and no one can take that away from me. Someday I'll understand. In the meantime, I'll have faith, and accept the peace that comes from Christ.

YESTERDAY I WANTED TO DIE. TODAY I HAVE A NEW LIFE

If there's anything I learned from my experience yesterday, it's that I place way too much stock in how others think of me. And when I think about it, it's still true. Deep inside my heart... No, more like right on the top, I want people to like me, to love the gospel, to gain the attributes that will help lead them closer to Christ. And realizing that I am still a novice in anything social is more than a bit unnerving.

And I was reminded that God loves me. In every way possible, the Lord told me that He loved me yesterday. Strangers walked up to me on the street and gave me hugs, or texted me and thanked me for a random thing I had done in their lives. Friends and family members called to check on me. Many of you posted comments or wrote personal messages. And a member of my Bishopric felt prompted to come by my house to see if I needed anything. Thank you...

I gave up my anger and tried to understand - to figure out what I could do so that I wouldn't push more people away. I learned that some people think I'm too friendly. Others blame the fact that I skip smalltalk, or that I'm overly confident and direct in showing people I care about them. And another said that treating everyone like my best friend could be the reason. Then the Lord gave me two thoughts... Both of which have made me think.

The first was echoed by some of you - don't worry about what other people think... Life isn't between you and others... Love people unconditionally even when they reject you... Rely on the Lord to know what you are doing right and wrong - not someone else's judgment... This was what helped me realize how little self-esteem I had at the moment. At least at that moment, everything in my life revolved around others... including my own personal self-worth. That places way too big a burden on others... and will ultimately fail. People can't meet all my needs, and I should rely on God anyway.

The other thought, which I haven't entertained much, is how much easier it would be to navigate life and avoid difficulties in communication if I could simply lay down all the cards on the table: if I and everyone else

could honestly share our griefs, pains, trials, and sorrows with others so that they could better understand our needs and we theirs. It's the first time I've actually pondered merging my two worlds into one - putting a name and face to Mormon Guy and using my attraction to guys as a reason to who I am in real life. For the first time, I wasn't concerned about the impact it would have on my family, or on how people would think of me. I mean, I keep a blog on being spiritual and attracted to guys. I'm committed to staying clean for a girl even when part of me says she doesn't exist and I'll never find her. What girl wouldn't kill for a husband like that? Seriously, though, I feel peace about who I am, the growth and spirituality repentance in my life, and the work I'm doing in my part of the field. The only thing that made me wonder, is wondering if that choice - to become a public figure with a name instead of a cool pseudonym (It even shows up at the top of alphabetical lists! How's that for cool?) - would help or hinder the work and my own ability to serve in the Church and my workplace/chosen field. Right now it doesn't feel like the right choice. But it's a choice-- one that hasn't been in the past.

I don't know what will happen with my relationship with this Priesthood leader. I knew I wouldn't see him today, so I texted him (I think I may stop texting... or at least stop texting when I could call or talk in person the next time I see someone...) the following message: "[Name] - I hated you this morning...But I wanted to let you know that I forgive you and I'm sorry. Don't share this link with anyone [link to this blog]." I didn't know what to do except be completely honest with him - to lay all the cards on the table. I don't know if he'll follow the link, or if coming to (Gay) Mormon Guy will solidify my being a creep... but something inside me said I should give him that chance - the chance to see me in a totally different world... where maybe he would realize that at least my creepiness was unintended and totally benign. Whatever happens - if I find a friend who is willing to help me through life or someone who wants lots of space - I'll be okay. Really. Today was better than yesterday, and tomorrow is a new day.

BEGGING FOR PEACE, LOVE, FAITH

"Are we not all beggars?"

I was listening to the first chapters of Mosiah this morning, and King Benjamin's words blew me away. This man was beyond incredible, and had such an awesome understating of the teachings of God and how they apply to others. In four short chapters, he speaks with such power and spirit that every person in the sound of his voice turned to God, covenanted with Him to keep His commandments, and never turned away from the truth.

His oration seemed this morning to apply even more greatly to me... I'd suggest reading it all, from the end of Mosiah 2 through Mosiah 5... But I wanted to share a few verse that really hit me... I apologize if this sounds overly preachy to those of you who aren't Mormon... But here are some verses, some with my own changes.

Mosiah 2:41 - *And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.*

Mosiah 4:16-23 -

16 And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance [knowledge and faith] unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish [physically or spiritually].

17 Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery [or his pride, his anger, or his unwillingness to believe in God]; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance [or share my faith, or open my heart to him] that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just --

18 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to

repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

19 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind [do we not rely on Him for our personal salvation, the knowledge that we have, our faith, our hope, our peace, and everything we have]?

20 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins [peace, and understanding]. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

21 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another [whether it be physical, spiritual, social, or emotional].

22 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance [or faith or support in becoming a better man] that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life longeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

23 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance [and his faith] shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world... [and I make reference to faith and hope and peace - greater treasures which are not of this world].

I need to just be open, kind, and honest with others, not judge them, and move forward with faith. And the Lord will bless me. Everything will work out in the end.

BEING AMAZINGLY, AWESOMELY, INFECTIOUSLY HAPPY

I've had some rough times over the last few days. And, as usual, the rough spots in life give me the chance to turn to God and seek His guidance. Often when I ask for help, He helps me identify things that I can change... and ways that I need to improve in order to feel greater peace and joy. But these last few days have been different. Maybe it's just a calm before the storm, but I feel like I'm on the right path, and that I simply need to keep moving forward. Every answer to my prayers held the message of God's love and esteem for me, and I feel like I am doing enough.

Those of you who've read over the last few months probably realize how singular this feeling is in my life. I'm a perfectionist. I'm super-zealous in fulfilling my duties and trying to do what is right. And yet, through each step of my life I carry the powerful sense that I could, and should, be doing more to build the kingdom. Meeting with good friends and mentors and talking about this blog and my efforts to share the gospel hasn't helped. Talking with other friends and trying to lift them hasn't helped. And spending every spare moment trying to improve my talents and give back to the world hasn't helped, either... The peace and joy didn't come from any of those; it came, unexpectedly, as a gift from God - proof of His grace when I still lack the essential characteristics of perfection.

I think I've taught people that joy doesn't come from what we do. I taught it on my mission, and it shapes the lessons I teach and the things I write and say. But, somewhere in my heart, I guess I've always believed that happiness came inherently from doing more good things - that the more good I could accomplish in life, the happier I would end up becoming. That's only partially true. In reality, my ability to feel joy is based on my relationship with God and *who I am*, not what I do. Yes, wickedness never was happiness, and men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause and bring to pass many good things of their own accord. But when life is hard, and the pain of living in an imperfect world seems too great to bear, true happiness comes from God... as a gift. Reading King Benjamin's sermon yesterday reminded me of that, and now I realize it completely.

This is probably one of the most stressful Christmas seasons I've ever encountered. Everything in my life is up in the air, and the Lord asks me

to do more and more things I have no clue how to do. But, I can honestly say that this Christmas season is also the happiest I can ever remember, because of who I am. I'm not perfect by any means. But looking back, and seeing the gifts of faith, love, and diligence that I've given to Christ, this Christmas comes with peace and joy. I have no idea what trials tomorrow holds, or what painful experiences the future holds. But it doesn't matter. I'm happy - amazingly, truthfully, and awesomely happy... and no mortal power can ever take that away.

ANOTHER VERY DISSENTING OPINION

I'll sometimes get comments like this one on my blog - from people who believe, honestly, that I can't exist as a righteous, faithful, happy Mormon Guy who is also attracted to guys. They're normally also chock-full of "objective" statements that go against the nature of (Gay) Mormon Guy, so I don't have the time or real desire to publish them. But this one, while definitely disparaging in nature, made me think... and want to respond. So here goes. His comments are in italics. My response is bold.

I'm glad you have an outlet through this blog, as do many of your fans and followers. The reality is, just as your title exclaims, is a giant oxymoron. You can't have both worlds. I believe those who are homosexual cannot coexist happily with the gospel, nor can straight members coexist with homosexuals. The gospel, at least the LDS gospel, strictly forbids sexual choices, and you know there isn't the understanding that homosexuality isn't always a choice. That being the case, you will never be happy in the gospel, I will straight out tell you that right now. The more you try to reason the gospel into your life, the more you'll have men you'll be attracted to (in the church) that will call you "creep" or shun you because it is not accepted. Please, find the things that make you happy, the ideology, the teachings, and run with them if they make you happy. But the gospel in its entirety strictly forbids who you are, and so you will live a life that will, in essence, be hypocritical and oxymoronic, and always painful.

The only way I know how to respond to this is my own personal experience. The gospel, specifically the LDS gospel, is where I have found peace. The members of the Church, like everyone else in the world, are imperfect... and when I rely on them or on anyone else for my happiness, I agree - I won't find it in the end. But I also know that I am not an oxymoron... and while those who live with my struggle may not fit in your eyes, I fit in God's. And this is His Church. I've spoken with leaders of the Church on this subject, and, of all the things I have learned, is the true acceptance of who I am. I am a son of God, who is committed to living the gospel. Yeah, I'm attracted to guys. And there is nothing wrong with being attracted to them. I repeat - there is nothing wrong with being attracted to others. God gave us attraction as part of who we are. For normal guys, it's to help them find a wife. For me, it's an all-encompassing trial designed to help me be who He sees in me. If all extra-marital attraction were sin, we would have much bigger problems on our hands. The sin, and the choice that is not accepted in the gospel, is

choosing to sexually act out those attractions... and that is as prohibited for me as it is for men attracted women.

I'm happy, anonymous. Really. I know you may not believe that... but I'd ask you to ask God - and I know that He can give you the same understanding He gave me.

We've known who you were, even those in your ward know who you are. They won't understand. Happiness is not in trying to be a part of something that shuns you out, while you try to hold onto the little good you know there is. Don't hurt yourself with the church. I know the 'priesthood leader' you professed about that called you a creep, and it's people like him that prove that there won't be acceptance, allowance, or tolerance. It goes against what the gospel states to have those things. I'd want to reason and believe as you do, but I know I'd be lying to myself. You will be happy. There are many like you and they've found solace in a world outside the church. You state about Him and how He loves you, of which, He does. But His love isn't how you state it. His love is because you are His. His gospel, however, (if you believe the LDS doctrine) is not the same love you are hoping for. If so, then His mouth pieces, the apostles, President Monson, do not speak truth and lie. If you believe they do speak the truth, then you can't twist or reason that what they say, what the scriptures say, can be warped into what you are. The "truth" is you must repent and turn to Christ, the way that is outlined by the church. Repentance isn't about who you are, it's what you do. Why repent of what you are if it's not a choice? I don't know if you see where I'm going with this.

If I went to church on Sunday and everyone knew, and everyone judged me, I would still go, and I would do the same things I do now - reach out to others and try to be a good person. My membership and faith isn't dependent on being understood or accepted by others - it comes from being understood and accepted by God.

Maybe you do know him. But I choose to doubt that unless proven otherwise. I could be being incredibly trusting, but I believe in the goodness of people, even when they give me every reason to believe contrary. I'm not naive - I treat people as the best I see in them, and give them the chance to live up to that vision.

And, even if there were a thousand people who rejected and hated me for my circumstances, I've met with so many people who are accepting of who I am - most Church leaders - that I'll never believe

that the gospel, or the Church, doesn't allow others to love, understand, and accept that I am attracted to guys. In fact, I know it's exactly contrary. When a member of my stake presidency gives a talk on the importance of forever families... and then looks at me and talks about the faith that comes in living true principles even when you don't understand, I can see in him more than just acceptance and tolerance... in his eyes is a profound admiration for being true to who I am in a trial he will never face and struggles to imagine. Knowing me, and seeing my faith, has made him a better person, and helped him on his journey of faith... and I know that because he has told me.

I believe that it is here that I find peace and joy. I know that what the prophets speak is true. I know, not only because I've compared and critiqued their every word, but because I've turned to God and learned the same truths at His hand. I've seen the same visions, received the same revelations, heard the same still, small voice... and from those experiences I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that Thomas S. Monson is a prophet of God... and that I'm on the right path.

Still, I'm saddened to see how sad you feel sometimes, both when I pass you by on Sundays or other days, and through this blog. If you want happiness, you need to not hurt yourself with the hope that things will change. The gospel doesn't change if it's true. Truth doesn't change. If you are who you are, you have no reason to change that part of you either. So the two can't blend together, but I'm sure you can coexist, separately. I'm sure you'll eventually figure out who I am, but that's irrelevant.

As far as figuring out who you are, passing you on Sundays, or constantly being sad, maybe you have the wrong guy. Here on (Gay) Mormon Guy I share only a small part of my life, and the only reason it's sometimes depressing is because this trial is sometimes depressing. But it's the only thing in my life that qualifies under that category... Everything else in my life easily qualifies as being incredibly blessed, and except for maybe a wife and family, I literally have everything that anyone could want. My life is awesome in almost every aspect.

Maintain the smiles you put on and push through each day. Just know you are in our thoughts, and you'll come out stronger in the end when you realize there's more to this

life than being shunned out by that which you want to be a part of and parts that you want to believe. You are better than that, and that, I do believe with all my heart.

On this I agree with you, but with an application different than the one you had in mind. You believe that turning away from the Church, with its people and their potential prejudice, would give me happiness. Happiness doesn't come from people. It comes from God - and from living the principles of the gospel. True faith is giving to those that stand in need - and that is why we have the Church - not only to be buoyed up by others, but more to have a chance to serve and share and, by serving others, come closer to God.

Thanks for your comment. I know we believe different things, but I'm grateful that you care enough to write, to compose your thoughts for me. Merry Christmas!

WHAT I, (GAY) MORMON GUY, WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

I wish Santa Claus could bring me a best friend who would completely understand me, a girl I could fall in love with and marry, and the ability to share the message of the gospel with every person living. But while those things have been in my prayers, they're not really on my Christmas list. I'll spare you the temporal nonsense that ubiquitously populates Christmas wishlists - whether I want a toothbrush or an orange in my stocking or something that will be novel at least long enough to break before I'm finished with it... and tell you about what I really want to find, and hopefully have the faith to see happen in my life.

1. Some more guy friends to do guy stuff with.

I have a handful of friends I can talk to when I'm down, and most of the time I can talk to the Lord anyway. But I can't play soccer or volleyball or lift weights or go running with a friend when no one is interested or makes time. I'd just like to find some guys I can chill with throughout the week.

2. Direction in what to do next with (Gay) Mormon Guy.

People are still coming here, and writing helps me to stay strong each day and understand how this trial affects my life. But there are still thousands upon thousands who need to hear the message - many of whom are searching as I was years ago. I want to know what to do next to find them and bring them hope.

3. A better relationship with God and my friends.

I know that many of you have indicated that I should drop any friends who reject or betray me... but I'm not that kind of person. I don't reject people just because they reject me. I don't hate them because they hate me. I'm not stupid or naive - I just love people way too much to ever give up hope on them. It's the same way with God and me, from His perspective... how could I offer anything less to the people I love? I want my friends to realize that I care about, support, forgive, and love them, no

matter what they do... and that I would give my life to help them to be happy.

4. Greater faith... To have patience in finding true friends and an eternal mate.

I know that, someday, I'll find someone who shares enough of who I am that we'll 'click'... and our friendship will grow into something amazing. I also know that I'll fall in love with a girl in that category, she'll fall in love with me, and the miracle I've been waiting, hoping, pleading, and praying for will come to pass. Right now, though, I just look at my life... and see very little that foreshadows either promise. Few good friends, fewer of which understand me... and definitely no attraction yet for a girl to be my wife. I just want greater faith to be patient, to do the Lord's will and have faith in His timing and His ways.

5. Help becoming better.

My experience Saturday highlighted the fact that I still have a long way to go before I am perfect in social skills. I still have a long way to go before I'm perfect in much of anything... And I just want some help understanding what I need to do and who I need to be.

I don't know if God will answer my prayers this Christmas, or if He has something better in store (patience or just a different answer). We haven't had that conversation yet. But these are my hopes and dreams - shadows of the greater ones that He's promised will come someday. I guess I'm asking for a lot. We'll see what happens come Christmas.

THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

"For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord..."

2000 years ago, a young woman and a young man took courage, followed the counsel of the Spirit, and walked into the darkness with faith. They broke with traditional Jewish norms in the timing of their wedding, and when the call came to travel to Bethlehem for the census, they probably took everything they had with them on the journey - each other and their faith.

One of the traditions of Christianity in paintings and nativities is to paint the Holy Family surrounded in darkness, creating their own light. While the world looks on and the darkness gathers, they sit, full of faith and hope and light... even though they probably have absolutely no clue what the future holds for them and their loved ones.

Right now in my life I feel like I could probably fit in that picture, at least the part about darkness gathering around me. I don't know what tomorrow holds... and the only thing I can do is walk forward into the darkness with faith. For a long time I expected the light to come on as soon as I stepped forward - for the Lord to somehow reveal some great truth to me to put everything in perspective. And sometimes that happens... but recently there has been no brilliant flash of light. Instead, I've found myself walking in the darkness, and slowly able to see by another light. I definitely have a long way to go before having a halo... but I feel like this is the right direction. The Lord has helped me learn and understand gospel principles for myself, becoming a better person and learning to see the hand of the Lord... and slowly gaining the light of the Lord in my life.

OUTED ON THE 1ST DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I got to church today and the bishop wanted to talk. Three thoughts went through my head.

- 1: A new calling.
- 2: He was prompted to meet with me.
- 3: I had been outed.

It was definitely the third.

Our meeting started well. We talked about Christmas traditions and the ward in general, and he thanked me for being a member of the ward. Then I sat back and let him explain why he wanted to meet.

"____ (guy who is subject of last Saturday's post) came to me and there is some sort of friction between you two. I've heard what he said and I just want to hear your side of the story."

I don't know my bishop very well. I hadn't decided to enlist his help yet, since I don't have any worthiness problems and I'm not sure how he can help. So I shared part of the story - talking about my desire to serve, be connected in the ward, and support and sustain my leaders.

He listened attentively, then told me, "Everything you say to me is confidential. Everything ____ said to me is confidential - I won't tell you what he told me and what you say won't leave the room. It's like they say, 'What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.'"

Interesting metaphor, but I love my bishop. He asked me if there was anything else.

I took a deep breath and went deeper - and talked about wanting friends and to be a friend in a new place... leaving the door open for issues like self-esteem (which no one would ever guess) and depression (similar). I knew he wouldn't get either hint, but I have a really hard time opening myself up to people. Again, he listened attentively, but wasn't hearing what he wanted to hear.

“I don't know how to bring this up,” he said... paused... “I know that some subjects are ... touchy... Tell me about a website or a blog...”

I looked at this man in front of me while my mind went in a dozen directions. He knew. I had been outed. And now I was supposed to share my life with an almost stranger in a few minutes. I wondered what had pushed my friend to talk with the bishop - but I know nothing of the circumstance but my own view. I still wondered, though, what had gone through his mind... how their conversation had progressed... and what I could do better to make it so that I don't run away friends in the future.

The other part of me realized that, suddenly, I had someone here in front of me who wanted and needed to know at least a good chunk about me and my trials.

The five seconds of wait time was up, and I replied, “That will probably take more time than you have scheduled right now... Have you read it?”

He hadn't. He didn't even have the address. And he wanted to hear from me before he read the site anyway. My esteem for my bishop jumped in that moment... as I realized that, regardless of circumstance, I was grateful to be talking with him. He may not be able to help in what I need right now, but I can counsel with him... and find strength in his guidance. He's a good guy.

I decided to give him a brief synopsis before another meeting with more time. Without ever using the word gay or any of its many incarnations (I actually never used the word, or any relation to it, during the entire conversation. I had already been outed. My friend told him. I didn't need to mention it again.), I talked about my prompting to start this blog, talking with past leaders, and seeing incredible success. I shared some of the countless stories I've received - marriages saved, suicides averted, faith restored... and thousands of letters and comments of thanks.

He asked me, cautiously, if the blog shared principles that led people away from the Church. It sounded like the question was taken partially from the temple interview question. I laughed and told him no - of all the gay Mormon blogs in the blogosphere, mine probably gets the most anti-Mormon hate mail. I get a lot of well-written, well-intended stuff too...

but when someone calls you stupid 10 times amid swearing in the course of a poorly written letter...yes, I definitely support Church doctrine.

I gave him the address and asked him to read the blog from the beginning. I want him to read the whole thing, but I'm not sure if he will. Or if he has the time... I have hundreds of pages by now.

He looked at me and asked, "So, is this going to be a problem between you and ____ for a certain period of time?"

"I don't know, bishop. I'd like to talk to him about it, but I don't know if he'll talk with me."

"I'll talk to him." Then he looked at me with a look that bore into my soul. "Mormon Guy, I want you to know that I am the bishop of this ward, and I know everything that happens. Either people tell me or I get intuition. I'm the judge in Israel here... and I am talking with you because I want you and everyone here to have a spiritual experience in this ward. I don't want you and ____ to be walking down the hall towards each other and to make a u-turn. I want to make sure that doesn't happen."

Nothing else in our conversation meant more than that. If the bishop said he would make it right, it would happen... and maybe it would mean that the burned bridge could somehow be rebuilt.

"Is there anything else I can do?"

I looked at him again, and I saw him, honestly wanting to do everything he could. I told him I'd ask at our next meeting.

Since our conversation, I've thought about all my current needs... and how he could help. Here's the list.

1: Good friends. I need good guy friends who are willing to be good friends. Maybe he can help me identify who in the ward would be good candidates.

2: Help when I'm in crisis, or if I need to repent. I haven't had any major crises lately, and I don't have any worthiness issues... but real people are

important. Just having his phone number and being able to call at any time will be enough.

3: Someone to counsel with when I need direction or just want to talk about my blog. Writing here is sometimes stressful. I'm never sure how to respond to letters, and I wish I had more people just to talk to... my few friends who know don't have the time to follow my blog, so I can't talk about it with anyone.

4: (very specific to me) I've felt the desire to go dumpster diving recently - to actively reach out and find people who are struggling beyond the blog. It's one of the most draining things I do... but I need to try again. And when I dumpster dive, I need a shoulder to cry on.

Outed on the 1st Day of Christmas...

DREAMS ON THE 2ND DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I've had two dreams for as long as I can remember. Dreams that fill my sleep and haunt my days... and whose lilting, vagrant melodies make me question whether I will ever see their fruition. Inside my heart, I know they will happen someday, but until then I work and wait and pray.

The first dream is of love. I wish I were in love... hopelessly and completely in love with a girl who loved me in return. I wish I could shower her with gifts, talk late into the night... I'd even be willing to sing her love songs every so often. I dream of having a family and being a righteous father and husband... standing by my future wife through everything... teaching my children the gospel and helping them each to see the hand of God in their lives.

The second dream is to make a difference in the world - to do something truly great... something to give back to humanity and leave the world a better place. But it's more than just wanting to end world hunger or fight famine or disease... I want to change the people of the world - to inspire them, somehow, to become who they truly were destined to be.

Looking at my life right now, and honestly looking at all the pieces, I still have a long way to go. I don't even have a girlfriend, or any girl that I'm attracted to... and I've only ever fallen in love with guys. And changing the world? Maybe I can touch a few lives with something I say or write, but there are billions of people in the world. I don't know how I'll ever change the fabric of humanity.

So those are my dreams. They're what keep me going through the hard days of life, get me up in the morning, give me a reason to keep living when my days are down. They're big dreams. And some might say that they're impossible... but they're mine, and in my heart I believe that someday they'll come true.

FITTING IN: THE 3RD DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I stick out. Everywhere I go. Really. Except for the temple, I've never found a place where I really feel like I belong. I go to family gatherings and feel like the black sheep. But then I've felt like a black sheep everywhere - church, school, work, the mission, with groups of friends, even going out on dates with girls who like me. And it's not an in-my-head-oh-no-everyone-is-watching-me kind of sticking out; in my case, everyone (no exceptions so far) around me tells me I'm different.

I realize that “everyone is different,” and “there is no normal.” But when everyone I meet tells me I'm different, even in a good way. it does more than just highlight my differences. I'm sure they usually mean to compliment some talent or perspective on life... but even so, being different cuts a chasm between me and the rest of humanity. I feel like I can't relate with people, or they with me.

I know that I need to rely on God to meet my needs. I'd still like to fit in with people, though... and feel like I'm one of them - not just an outsider that someone kindly invited to play a supporting role. But I'm not sure what needs to happen... if I need to keep searching until I find the right group to fit in with, or if I just need to change to better fit with the rest of humanity.

SPIRITUAL PARADOX: THE 4TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I like to have all the right answers. But today a guy asked me a question that made my blood run chill. "What would you do if God commanded you to find a husband?"

I told him I honestly didn't know, and the conversation shifted to safer topics. I tried to convince myself that God couldn't do such a thing, as it went against everything I had ever known to be true. But in the back of my mind I wondered about my unanswered question. What *would* I do? As I thought, I realized that my question was about more than just gay marriage - it cut to the core of living life by the Spirit and following counsel received by prophets. What would I do if the Spirit prompted me to do something contrary to the teachings of the prophets - anything at all? It may never happen. But it has - Nephi was commanded to kill Laban. Abraham was commanded to kill Isaac. And black men were prompted to ask for the Priesthood before the Lord had made it possible. God *could* prompt me to do anything at all. What would I do?

I know that God will answer any personal question with a personal answer... and so this afternoon I asked Him to help me answer this one - if not for me, for anyone who feels torn between promptings of the Spirit and the teachings of the prophets... torn between wanting to follow God's personal counsel, and knowing how to follow it.

The first thing that came to mind was the importance of knowing the voice of the Spirit. Even the devil can appear as an angel of light... so my first step would be determining if the revelation truly came from God... and would involve a whole lot of fasting, prayer, scripture study, temple attendance, blessings, and meditation.

If the answer still held, and God still prompted me to move forward, I'd go on to the next step. Elder Uchtdorf's talk on divine lines of communication this conference emphasizes that all revelation and truth can and must be reconciled using two lines of communication. That is why we have two lines - so that, in difficult situations where issues are unclear, we can receive revelation from multiple sources.

So I would check using the Priesthood line - talk with my bishop, stake president, and anyone else who could receive revelation on my behalf. I'd

explain the situation honestly and sincerely, and ask them to pray and confirm what I had learned from God.

If my Priesthood leaders confirmed what came through the personal line, then I would go forward with faith. If they did not, then suddenly I would be faced with a spiritual paradox. The Spirit tells me to do one thing; the leaders of the Church tell me to do another. Which do I follow?

This is the heart of the matter - do I follow God or His Church?

As I thought through this question, I was reminded of the many talks this conference that referenced the 14 truths about the prophet. Among them, the prophet can speak on any topic... and the prophet will never lead the Church astray. Ultimately this question, and my ultimate loyalty, hinges on one question - whether the Church is truly God's Church, and whether Thomas S. Monson is His prophet. Because if the Church is true, and Thomas S. Monson is a prophet, then what he teaches is true... and the Church has the authority and responsibility to guide how I live my life to enable me to receive salvation. In that case, the right thing to do will *always* be within the bounds that the Lord has set through His prophets. And if the Church isn't true? Then I have a much bigger problem.

I know that Thomas S. Monson is a prophet... and I know the Church is true. I've asked, and God answered me... and so I know that God will never lead His prophet astray, and that His prophet has the authority to receive revelation on my behalf. So what would I do? I would continually check the personal line of revelation and do what the faithful black members of the Church did as they waited for the Priesthood. I would follow God's commandment to me as far as I could within the doctrine of His prophets... and then I would wait for God to make the next move.

But my waiting wouldn't be for the Church to change - it would be to receive guidance in my own life to do what was right, paired with a willingness to submit to all His commandments, and prayers for God's oracles. Maybe He would change doctrine... and maybe He would change the commandment He gave me...

Commandments aren't always given with the express purpose of keeping them. I would try to look beyond His commandment and understand its purpose, since God gives me commandments to teach me critical principles of the gospel. In the scriptures there are examples of

commandments the Lord never intended His children to keep. Abraham was not commanded to kill Isaac so that Isaac would die; he was commanded to test his faith and prove to himself that he would follow God in all times and in all places. That didn't change the commandment, though... or the requirement for Abraham to be completely willing to follow God no matter what. In my own life the Lord has often given me directions that seemed confusing or strange, only to change directions again in the future.

And so perhaps the commandment was given, not to be fulfilled, but to point me in the direction the Lord needs me to go, today, in order to accomplish His will. Maybe having the goal in mind to keep His commandment would enable me to be a better missionary and share the gospel, or motivate me to become a better person as a whole, so that God could give me more direction.

Ultimately, if God commanded me to do anything against the doctrine of the Church, and I knew the prompting came from God, then I would follow His commandments. I'm grateful to know that the Lord has called a prophet today who speaks to God on my behalf... and that the onus of receiving guidance from the Lord is not mine alone. I would follow the promptings the Lord had given me as far as I could within the guidelines set by the prophets... and then wait and pray to see what God did next in my life - if He changed the doctrine and commandments of His Church, wanted me to simply wait and learn patience, or if He turned me in another direction once I had learned the lessons I needed to learn by moving forward.

It all comes back to that - if the Lord has established His Church as an authority here on the Earth, and if He is guiding the Church through a modern prophet, then I can and must follow the teachings of the prophet to the ends of the Earth, for, in God's words, a prophet's teachings are the words of the Lord, and the prophet is given the ultimate authority to receive revelation in my behalf. If he is a true prophet, then his counsel, as the authoritative voice of the Lord, will always be the ultimate will of the Lord in my life. With that knowledge, I have a lens to see *how* to follow God's commands in my life.

Thank Heavens for answers to prayers... what began as an awful question became an opportunity to learn an important principle for my life. Whenever I receive any commandment from the Lord, I will do my best

to follow it and all the commandments God has given - melding my prompting within the bounds that He has set through His prophets. I will follow Him with faith, and He will take care of the rest.

(The conversation around this post continued for a while... and the last answer I received was that God will never ask me to marry a man because He'll never ask it of anyone. It's not part of His Plan for His children. Ultimately, that's the answer that helped me to know what I would do. God has told me He would never give that commandment, so if I ever get any sort of prompting to go in that direction, I can know with a surety that it isn't of God.)

GOLDEN RINGS: THE 5TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

Every person in my life wants me to be happily married... Which means that they each try to set me up with girls they've (usually) randomly and casually met. Girls who happen to work at the temple that they are visiting out of town. Girls who might be in Utah for at least 1 day of vacation. Girls who they have never even met - only heard about when a family came to visit their ward and mentioned that they had a female family member within 10 years of my age.

Don't get me wrong. I absolutely love the people in my life. I am amazed at how much they think of me and how involved they are in my life. Every time my great-aunt, grandfather, or anyone else tries to set me up with another girl it's because they want to give me every possible opportunity... and it's pretty much all they can do. I just wonder about the filtering process that goes on inside their heads. Some of the girls have even had boyfriends or fiancées... which meant that an awkward phone call to set up a blind date became even more awkward.

Some days I wish they knew the struggle I faced... and understood why telling me a girl is incredibly attractive is totally useless... and so that the incredible pressure to get married, at least from them, would lessen. But most of the time I'm glad that they're involved... and glad that they admire me enough to try to help me to be happy. If they knew they probably wouldn't ever try to set me up again... (I tried that once with a gay friend. Didn't work because she was just starting to date someone else and he didn't want to open up old wounds. They really hit it off though when they met - she was definitely on an all-out flirt and I had never seen his eyes light up for a girl before. Even if it didn't work out, I still think it could have helped him and her.) and that's not really my intent.

It'll happen someday. In the meantime I still go on blind dates, try to find girls that might fit (with the necessary miracle, of course...) and follow the progression and prices of diamond simulants (I'll leave my feelings about diamond cartels for a different forum). Years ago one of my marriage prep teachers said the best way to move towards marriage is to move as if it was already in the plans. Go ring shopping, choose a temple, taste cake samples, browse colors and reception styles, choose a honeymoon and think of baby names. I haven't done all that. Going ring shopping without

a girlfriend was awkward enough. This was the real conversation as I tried, nonchalantly, to just look around the display area.

"Does she know you're here?"

"No."

"Have you talked about it?"

"Not really."

And the salesmen look at each other knowingly. I think they'd have a very different look if they knew the whole story.

A NEW YEAR'S PRAYER: THE 6TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

From the darkness of my sorrow, dearest Father, bring me light.

Help me change and become better as I try to choose the right.

Dry my tears and ease my pain when I am crying in the night and feel alone; please help me feel Thy love.

In the place of hatred, give me love.

For sadness, give me peace.

And from my trials and temptations give me hope to find release...

While I toil through affliction help me never, ever cease to turn to Thee, and follow in Thy way.

Give me strength to choose the right and live throughout the day

Give me courage to extend my hand, helping others find the way

Give me patience to accept Thy will and see the shining ray... of peace that comes to all those who obey.

Give me love to be a friend to those who stand along life's path.

Give me friends who stand beside me though they may not understand.

Give me faith that I may always see the presence of Thy hand
in this New Year...

Happy New Year. May God be with you.

Mormon Guy

NEW YEAR'S PEACE: THE 7TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I woke up this morning to an incredible feeling of peace. For a moment, everything seemed to fall into place and life went into perfect perspective. And while today has been full of things to do, the feeling of peace and complete lack of stress has stayed - softly playing in the background as I respond to emails, run errands, and talk with friends about the rigors of life.

It's a somewhat unique feeling for me. Most of the time I obsess about my life. I'm probably an undiagnosed perfectionist. But right now I don't feel it - no overwhelming urge to clean or be somewhere else or do anything at all... just a feeling of peace beyond explanation.

I know I constantly write my beliefs here, but I thought I would share them again tonight. Tomorrow is fast Sunday, and so this is good practice for testimony meeting.

I know that God exists, and that He is my Father, my Judge, my Friend. He listens to my prayers and answers them... and stands at my side throughout each day. Because of Him, I am alive (in more ways than one...). Because of Him, I know that life is worth living. And I will follow Him forever to the ends of eternity. I know that He sent His Son to live and die for me - to show me the way to return to Him. Christ died and rose from the dead, that I will someday rise perfected in Him - free of mortal pains and trials.

Following God's Plan of Happiness brings me hope, joy, and peace. And someday it will help me to return to Him, saved by His grace. I give thanks to God that He has given His power to men through the Priesthood... and given me strength through sacred covenants and ordinances. I know that Thomas S Monson was called of God to be a prophet and receive revelation on the world's behalf... and that I receive knowledge and doctrine from God as I turn to Him in sincere prayer, willing to change my thoughts, desires, mind, and heart to become the man He sees in me.

There's a lot I still don't know or understand in life. But I know that with God at my side, it will all turn out for the best. He will be on my right and

left hand, His angels round about me to bear me up... and He will give me what to say, where to go, what to do, and who to be... in the very moment to accomplish His will.

“BE YOURSELF:” THE 8TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

A few weeks ago my social life was falling apart. I have never had good friends my age who understand me and stay an active part of my life. I find someone that maybe could fit part of that role, and then they decide to move a thousand miles away, life moves us apart in time and place, or they turn to me one day and tell me to get lost. Don't get me wrong - I have amazing mentors and role models and leaders who will do anything for me - but it's not the same. I've never had friends my age for longer than a few months. And days like today make me wonder if it will ever change.

I met with my priesthood leader today... and I'm torn between wanting to explain the details of our conversation - so you understand his motivation in what he did - and wanting to keep the confidence he indirectly requested. Even though we may never become good friends, and he may never read this post or (Gay) Mormon Guy again, integrity and loyalty are more important to me in relationships (even tenuous ones) than anything else... so I'll just go on.

I've talked with a number of friends recently, trying to identify what it is about me that is so repulsive. I can write something that appeals to hundreds of thousands of people... So what makes those same people, when they begin to get to know me, instantly reject me as an option to be a friend? Most of my recent friends were unwilling to give me any feedback - claiming they didn't know me well enough or that there wasn't anything inherently bad... but finally someone told me: I love people intensely, and most people don't want intense relationships.

As I look at my life, I understand the truth of that statement. I call or text people every time I think of them. Most people want friends who will call them every so often. I invite people to everything I do - extending the invitation whether or not they will accept. They want people who only invite them to some things. When my friends are sick, I make them soup, put their names on the temple prayer roll, and coordinate with leaders to ensure they receive blessings. Most people want friends who will ask once how they're doing... but won't actively try to understand their needs or their soul. I pray for my friends by name, try to find them the best surprise Christmas presents, attend their concerts and learn their trades. Ultimately, when I find a friend, I open my entire heart and soul to

him, and, subconsciously, take the steps to unlock and understand his as well... and because of that, I am intense.

In recent years I've put more and more effort into trying to appear less intense so that people accept me. I've had lists of conversation topics (and blacklists), taken courses on direct and indirect communication, talked with communication experts, logged interventions, and asked the Lord for help. But there has been no appreciable change. I'm thinking, honestly, that I may have Asperger's and simply have a different way of processing relational information.

It was with this understanding, and not really sure what to expect, that I met my bishop again today. He, too, asked me not to blog our conversation... But I will tell you that he had prayerfully prepared... and I will share one piece of inspired counsel he gave that was an answer to years of prayer: **when you are trying to find good friends, be yourself.**

I had asked him part of the list I made - for help finding good friends - people who wouldn't tell me to change who I was, wouldn't be afraid or discomfited by my intensity, and could actually, maybe, become good friends. He listed off a few names, then turned to me with the familiar look in his eyes of a Priesthood Leader who has received truth from God... and told me to be myself.

Before my mission, I never really had to make relationships work. I had tons of acquaintances and, somehow, found ways to fill my needs, or ignore them, by being busy in my life. But when I entered the MTC I realized that my intensity was the biggest stumbling block in trying to become friends with the people I loved. I began trying to develop social skills... always assuming that, because something in my character was incompatible with others, I had the burden of change. I started by trying to understand exactly what I was “supposed” to be doing in a given friendship and then doing it - making friendship like a dance or a game of cards or a counseling session. And while sometimes I was able to find temporary “friends” that way, they never understood me... and the friendships inevitably failed as I realized that I was tired of the dance and wanted real friends, or they saw beyond the facade and promptly rejected me. No one has ever made the jump from dance-friend in a carefully structured relationship... to true friend who loves and accepts me for who I am... and strives to understand and meet my own needs. No one my age has ever made the jump to true friend at all.

The stark contrast hit me - and I realized that this was my ultimate choice. I could try to love people less and pretend that I don't want to be involved in the intimate details of their lives - perhaps finding more people who will accept a faux me... or I can be true to the intensity that is an integral part of who I am, and with the hope of finding someone who will accept me, risk complete rejection and pain at every turn.

As I write this post, I realize that part of my lot in life is to know what it means to be friendless. Curled up in a ball, crying for peace, the Lord has taught me the importance of turning to Him before anyone else - **anyone** - and shown me how I can be a friend to those in need even if they can never reciprocate. He has answered my prayers for peace and guidance when no one else could... and I am grateful for the relationship that I have slowly developed with Him. I don't know if I will ever find true best friends. I mean, I believe I'll find a wife someday, and she will be my best friend first... but decades of trying hasn't worked before. How will this run be different from the last time, when I met utter rejection in the face?

Maybe it won't work, and part of my trial is learning how to be honest and true to who I am... even without friends - sort of like staying true to the law of chastity that I covenanted with God to keep in His temple, even when everyone around me tells me I'm a fool.

Either way, I know my direction... and I know that God will take care of me. He does miracles in my behalf, and He will make it right.

FINDING DIRECTION: THE 9TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

With my recent conversations with others about (Gay) Mormon Guy I've wondered about my direction here. I started blogging because, 10 years ago, I wished that I could have found someone - anyone - who was a success story in the making. Not someone who had somehow miraculously "changed" and never had to deal with the issue again, but someone who still lived with it, and never gave up hope. I had never heard of anyone like that. And 6 months ago, when I began blogging, I was one of few who openly and actively raised their voices in unapologetic support of the Church and its teachings. There are dozens of ex-Mormon gay blogs, anti-Mormon gay blogs, and gay Mormon blogs that condone living "your own version of the law of chastity." But what I needed - clear and unapologetic doctrine, hope, and understanding... didn't seem to be available.

I never wanted clinical counseling - it never seemed like a clinical problem. The issue I faced was a choice of will - whether I would give in to temptation or not. Evergreen, NorthStar, and the rest of the unofficial therapy groups that proclaimed their perfection for gay Mormon men and women... never seemed to have what I felt I needed. And other groups (whose names will definitely stay unmentioned) claimed to be for gay Mormons, when in actuality they were as anti-Mormon and pro-promiscuity as possible.

Someday I hope that the need I felt - and the need I am trying to fill with (Gay) Mormon Guy - will find its expression with the strength of the body and within the official channels of the Church... because those are the two things I lack. I can't be a best friend to everyone who needs one. I have a hard time finding and making friends in the first place. And, while I can share my own personal experience and testimony, nothing I say of my own accord is official doctrine of the Church that I love.

I asked yesterday if I should stop blogging here - if it was time to move on with my life - and testimony after testimony bore witness to me of the importance of sharing my witness with the world... trusting in God... and doing my part in the field in which I've been called. The Lord gave me the ability to write, to see His hand in all things, and the strength to conquer my trials each day. All He asks is that I give thanks and share the good

news - that peace, happiness, and hope come from living the principles of the gospel and keeping the commandments.

I guess I should have known that He would say that. Press forward with a steadfastness of hope, having a love of God and of all men. At least for now, that's my direction and resolution for the coming year.

BEING HONEST WITH MYSELF: THE 10TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I used to think that ignoring my struggles in life would make them go away. Sometimes it helps. But, at least in my life, my self-imposed ignorance meant I was never fully able to deal with problems when they arose.

I've lived with severe depression since I was 16. I've only ever told three people - my mom, my mission president, and one friend. But I don't think any of them believed me... or understood the extent to which it affects my life. No one ever knew. Each day, I could convince myself that I was happy... and if that didn't work, I just told everyone else that I was deep in thought. I threw myself into life and accomplished incredible things... all with the goal of never having unscheduled time where, inevitably, depression would hit again. But my best efforts always seemed to be in vain. Something would be canceled, life would stop, and I would find myself reading my scriptures, crying, and praying for the strength to live through my pain.

It wasn't until I looked at my life and honestly acknowledged the struggle that I could plan and take steps to face it. As I did, I found a wealth of “resources” for dealing with it. Practicing a musical instrument (even if I'm mediocre), studying the scriptures, going to a public place where I can be around people who know me and will stop to talk with me, going somewhere to meet new people, giving service at the food bank or another place, going to the temple, finding friends and having meaningful conversations long into the night, finding something fun that is also productive and won't make me feel guilty after (I can't play video games - I feel like I'm wasting my life away), writing in my journal or to others, writing poetry, visiting family members (that's what I'll do today! I knew this blog was inspired. :))... I still fight depression. Today I woke up and found myself crying before even eating breakfast. But I don't feel as hopeless as I did when I was 16. I know that, eventually, the shadows will fade and I'll be able to move forward with my life, and smile, again. And, in the meantime, I'm grateful for the opportunity to rely on God and see His hand in my life.

Living with my attractions has been a similar struggle, though I didn't

honestly acknowledge it until after my mission. But since I have, and given my life to God, He has helped me see the light at the end of each crisis. Individual temptations, like depression, eventually go away. They'll come back, but knowing how to cope - whether running 10 miles or biking 20, finding a good friend keep my thoughts busy, going to the temple, taking a walk for a few hours, or even watching people at the mall or somewhere else - helps me to have hope in the midst of what are easily the worst moments of my life.

So I'm honest with myself about my circumstances. But I never give up hope. A friend told me this yesterday: We are the result of our actions. We're not a result of our upbringing, our nature, or our circumstances in life - we're a result of our actions - the choices we make. And that statement brings me hope. Even though I live with depression, I'm an awful friend, and I have the most pathetic, undesirable set of temptations known to man... I am a child of God, striving to keep His commandments and become like Him.

Honestly? I feel better. Life can be so incredibly, suffocatingly awful. I don't think there's any way to explain it. But it's ok. God is there for me; He will take care of me if, by my actions, I choose to follow Him.

DEEPENING FAITH: THE 11TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I have some amazing friends who do some pretty cool stuff for the Church. I had a chance to talk with two tonight. They don't work together... But both mentioned recently thinking about core principles in helping others grow... and both had come to the realization I had on Sunday morning - that, in order to help others grow or overcome their trials, we help them deepen their faith in Jesus Christ and develop a greater relationship with God.

I thought it was amazing that both men echoed the same thoughts, across fields, callings, and experiences in life... and amazing that I had heard it twice before. Once on Sunday... and once again just a few days ago.

I have another good friend who is a General leader in the Church. He's crazy busy, but I visited him this last week and we took time to talk about life in the months since we had seen each other. He talked about his responsibilities, and then we started talking about our shared passion - people, and understanding how to help them grow. As he spoke, I thought about this blog, the struggle I face, and all the issues that surround it. Was there a common theme that I could glean from his experiences working in the councils of the Church? The theme I saw in our conversation was the importance of suiting gospel teaching to the individual... focusing on the good and letting it overshadow and overpower the evil... and how do we accomplish that? By teaching nothing but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance on His name... and allowing the Spirit to give light and speak according to the understanding of those we love.

That is the answer. And it's what helped me to stay alive. When I felt like life was going to end... when depression, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, pain, and everything else were at their height... how did I survive? I placed my faith in God, deepened my commitment to Him, and as my faith grew, it washed over to help ease my pain. That's how reading the scriptures could help me conquer addiction, and how improving my prayers helped with depression. Better quality temple worship made me a better friend... and finding ways to serve my fellow men gave me hope when days were dark with pain. As I focused on improving my faith where I could, it made up the difference and gave me strength to grow in areas once impossible.

And I moved on... and as my faith has grown, my ability to weather the trials of life has increased. Depression that used to incapacitate me for days now opens a door... and I visit family members or find something positive to do. Feelings of attraction for a guy push me to talk to him and see him as a person instead of an object. And questions for God... before sent to the Heavens without seeming responses, are now often answered in the very moment I pray, or, at most, long before I can ask another mortal.

That's the theme behind every email I send, too... and it feels like it is the theme in every mortal life. It's all just finding ways to increase faith most - finding what will have the greatest impact and moving forward there. It's not discounting the problem, but focusing on faith... and allowing the deepening power of faith to flow in and solve the insolvable, fix the unfixable, and explain the unexplainable. Faith is pretty awesome.

THE MAN I WANT TO BE: THE 12TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

Today I was watching people... And today I noticed numerous examples of people who put their own desires above others, and vice versa. I saw how sometimes being humble and selfless meant that they made sacrifices - sometimes big and sometimes small... but they did it out of love. I want to be known for helping people to feel like I care about and value what they think - not just what I feel. I want to be a friend to anyone who asks... even if that is hard.

The 12 days of Christmas were originally each symbols of icons in Christian Christmas traditions - from 5 - the gold that the wise men brought to 1 - Christ hanging on the cross. This is the first year I've thought about them... and looking back at the last twelve days, I realized that my experiences have helped me see the type of man I want to be... and what I want to avoid. Here are the things I took from each day in the last two weeks... and the traits and characteristics I want to have in my own life.

1st day of Christmas: integrity, loyal, kind... and willing to listen

2: Making a difference, loving, being a dreamer

3: helping people feel involved, loved, a part of the group

4: prayerful, spiritual

5: optimistic

6: patient & courageous

7: peaceful

8: intense

9: committed

10: honest

11: faithful

12: selfless

Someday, hopefully, I'll be all those things. In the meantime, they'll work as new year resolutions, or temporary long-term goals. And they are

helping me to find good friends - men who are striving to live according to the same law.

May the Spirit of Christ, as part of Christmas, be with you today and always.

SIMPLE THINGS

I had a bunch of plans today, and, one after another, most of them fell through. At first I wondered what I'd do with the extra, unplanned time... and how I would keep my mind occupied.

So I turned on Pandora to my showtunes station, and I've been listening for hours as life goes on. So my plans for tonight disappeared, in an instant, after weeks of planning and after a long drive to get where I thought I was going. But I'm good. I have a few dates planned for the next week - and they're with people who won't cancel on me. And belting (and pretending no one can hear) "Music of the Night" and a hundred other Broadway classics really makes it okay. I sometimes forget how amazing, powerful, and peaceful music can be.

LET HIS LIGHT SO SHINE

I was somewhere a few days ago and heard the song “Carry Your Candle” playing. The first time I had ever heard it was about a year ago on the radio, and the lyrics have stuck with me ever since... and remind me of the ability and call I have to share the light.

Frustrated brother, see how he's tried to light his own candle another way...

See now your sister - she's been robbed and lied to - still holds a candle without a flame.

As the words pass by, I envision countless people, each tightly gripping a candle in his hand, trying to find his way and stay warm in a cold, dark night. The sea of darkness is interrupted only with rare and tiny pinpricks of light. And then I see me, holding in my hand a candle, topped by a tiny flame. Why me? How is it that somehow it worked out and I learned the truth of the gospel? How have I stayed alive when so many others have given up and let the flame die? And, in a world where everyone seems to be searching for peace and hope, why does God answer my prayers and keep me safe when I am surrounded by the storm?

I think that at least part of the answer lies in the calling I've felt - the need to share the light - to run to the darkness to seek out the helpless, tired, and worn. Perhaps I needed to learn to give to others, to open my mouth, to trust Him when everything seems to be going wrong. There are days when I feel like my life is going nowhere, when I look around me and the only light I see is the pinprick of my faith in God... And then I look out at my brothers, each living a different life and fighting different battles... without even the pinprick that I hold in my hand... and I realize how blessed I am to have it.

Some days I wish I could be an angel - to have the power to speak and to shake the earth and call men to repentance... to give the world hope in the peace that comes from living the gospel and no other way. And sometimes I can. Here on (Gay) Mormon Guy I can share my testimony, and hope that the Spirit will carry my words to the far reaches of the world and light a flame to last for eternity. People from Thailand and India, Africa and Saudi Arabia, Korea, China, and almost every country in

between have found the message here... and I am amazed by the stories they send.

But, most of the time, I walk through the darkness with only my own candle... and when I find a brother who will listen, I take him in my arms, share the light of my candle, and watch as he goes through life changed forever, sharing the light that has become a part of who he is. Most of those people have actually been girls, since I have trouble making friends with guys.

That's the heart of who I want to be and what I want to accomplish - to somehow mold my life to reflect the light of the Savior and show His mercy and love to those who are searching in darkness.

And hopefully it will help my own search. Part of my trial in life is feeling alone. I can be in a room of people who love me, surrounded by those who admire and esteem me, or even confiding my heart to a friend, and I still feel alone. I find myself looking for warmth from others, instead of turning to my candle of faith and my relationship with God. But when I share the gospel, and a brother borrows the light I have been given to relight his faith, for a moment, the candles flare... and I feel at home. For a moment, I can see and feel clearly into eternity, and God's glory fills my soul with light.

ONE TODAY AT A TIME

Elder Christofferson's remarks last night seemed like they were intended specifically for me, in my life. Recently I've been looking at the future and wondering how I will ever be able to understand what happens, live with being attracted to guys, be celibate for as long as God intends, and maybe never really find anyone who can fully understand me other than God Himself.

The story of manna in the wilderness as he recounted it helped me realize that God gives me my daily bread - daily. He doesn't give it to me for a week, or a month, or for the rest of my life. Every single day, He expects me to turn to Him for the spiritual strength to get through the day... and when I have made it through today, then to turn again to Him tomorrow. It's not because He doesn't love me - on the contrary, the Lord gave manna in the wilderness and gives strength in my life to prove to me, each and every day, that He is with me in all things.

It also gives me hope. Sometimes I see men who have decided that, because the mountain of living a faithful life while being attracted to guys looks too hard, they won't take the first step. Or they lose hope and give up halfway when they look forward and see so far to go. The Lord doesn't ask us to conquer the mountain in a day. He just asks us to move forward, and have faith in Him, for today. And then tomorrow, He will give us the strength to overcome whatever faces us on the morrow. I have a hard time being an existentialist, but Elder Christofferson's was essentially teaching the importance of living in the moment - enjoying life and facing the trials of today, today. And then facing tomorrow, tomorrow.

One of the greatest concerns men have that talk with me is this: I don't know how I can stay true for my entire life. How can I resist temptation for that long, especially if I don't get married and face life without a family or a spouse? Even if I try to do what is right, I will always feel like an outcast in the Church since it focuses so heavily on families. How can I do it?

The answer is that, today, I don't have to do it all. I just need to live and work through today. Tomorrow, God will give me the strength tomorrow. But yes, I do not have the strength to face a lifetime of trials

today. No one does. Thankfully, God does not ask me to build the walls of Jerusalem in a day, or to change our very being in a moment. The conversion He asks for, while usually dramatic and always life-changing, normally takes place day by day as I live out my life in His service. ... And He promises to give me the strength to live each day, and then to give me strength for tomorrow, tomorrow. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.

Someday I hope to cross over the river Jordan and eat of the corn of the land - to walk in paths of righteousness and have the strength and faith to face the rest of life and see through the darkness to the light. But in the meantime, I'll turn to God, ask Him for my daily spiritual bread, and give thanks for the manna that falls from Heaven as I turn to Him. Tomorrow is tomorrow. And until it comes, I will live my life today... one day at a time.

YOU MAY BE LIKE (GAY) MORMON GUY, IF:

1. You've convinced everyone but yourself that you are almost perfect.
2. You've never done a cat-call.
3. You know what K9 is.
4. You can count the number of girls you've wanted to kiss without any hands.
5. You have the section of your Patriarchal blessing that covers marriage memorized word-for-word.
6. You followed this blog in the BC (before conference) era.
7. You'd rather go to an Elder's Quorum activity than a date with the hottest girl in the ward. But you go on the date anyway.
8. You've made at least 10 girls cry when they realized you weren't attracted to them.
9. You can't find a picture of your ideal wife... which made that assignment in marriage prep a bit awkward.
10. You've taken every single marriage prep, dating, and other similar course the Church offers.
11. You've fallen in love, but never with a girl.
12. Your temple recommend is a permanent part of your being.
13. It freaks you out if a girl other than your sister or mom touches you. Girls who give backrubs in church? I'm not sitting by you again...
14. You'd give almost anything to be married and have a family - anything but your soul.
15. The word evergreen is more than just a Christmas tree.
16. "SSA" doesn't usually remind you of the old DOS game "Super Solver Adventures."
17. You've fasted for five days in a row, multiple times, just to get through another week.
18. You know what it's like to be alone in a crowd of people, even among family or friends.
19. You've spent at least a month taking ice-cold showers every single day, with a fully functioning hot water heater.

20. Your journal is under lock and key... or you don't have one at all.
21. You don't get massages for fear that the therapist might be a girl, or, even worse, a guy.
22. You believe, honestly, that lasting happiness comes from living the gospel at any cost.
23. You're okay with living today and finding happiness in the moment... And you have the faith to let the Lord worry about tomorrow.
24. God answers your prayers, stands by your side, and is willing to do miracles in your behalf... all but one.
25. You understand and believe... “all these things shall be for thy good, and give thee experience...” and daily you give thanks to God for the blessings, trials, and everything else He has given you in life.

NEVER AGAIN

I've tried hundreds of things to clear my mind when temptations or thoughts come uninvited. But for some reason I can't sing my favorite hymn and the thoughts are still there - and refuse to go away. I try to sing one hymn and think the words of a second, and they are still there... and then I add a third hymn, which consumes all my brain power, effectively debilitating myself temporarily from doing anything, and the thoughts disappear... Until I stop singing.

That works when I can afford to stop doing everything else in life - if I'm not engaged in a conversation or driving or actually doing anything. But most of the time that doesn't apply.

I've tried reciting my patriarchal blessing, the proclamation on the family, scripture masteries, and praying for help. But I've realized that, while each of those is useful, they lack the emotional connection to rising out of my trial - they don't bring back the memory of how I felt when I made the commitment to repent. They help me look forward, but I needed something simple, repeatable, and memorable that would hold, in stark contrast, the pain of sin and the light of forgiveness... And bring both to remembrance. It was then that I found "never again."

Today, when thoughts or images or anything else comes to mind uninvited, my immediate, resounding, repeated, and silencing response is "Never again."

Never again will I be a slave.

Never again will I turn away from God.

Never again will I trade eternity, peace, and the happiness I have learned over the years for anything else.

Never again will I let Satan in my life.

Never again will I listen to temptation.

Never again will I walk down the pathways which will lead me to it.

And as I repeat the words over and over, they fill me with courage. I am a son of God. He stands at my side and watches over me... and never again

will I doubt that or doubt His love, His commandments, or His involvement in my life. He is supreme, and gives me strength to move forward in life.

And, with the strength and His presence comes a promise - a promise that someday I can grow strong enough to be like Moroni, or Helaman, or the people of the city of Enoch, in this life - faith so strong that the devil has no power to tempt me in any thing. And when that day comes I will be able to walk forward in the light, never looking back, ever, again.

BIGOTED, HATEFUL, AND HOMOPHOBIC

Last night I felt like I had been run over by a half dozen emotional Mack trucks. Part of me wished their human masquerade could disappear, and they really had been trucks... and then they could have seen the damage. But not... it's just hard when... I know my emotional needs are way beyond what they're willing to give. I've rewritten this paragraph five times because part of me wants to label them, and everyone else in the world who doesn't understand, as callous and unkind, insensitive and rude... But I can't.

I think that's a big difference in the way I perceive others and the way many in the gay community do. When pain strikes, it's easy to label those who don't understand or agree as bigots, hateful, spiteful, unChristian, homophobic... and in applying those labels I would apply the negative emotions, hatred and spite and insensitivity, as answer to the same. By labeling the people who have hurt me, it makes them less worthwhile, effectively making the pain subside, since those inflicting it are less human... and less worth my interest.

But I can't do that. Just as firmly as I know that I am a son of God, and that He loves me, I know that God loves all His children - including those who have hurt me, purposefully, beyond their own understanding. They aren't monsters, or hateful demons, or bigots, or spiteful, or homophobic. They are sons and daughters of God... and when I follow God, I feel His love for them. I can't curse or hate or think less of a son of God.

So that puts me in a bind. My pain would be a whole lot less if I were to label my "enemies" as such, piling on enough epithets that I could honestly question their humanity. But I know they are children of God - with divine potential - and so I can't demonize them. That leaves me with a whole lot of pain, though, and nowhere to put it.

The next easiest way to deal with the pain would be to do nothing - to let people step on me and just "deal with it," "get over it," or "suck it up." It was what people who don't understand the implications have suggested - just ignore it and it will go away. But where demonizing others turns me into a demon, becoming a doormat could be worse. The pain doesn't go ever go away, only building up to a massive explosion of fire and passion -

the “coming out” talks in Sacrament meeting, or the anti-Mormon books written in secret and published simultaneously with a letter asking for removal from the records of the Church... or the suicide letters simply asking for relief. It never works in the end. The day-to-day pain never ends, and rarely gets temporarily better. And when they have had as much as they can handle, something breaks and men and women find themselves scarred with eternal pain, wondering if their faith is worthwhile. And if this is all it brings, then the answer is no. No faith that only brings pain is worthwhile.

So last night I found myself wondering exactly what I was supposed to do with the pain that I've felt - the pain of being misunderstood, ignored, and outcast, on purpose or by circumstance. In both choices, nothing would change. Only really good people honestly listen to those who call them bigots and hateful, and the people who are really good love everyone anyway. There would still be pain. And being a doormat would make everyone think that I'm just like everyone else. There would still be pain. And nothing would change. And then I found a third way.

It's by far the hardest way... but I knew in an instant that it's what the Lord has taught me all along. It's the message of the gospel, and the power that can give men strength to weather any trial: Be the change you want to see in the world.

It means giving the Lord my pain and loving others unconditionally - no matter what choices they make. It means loving them when they hate me, ignore me, and make jokes in Elder's Quorum. It means loving them when they send me hate mail or post videos on YouTube or deride me in public forums. It means loving all men unconditionally - no matter who I am and no matter who they are - and without reserve. And it means showing that love by being a part of their lives, supporting them, standing at their sides, inviting and lifting them forever. Befriending others when I need a friend, sympathizing with others when I need a shoulder to cry on. And sharing my voice and my love, unconditionally.

So last night, through my tears, I gave the Lord my pain and asked Him to forgive the others - all the people in the world whose ignorant existence makes my life a living misery. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. And even if they do know, they are still children of God, still worthy of my love. And I again committed to actively loving them - to being an

influence in their lives and following the words of Christ - loving those who spitefully use and persecute me.

But how far does it go? What does unconditional love mean? There's a guy I know who seems to absolutely hate me, or be afraid of me, or be jealous of me, or something. "If you had the opportunity to sacrifice your life for his," the question came, "Would your love be enough to do it?"

This was without direct commandment from God to do it. Without assurance that my sacrifice would be worthwhile. Without assurance that he or anyone would ever know. But in that question I heard the voice of God speaking to another of His Sons - a Son who had felt all of mankind's sins and seen the depth of their iniquity. A Son who spent His life picking up the pieces of those who callously, or ignorantly, discarded their fellow men. And, when God asked Him, He said yes.

That's the power of the pure love of Christ. It throws out hatred and spite and the labels of the world, and replaces a desire and willingness to do anything to bless the lives of others - hence the quote from the prophet Joseph - a man filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family only, but goes through the entire earth, anxious to do everything in his power to bless all men.

In a moment, I saw all the people in my life - the good and the bad - dressed in white, standing as a family. I saw the good that they could do, and the change they could be in the world. But, most, I felt God's love for them.

So would I do it? Would I give my life for an enemy, a stranger, a friend, or a guy who hates me? Yeah, I would. That's the greatest thing that my trial has taught me - true love for others. Even if really loving people makes me an outcast, even if nothing ever came of it, even if no one ever knew. We are family here - brothers and sisters - children of God. He, I, and all of us were worth the life of God's Begotten Son... so it's worth living my life for others, or giving it for them, as well.