

Bearing Our Crosses Gracefully: Sex and the Single Mormon

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IN THE MORE THAN five years I have served as bishop of a singles' ward, sexual transgression has been the most pervasive, persistent, and painful problem I have had to deal with. Scarcely a week goes by that I am not involved in counseling with those who have broken or who are contemplating breaking the law of chastity, encouraging new members of the ward in initial interviews to be forthcoming about any transgressions that need resolving, working with those who are attempting to repent of transgressions, holding councils for those for whom formal disciplinary measures may be helpful in changing established patterns, and trying to persuade individuals that there are sound reasons for following the Lord's counsel in these matters. The following is my attempt to formalize the ideas that I find helpful in attempting to maintain balance in my own sexual stewardship and in counseling others.

Sex is something we all have in common. Our sexual genders, our sexual power, our sexual identities are all gifts from loving heavenly parents who are themselves sexual beings. That our Heavenly Father and Mother are sexual beings is one of the most significant yet clearly radical ideas of the Restoration and one that sets us apart from the rest of Christianity. A related and equally radical idea is that we may become like God in this way, that is, eternally sexual.

In general, such doctrines are abhorrent to other Christian churches because they tend to see sex and sexuality not in their highest manifestations, which are spiritual, but rather in their lowest, which are carnal. Negative attitudes toward human sexuality can be traced back

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at least to Plato, who believed that the material world is a corruption of the spiritual or ideal world, and that the tangible, corporeal world is both less real and less important than the spiritual world. In Christianity, this led to a belief that God himself could not be physical (and certainly not sexual) and that since men and women were corrupt, the body and all its functions, especially its sexual functions, were corrupt. Sex was considered a necessary evil for the purposes of procreation, but an evil nonetheless.

The most influential of the early church fathers, believing with Plato that all matter was evil, could not conceive of a God with a body and saw their own bodies as terrible encumbrances, flesh to be tortured, denied, subdued, and, ultimately, gratefully escaped through death.

St. Augustine, one of the most notable of the early church fathers, as a young man went to Carthage, where, he says, "There sang all around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves" (*Confessions* III, 36). He heard that song and gave in to its seductive power with abandon. Later, as a reformed sinner, he held extremely negative views about sexuality that influenced the Christian world into the twentieth century. Augustine believed that God had neither a body nor sexual feelings.

That spring day in 1820 when Joseph Smith went into the Sacred Grove was remarkable because it altered centuries-old ideas about God and humans. Joseph saw with his own eyes God manifest as a physical personage, one with body, parts, *and* passions. That vision restored the lost truth that we were created literally, spirit and body, in God's image.

Joseph Smith taught that matter is not only *not* evil but, in a reversal of Platonism, that the spiritual itself is really material: "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine and pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes" (D&C 131:7). He taught that when our bodies are purified, we shall see the spiritual and the physical as parts of a seamless whole. Joseph Smith might have agreed with his contemporary, Walt Whitman, who said of his body, "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me . . . / Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile" (1959, 27).

Mormons differ from other Christians in our literal belief that we are begotten of God spiritually and that Christ was begotten of him physically. Paul says in Acts that we are God's offspring (17:28-29). We believe that our spiritual conception was sexual just as we believe that Christ's mortal conception was. Elucidating on the latter, James E. Talmage says, "That child to be born of Mary was begotten of Elohim the Eternal Father, not in violation of natural law, but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof" (1986, 81).

Since God is the designer and creator of our bodies as well as our spirits, and since he has all knowledge and wisdom, we should be able

to trust what he says about using our sexual powers. And what does he say? Sexual intimacy with another person is reserved for marriage. There does not seem to be any ambiguity or equivocation about this, either in the scriptures or in the words of latter-day prophets. The scriptures clearly condemn fornication and adultery as well as lustful thoughts and actions. Peter says, "Abstain from fleshly lusts" (1 Pet. 2:11); and in modern scripture the Lord admonishes, "Cease . . . from all your lustful desires" (D&C 88:121).

This does not mean that we cannot have sexual feelings or be passionate. What it does mean is that we must govern these feelings, control them so that we do not express them in lustful or inappropriate ways.

For having rebelled against God in the premortal existence, Satan does not have a body and therefore is denied sexual expression. In his envy of us and in his hatred of the Lord, he would convince us to go against God's counsel by persuading us to believe lies and half-truths about our sexuality. Let me cite just a few of Satan's deceptive arguments.

1. *It is not natural to suppress our sexual feelings or normal to control our sexual desires. Doing so endangers our physical and mental health.* The problem with this deception is that in some respects it is true. Of course it is not natural to suppress these feelings, but then God requires us in many ways to go against our natural inclinations. Scott Peck says, "All self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural" (1978, 53). This is why King Benjamin says that "the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19). As far as I know, there is no evidence that we impair either our physical or our emotional development by abstaining from sexual relations.

2. *The need for sexual expression is more powerful than we are; it is greater than our ability to control it, and we have no choice but to give in to our sexual urges.* Satan, having failed in his attempt to deny us our free agency in the premortal existence, strives to convince us that we don't have free agency here. In actuality, we are free to choose in this domain as in others in which the Lord has given commandments.

I do not deny the power of sexual temptation. Our sexual feelings are pleasurable and powerful, and the temptation to express them is at times extremely strong. Nevertheless, the Lord has assured us that we

are more powerful than these temptations. As Paul tells the Corinthians, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

3. Conversely, *our power over our sexual feelings is ultimate; we can stop at any time once we have become sexually aroused.* I think it is safe to say that the more sexually excited and stimulated we become, the less free we are. That is, when we persist in inappropriate sexual activity, degree by degree we abandon our agency until we have almost none left. At a certain point, our desire for sexual culmination becomes greater than our desire for obedience. This reminds me of the line from Linda Paston's poem about a woman giving birth. She says, "I signed for this at a moment/when I would have signed for anything" (1976).

We need to be aware when we date that as we pursue sexual arousal, our bodies are designed to move toward culmination. When we are aroused to a certain point, there are only two possible outcomes—culmination or frustration, neither of which is a positive outcome for a single Latter-day Saint. Some people establish patterns of continual arousal and frustration and thereby erode both their power over their sexual feelings and their spirituality.

4. One of the most destructive of Satan's deceptions is that *women are not as fully sexual as men.* This belief has robbed women of their full sexual identities and has resulted in centuries of male sexual dominance. God created men *and* women as fully sexual beings. While they may be different in their sexual feelings and orientations, both have the capacity to find full sexual expression and fulfillment, and appropriately they find it together in mutual pleasure and joy.

There is no question, however, that centuries of cultural conditioning have made men more sexually aggressive than women, and more oriented to sexual gratification. It has been suggested that one reason men have been given the priesthood is to compensate for such destructive cultural ideas about sexuality. That is, the Lord, knowing Satan's plan to undermine our authentic sexual power, has designed a way to counter his designs. The priesthood, which is the power to act in God's name, should have the effect of giving men the power to overcome their negative cultural conditioning with regard to sexual aggression and exploitation. In matters of sex, it should provide them with the power to give leadership in keeping the Lord's commandments, and it should also enable them to treat women in sexual situations with love, respect, and tenderness. A man who acts otherwise loses his priesthood powers. I believe that Doctrine and Covenants 121 refers to sexual as well as to other kinds of behavior.

It is particularly distressing, therefore, to find priesthood holders who actually put sexual pressure on women and try to persuade them to engage in inappropriate sexual behavior. Instead of setting the example, they violate their covenants and priesthood principles to gratify their desires. I consider it perfectly appropriate for women to remind any Latter-day Saint man who violates gospel principles in dating that he holds the priesthood and should act accordingly.

5. There is a misconception that *it is okay to engage in sexual behavior as long as you don't go all the way*. From my experience, this is a particularly dangerous and destructive deception. In my opinion, couples who repeatedly engage in prolonged petting (and I think we should do away with the distinction between light and heavy petting), oral sex, or other such activities commit transgressions as great as those who, in a moment of passion, have sexual intercourse. When people say, "Technically, nothing happened," they are seduced by this deception. With chastity, as with all the principles of the gospel, we should be concerned with the spirit rather than with the letter of the law. Rather than trying to see how much we can get away with, we should be seeing how fully we can keep the Lord's commandments. It is interesting to note that one of the changes in the revised temple endowment establishes a broad rather than a narrow definition of sexual intimacy.

6. A related myth is that *if we engage in these activities, it is not all that serious and we can easily repent*. I have heard some argue that since the Church seems to be more forgiving of sexual transgression than in former times, one can transgress with impunity. This same attitude was prevalent among the Nephites. Paraphrasing 2 Nephi 28:8: "And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry: nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, read pornography, engage in petting, have sexual intercourse with someone you love; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God." The Lord says that he cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Nor should we.

This attitude, which takes a cynical view of the atonement, is tantamount to saying, "Christ died for my sins and my sins cause him to suffer, but I will sin anyway, because it doesn't seem like the consequences are so great for me."

One of Satan's most powerful tools in persuading us to believe these false ideas is the media. Sexually suggestive and explicit material is all around us, reflecting the "evils and designs which . . . exist in the hearts of conspiring men [and women]" (D&C 89:4). Pornographic and even nonpornographic sexually explicit material can

become addictive. Those who seek pleasure in such material, like those who take drugs, tend to seek for greater and greater stimulation. I know this from personal experience. As a young boy I was exposed to such material and for a period of time was attracted to it. I found myself increasingly in bondage to the sexual excitement and stimulation these materials provide. It was only with the greatest effort that I was able to free myself from the attraction of such materials. Even today it is an area in which I must be vigilant.

St. Augustine's "cauldron of unholy loves" still sings to us—from porno shops, adult movie houses, massage parlors, and other venues of explicit sex. In books and on billboards, in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television, in films and videos, the siren sounds of sex beckon us. Even seemingly innocent advertisements contain subtle and sometimes subliminal messages of sexual enticement.

The biggest problem with these messages is that they lead us to see our identities first and foremost in sexual rather than in spiritual terms. The conclusion is that if we are primarily sexual beings, then sexual fulfillment must be our highest goal. A corollary conclusion is that if we are not being sexually fulfilled, then we are less desirable and less worthy than those who are.

R-rated films may be particularly seductive because they often are well made, artistically crafted, and may have compelling and positive messages. Often our justification for watching such films is that we are sophisticated enough to handle the material. If we choose to watch such films, we need to discriminate carefully as to which ones we will see. We also need to be honest about our motives for seeing them. If we are honest with ourselves, we will probably admit that sometimes we may go to such films for the prurient material they contain.

Here again I speak from personal experience. I teach film at UCLA and consider myself more knowledgeable than most about the subject. At times I have viewed R-rated films that I have regretted watching. I have come to believe that such films viewed indiscriminately subtly erode our spirituality and encourage us to unholy thoughts and acts.

One of the main problems with such films (and this goes for print media as well) is that they present an illusionary picture of intimacy. In speaking of this, Victor Brown says,

Illusions deal with fragments of human beings, not with whole human beings. Illusions deny the consequences of human behavior. Illusions deal in indulgence, not in discipline. . . . If we relate to each other in fragments, at best we miss full relationships. At worst, we manipulate and exploit others for our sexual gratification. . . . Through fragmentation, the larger matter of human intimacy is reduced to the smaller part of sex. . . . Sexual fragmentation is particularly harmful because it is particularly deceptive. The intense human intimacy that should

be enjoyed in and symbolized by sexual union is counterfeited by sensual episodes which suggest—but cannot deliver—acceptance, understanding and love. Such encounters mistake the end for the means as lonely, desperate people seek a common denominator which will permit the easiest, quickest gratification.” (1981, 5-6)

Again, a loving Father who created us as whole beings would save us from such illusions and from diminishing ourselves and others.

I would like to distinguish here between the ideas that come into our minds spontaneously and those we consciously choose to place or keep there. We may not have a choice over the former, but we clearly do over the latter. Let me illustrate this with a Zen story. Tanzan and Ikado, two Buddhist monks, were walking down a muddy road together one day. Coming around a bend, they saw a beautiful young woman in a pink silk kimono with a pink camellia in her hair, trying unsuccessfully to cross the road. Without hesitating, Tanzan picked her up and carried her to the other side. Ikado did not speak again until that night when they reached the temple, when he said, “We monks do not go near women, especially young and beautiful women. It is dangerous. Why did you carry that young woman today?” Tanzan replied, “I left the young woman there by the side of the road. Are you still carrying her?” (in Bolle 1985, 12).

Whatever standards the world applies, if we have testimonies of the gospel and if we are living worthy of the gift of the Holy Ghost, we cannot be happy while giving in to sexual temptation. My conclusion from dealing with members of the Church who have engaged in illicit sex is that while such encounters may provide momentary pleasure, they do not provide lasting happiness. I don’t know of a single instance in which engaging in this kind of behavior has brought happiness or peace. To the contrary, momentary pleasure is inevitably followed by an erosion of self-esteem, heartache, and spiritual estrangement from the Lord and from his church.

I am haunted by the words of a former ward member who, in explaining her improper sexual behavior, said, “I would rather be loved than saved.” She has had several abortions, has been disfellowshipped from the Church, and has spent a number of years wandering in a dark and desolate spiritual wasteland. She thought she had chosen love over salvation, but in reality she had experienced neither.

Much has been said and written about the sexual revolution, a revolution that has taken place during our lifetime. I had a conversation with President Hugh B. Brown not long before he died. In speaking of the Civil Rights Movement, he said, “Remember that at the heart of every revolution is an important truth.” The important truth at the heart of the sexual revolution, in my opinion, is the same mes-

sage that Joseph Smith revealed more than a hundred years before that revolution began—sex is good, and one of its purposes is to give us pleasure and joy.

To the extent that the sexual revolution freed men and women from some of the more negative ideas about sex, its effect has been positive. To the extent that that freedom has led to impersonal and uncommitted sex, promiscuity, sexual license, and deviant sexual expressions, its effects have been negative.

The sexual revolution has made possible more understanding of the physiological and psychological complexities of sex, has helped men and women have healthier attitudes toward their own sexuality, has created greater openness about sex, and has made possible more positive and more fulfilled sexual expression in marriage. But it has also opened the way for evil and unscrupulous people to exploit our need for intimacy.

One of the most disturbing things I have learned after five years of counseling single Latter-day Saints is that 90 percent of those who have engaged in sexual intercourse have taken no precaution against either pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. It is morally wrong to engage in intimate sexual relations outside of marriage. It is both morally irresponsible and downright stupid to do so without taking precautions. There is now no known cure for either herpes simplex, which among other things can cause sterility, or for AIDS, which may exceed the black plague in its destructiveness. If sexually active individuals don't care about themselves, at least they should have the decency to care about others, including the children who are the most tragic victims of such selfish behavior, either by being born out of wedlock or by being infected by AIDS or venereal disease.

If we are to keep our erotic poise, as a friend of mine calls it, we must discipline ourselves. If we truly love ourselves, we should be willing to submit to the discipline the Lord requires because only through doing so can we find lasting happiness in regard to our sexuality. Because he knows that ultimately we cannot be happy if we use our sexual powers inappropriately, a loving Father requires us to discipline those powers, even if it means that some must do so for the entirety of their mortal lives.

This is a great sacrifice, one that involves suffering and requires extraordinary courage and faith. One could argue that the whole purpose of our life here is to learn to use God's power as he uses it. Obviously, this applies to sexual as well as other kinds of divine power.

While there is no explicit doctrinal basis for it, some Mormons believe that only those who accept the Lord's requirements for sexual discipline will have an opportunity to express their sexual feelings in

the eternities. As LDS family therapist Carlfred Broderick says, "The eternal preservation of reproductive sexuality is the central, distinguishing characteristic differentiating the exalted from the merely saved" (1967, 101).

In dating and in related romantic activities, many Latter-day Saints engage in high-risk behavior. They permit themselves to do things they know may lead to sexually compromising situations, deluding themselves that nothing will happen or that they can handle any situation. Long lists of prohibitions or rules for dating tend to emphasize the technical and legalistic aspects of the gospel rather than the spiritual ones. I agree with Joseph Smith's philosophy of teaching people correct principles and letting them govern themselves.

While I do think there are a number of things responsible and righteous Latter-day Saints should not do—and should not permit others to do to them—I would like to mention just one. I am surprised by the number of single Latter-day Saints who feel comfortable spending nights together in the same room or apartment and at times even in the same bed. As innocently as these occasions may begin, as well-intentioned as the parties may be, and as confident as individuals may feel that no sexual impropriety will occur, frequently something does happen, and the consequences are often serious. Why take the chance?

Those who are dating should treat one another with respect. Latter-day Saints who choose to date nonmembers should apprise them at the outset of Church standards with regard to physical affection. Those who date within the Church should help one another abide by Church standards. Courtship is a prelude to marriage, and attitudes toward sex established before marriage will likely carry into marriage.

It might surprise single Latter-day Saints to learn that sexual temptation doesn't end with marriage and that self-discipline in sexual matters is required after marriage as well as before. Sex is an integral part of most healthy marriages, but because of its subtlety and complexity, it often requires incredible sensitivity and restraint. This is why it is important to develop the proper attitudes and behaviors about sex before marriage.

After thirty years of marriage, I have come to two important conclusions about sex. The first is that primarily and ultimately its fundamental basis is more spiritual than sensual. I don't yet understand this, I only sense that it is so. Perhaps there is some mysterious way in which spirituality and sensuality converge in the highest expressions of sexuality. Perhaps it is only when we have learned how to love another person spiritually that sexual relations with that person can have their ultimate flowering. It is no accident, I believe, that the early Church fathers used the sexual union of husband and wife as a meta-

phor for our unity with God. Some Eastern religions, unburdened by the often negative views of sexuality that have prevailed in the West, hint at the higher, spiritual basis of sexuality. It is because we do not understand this that so often our sexual relations are doomed to failure. I have counseled with dozens of single Latter-day Saints who have found disappointment in their sexual experimentation because, I believe, physical gratification was the primary objective of their relations and, therefore, the experience often left them empty or, worse, somehow diminished.

The second conclusion I have come to about sex is related to the first: God has designed male and female sexuality in such a way that it requires us to go beyond our own physical gratification and beyond the merely physical aspects of sexuality in order to achieve the ultimate fulfillment that sex is designed to provide. While men and women both have strong sexual desires, they tend to view sex differently and they achieve sexual fulfillment in different, if complementary, ways. For example, it is generally true that the context of lovemaking is more important to women than to men. Or to put it another way, women tend to have a much broader view of what constitutes lovemaking and experience the prelude and postlude to sexual intimacy in a more personal and profound way than men do. I personally believe that in general women understand the spiritual basis of sexuality to a greater degree than men do because their orientation to sex is more complex and multi-dimensional and because it is less sensual and self-ish than is men's.

I believe that the differences in male and female sexuality are by design and that their purpose is to entice us to both raise and deepen our consciousness about sex, to require that we include in our sexual relations such principles as sacrifice, discipline, gentleness, consideration, patience, and, especially, love. Somehow, the Lord seems to be suggesting that we must move from eros to agape (which is translated as "charity" in the New Testament but which Moroni calls "the pure love of Christ") in our sexual relations, and most of us, including those of us who are married, have failed to understand this.

For those who have transgressed sexually, the Lord has prepared a way for repentance, and his forgiveness is complete and unconditional: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:12); "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42); "But as oft as they repent . . . and seek forgiveness, with real intent, they . . . [will be] forgiven" (Moro. 6:8).

Fundamental to the process of repentance is forgiving ourselves. For some that is the hardest step. Perhaps we do not fully understand

the atonement; we persist in believing that even if we repent, the scar is still there. We either refuse or are unable to take Christ at his promise. And what is that promise? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Alma says our garments can be "purified until they are cleansed from *all* stain, . . . cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ" (5:21, 27); from 3 Nephi we know that it is possible to be "cleansed *every whit* from . . . iniquity" (8:1)(emphases mine). And Moroni in his last great witness testifies that if we repent of our sins and truly follow Christ and are filled with his love, "we may be purified even as he is pure" (7:48).

If, after repenting of our sins, after having been forgiven by Christ and by his church—if we still have not forgiven ourselves, in some significant way we are not accepting his atonement for our sins.

My own faith has been strengthened by those brothers and sisters in my congregation who have recognized the seriousness of their sexual transgressions and have repented of them by humbling themselves before the Lord and seeking his forgiveness. We have rejoiced together as they have been purified by the healing power of Christ and have been fully unified with his Church.

I would like to conclude by talking about Christ. What of his sexuality? The scriptures indicate that he developed normally, which would include normal sexual development with all its attendant sexual feelings. Did he know sexual temptation? Most certainly, for as Paul says, "[He] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Paul tells us further why Christ experienced and suffered sexual temptation: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). The New English Bible is plainer: "For since He himself has passed through the test of suffering, he is able to help those who are meeting their test now."

Christ willingly took upon himself a mortal body and experienced and resisted sexual temptation so that in this, as in all matters, he could both identify with our suffering and, through his suffering, help us to endure it. In a scripture with profound implications, Alma says, "Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance" (7:13). Christ could have known about the temptations and infirmities of the flesh through revelation ("the spirit knoweth all things"), but instead ("nevertheless") chose to suffer them personally and actually that he might better identify with us, that in this, as in all things, he might show us the way.

In his novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis (1960) shows how Christ wanted to be just like everyone else, an ordinary person, free of the suffering he was ordained to endure for our sakes. The last temptation he faced was to come down from the cross and be just a normal person. Of course, he didn't, out of his love for humanity. He bore his cross courageously and faithfully to the end, and for one purpose only: to show us the way to God—even in matters sexual.

What, one might wonder, does the cross have to do with sexuality? The Book of Mormon gives clarification. Two remarkable scriptures, one in Alma and one in 3 Nephi, give a key to understanding what our attitude should be toward our desire to express our sexual feelings outside the bounds which the Lord has set. The first is Alma's discourse to his son, Corianton, who had gone to the land of the Zoramites and consorted with the harlot, Isabel. Alma tells Corianton the seriousness of this transgression and says, "Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the Kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things" (39:9).

It is curious that Alma uses "cross" here both as a verb and as a noun. "Cross yourself in all these things"; "take it [that is, your cross] upon you." In other words, Corianton was admonished to consider the denial of his sexual expression as a "cross," a cross like the one Christ carried to bring us to salvation.

Throughout the scriptures, the cross appears as a metaphor for the burdens that we must bear in this life if we are to follow Christ. Christ says in Matthew, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (16:24). In his Inspired Version, Joseph Smith rendered this scripture as follows: "And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments." In 2 Nephi we are told that the true followers of Christ are they who have endured the crosses of this world (9:18). Jacob says he would "persuade all men . . . to . . . believe in Christ, and [to] view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world" (1:8). Doctrine and Covenants 56:2 says, "He that will not take up his cross and follow me, and keep my commandments, the same shall not be saved."

The second Book of Mormon scripture, and the one that most powerfully links sexual fidelity to the cross, quotes Christ himself speaking to his disciples in the New World after his resurrection and ascension in Jerusalem. In reiterating the difference between the technical requirements of the old law and the spiritual requirements of the new, he tells them that looking upon another person with lust is tantamount

to committing adultery in their hearts. Then he says: "Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things [that is, our lustful desires] to enter into your heart; for it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell" (3 Ne. 12:29-30).

What the Lord is saying is that denying ourselves inappropriate sexual expression is a cross that, if we are true and faithful to him, we must take upon ourselves. Is it a hard cross to bear? We can all attest to that. Not the hardest, but a very hard one indeed. Is it impossible to bear? The faithfulness of many single Latter-day Saints testifies that it is not.

I am pleased to report that the great majority of men and women in my own congregation, among them both hetero- and homosexuals, have taken upon themselves this particular cross and, for the most part, are bearing it gracefully. There are others who, staggering under the weight of their crosses, have stumbled but through repentance have taken them up again with new resolve. And there are those who do not yet understand this principle.

For those who are committed to Christ in the covenant of the New Testament, being faithful in sexual matters is a common cross. That is, to one extent or another, whether single or married, we all bear it. For some, it is a greater cross than for others. I think it is a particularly difficult cross for single Latter-day Saints who are committed to Christ's call for sexual integrity, and I think this is especially so in a society where the norm is free and often wanton sex, where chastity is ridiculed as old-fashioned or repressive, and where we are constantly bombarded with sexually explicit material and numerous tangible opportunities to sin.

As Christ carried his cross to Calvary, the soldiers became impatient with his pace (slow, in part because of his agony for us in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before) and thrust his cross on one of his disciples, a Syrian named Simon. And herein is another important lesson: like Simon, we can help one another in the bearing of our sexual crosses. In his great call for Christian charity, Alma says that our responsibility is to "bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; . . . to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort." As we do this, we "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things [even in sexual things], and in all places" and are "redeemed of God" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

We are a royal generation. Many have patriarchal blessings that inform us that we were preserved to come to the earth during this last great dispensation of the Lord's work, which is also the great day of Satan's power. As children of the promise we have been asked, in the

words of Alma, to come "out from the wicked . . . and touch not their unclean things" (5:57). That we must choose is made clear by the apostle John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Let me close with my witness that the things I have said concerning the importance of our sexual feelings and their goodness are true, as is the commandment that we express them within the bounds which the Lord has set. It is also my witness that a loving Savior understands our sexual feelings and temptations. If we will come to him, bring our burdens and lay them at his feet, and if we will share one another's burdens, the day will come when we will understand why the Lord has put us under these obligations. When that day does come, we will experience the crowning of the many gifts and blessings of our sexuality along with all of the other blessings promised us by loving heavenly parents.

I pray that we may bear our sexual crosses gracefully and, like Paul, count it an honor to do so. I also pray that we may help one another to do so in love and fellowship. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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