



Fostering a **Positive Perspective of Sexuality**

God has blessed us with divine, appropriate sexual feelings for a reason. As we better understand those feelings as single members of the Church, we will find greater peace and hope.

By *Ensign* staff

Editors' note: This article is part of a series in the August 2020 Ensign about having a positive view of sexuality, sexual intimacy, and the law of chastity. The term sexuality means different things to different people, but in this context, we are talking specifically about our sexual feelings and identity.

So much of the world today seems to be very confused regarding a healthy, positive understanding of sexuality.¹ And let's be honest, in some ways, some of us young adult members of the Church are too. So let's clear some things up.

First off, we should know where we as Latter-day Saints stand on our view of sexuality. Many years ago, Elder Parley P. Pratt (1807–57) taught: “Our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose; and they are the very main-springs of life and happiness—they are the cement of all virtuous and heavenly society—they are the essence of charity, or love; . . .

“There is not a more pure and holy principle in existence. . . .

“The fact is, God . . . planted in [our] bosoms those affections which are calculated to promote [our] happiness and union.”²

And President John Taylor (1808–87) also explained: “We bring it [a natural desire] into the world with us, but that, like everything else, has to be sanctified. . . . A proper exercise of our functions leads to life, happiness, and exaltation in this world and the world to come.”³

Simply put: God created us to be able to have sexual feelings. It's part of who we are. And it can be a good, wonderful, joyful part of life—as long as we learn to use and channel them in ways He would approve of. As we manage those feelings in appropriate ways throughout our lives, the blessings we receive are incredible.

Through this gift, we have the potential to help fulfill Heavenly Father's plan and become like our heavenly parents.⁴ Sadly, in our world today, Satan has led so many to have a distorted view of appropriate, God-given sexuality—He wants us to misuse or misunderstand it and its sacred nature. He sometimes makes us confused about the difference between sacred and secret, causing us to feel ashamed of having appropriate sexual feelings, to let curiosity lead to things like pornography, or to use our own or others' bodies in ways that are outside the bounds He has set. But in reality, sexuality—used in the ways God intended—is a divine gift. If we have negative feelings about our sexuality, we just might need to understand it better.

How can I cultivate a positive view of sexuality?

So if our view of sexuality is distorted, how can we instead view our God-given innate sexuality in a positive light and learn to understand and channel our feelings properly, as we strive to become like the Savior? How can we be comfortable with who we are and accept the God-given sexual feelings we were created with? Here are some suggestions that can help:

1

Understand that everyone is both a spiritual and a physical being

You might think of sexuality as a purely physical thing, but it also has a lot to do with our minds and thoughts. Our thoughts affect our actions, and the way we use our body affects our spiritual selves as well. President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015) taught, “Our spirit and our body are combined in such a way that our body becomes an instrument of our mind and the foundation of our character.”⁵

When you express it within the bounds of the law of chastity, our innate sexuality isn’t an impediment to spirituality. If you do have a skewed idea of sexuality as a negative thing, that is likely to carry over into your marriage. But Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Sexual union [within marriage] is . . . a union not only of a man and a woman but very much the union of that man and woman with God. . . . *You will never be more like God at any other time in this life than when you are expressing that particular power.*”⁶ How could understanding that change your current perspective about sexuality or sexual intimacy—even while you’re single?

2

Learn about your body

If you haven’t already, learn about human anatomy. The more you understand the natural process of your body’s development, the more you’ll understand that appropriate sexual feelings are a normal part of life. Learning about human anatomy, calling the body parts by their name, and understanding their sexual and physical

functions helps to decrease the taboo nature of these parts. At the same time, we should also “eliminate degrading, vulgar, and sexually explicit words, jokes, and themes from [our] conversations.”⁷ As body parts and their purposes are understood, we become less susceptible to seeing them solely in a sexual context.

President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Each organ of your body is a wondrous gift from God”⁸—and obviously that includes sexual organs. They were created for a wise purpose, and it’s up to us to learn to employ them in the ways the Lord would want.

3

Don’t be afraid or ashamed

Learning more about your body will help you understand how sexual feelings are a normal aspect of our bodies. And while we are all trying to overcome the “natural man” in this life (see Mosiah 3:19), simply having appropriate sexual feelings isn’t something to be ashamed of. It is only a sin when you act on them inappropriately or entertain inappropriate or lustful thoughts. We don’t feel ashamed or guilty for feeling hungry! Just maybe when we gorge on our favorite food in response to our hunger or start obsessing over hunger. Allow yourself to recognize that appropriate sexual feelings and thoughts are part of our God-given nature and serve a useful purpose in the right place and time.

If you experience same-sex attraction, you might feel scared or ashamed of your feelings, but God doesn’t want you to feel this way. We can live a fulfilling life within the bounds that He has set for our benefit. We each have a unique journey in mortality, and if we will love Him and keep His commandments, there is no circumstance that Heavenly Father cannot turn to our eternal good (see Romans 8:28; John 14:15; Doctrine and Covenants 90:24). With His help, we can learn and grow and become like Him.

4

Create meaningful connections

Physical feelings are only part of sexuality. One of the real needs behind appropriate sexual feelings is connection. As humans, we crave closeness. Connecting with others through deep friendship, bonding, appropriate touch, love, and affection can help you see others as they truly are and express sexuality appropriately while still keeping the law of chastity.

Elder Marlin K. Jensen, emeritus General Authority Seventy, said: “The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that ‘friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of [our religion].’ That thought ought to inspire and motivate all of us because I feel that friendship is a fundamental need of our world. I think in all of us there is a profound longing for friendship, a deep yearning for the satisfaction and security that close and lasting relationships can give.”⁹

5

Think about your own body as divine (because it is!)

Our bodies are amazing blessings from God. And yet so many of us often fall into the trap of criticizing our bodies. If we could remember how much bodies meant to us before we had them (and how much they’ll mean to us after we die [see Doctrine and Covenants 138:17, 50]), then we might feel more gratitude and less contempt for these amazing gifts.

President Nelson taught: “Your physical body is a magnificent creation of God. It is His temple as well as yours and must be treated with reverence. . . . A study of your body attests to its divine design.”¹⁰ And knowing how divine our bodies truly are will influence our actions for the better. President Nelson also explained: “When we truly know our divine nature, . . . we will focus our eyes on sights, our ears on sounds, and our minds on thoughts that are a credit to our physical creation as a temple of God. In daily prayer, we

will gratefully acknowledge Him as our Creator and thank Him for the magnificence of our own physical temple. We will care for it and cherish it as our own personal gift from God.”¹¹

Don’t forget that this is a lifelong journey

Understanding and cultivating a positive, healthy sense of appropriate sexuality isn’t something you start working on after marriage or something that you master overnight. It’s a lifelong journey—one that will bless you in many ways in your mortal and eternal life. And if your journey has included ups and downs, know that the healing and sustaining power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to all who reach for Him (see Mosiah 4:1–3, 10–13).

Ultimately, whatever our circumstances or experiences, as we follow the example of our Savior, God will fulfill all His promised blessings to us, and we will realize that we each have a part to play in His plan (see Doctrine and Covenants 59:23). With His help, we will succeed in all our efforts to achieve a positive view of sexuality. ■

For three additional suggestions on cultivating a positive view of sexuality—including using media that portrays healthy relationships, treating everyone as children of God, and remembering your true identity—read the digital version of this article at [ensign.Church of Jesus Christ.org](https://www.ensign.churchofjesuschrist.org).

NOTES

1. The Apostle Paul saw that people today would be “led away with divers lusts” (2 Timothy 3:6).
2. *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt* (1952), 52–53.
3. John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1943), 61.
4. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 84; see also “Sexual Purity,” in *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 35; Dale G. Renlund and Ruth Lybbert Renlund, “The Divine Purposes of Sexual Intimacy,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2020, 14–19.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character,” *Brigham Young University 2002–2003 Speeches* (2003), 2; see also M. Russell Ballard, “Giving Our Spirits Control over Our Bodies,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2019, 106–9.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments” (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 12, 1988), 8, speeches.byu.edu; emphasis in original.
7. *Chastity* (missionary lesson pamphlet, 2007), 11.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “Your Body: A Magnificent Gift to Cherish,” *New Era*, Aug. 2019, 4.
9. Marlin K. Jensen, “Friendship: A Gospel Principle,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 64.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Your Body: A Magnificent Gift to Cherish,” 4.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “Your Body: A Magnificent Gift to Cherish,” 6.