

## THE BEST THING I CAN DO FOR

# Leigh

### NAME WITHHELD

I was the first member of our immediate family in whom my sister, Leigh (name has been changed), confided. For the next few years, I would be the only one who knew about her same-sex attraction. Though Leigh had gone out with men previously, I vividly remember the night she sat in my living room and broke the news to me that she was moving to Oregon with *her*. I was not an active or believing Latter-day Saint at the time, and having no sense of the present or eternal implications of my sister's choice, I really did not react much to the news except for feeling how deeply I would miss her after she moved.

Since that time, as I have come back into the Church with a strengthened testimony of gospel truths—including doctrines about the family—I have wondered about what they mean for my sister and for my relationship with her. I have learned that although there are many things I don't know, I can rely on what I *do* know for guidance.

Leigh and I had always been close. We are just a little more than a year apart in age, and we had common friends in high school. We

shared music collections and enjoyed traveling to concerts together. She understood my jokes. She had been my hero in many ways—whatever she was, I wanted to be. I always introduced her to my friends with a great sense of pride. She was everything a big sister was supposed to be, and I loved her for it. After I learned about her attraction to other women, our relationship continued to be a strong and close one.

Though Leigh and I share a history that is rich and deep, the story of where we are today really starts late one fall, five years after she told me about her same-sex attraction. By that time, I had not been active in the Church for nearly 10 years, but I had started to feel increasingly strong and frequent promptings to get my life in order and return to Church activity. Through countless experiences, both cherished and sacred, I knew the Lord was leading me back.

It wasn't until that year that I found myself considering the unfamiliar and confusing ramifications of reconciling deep and tender feelings about my sister with an increasing testimony of and devotion to the Lord's

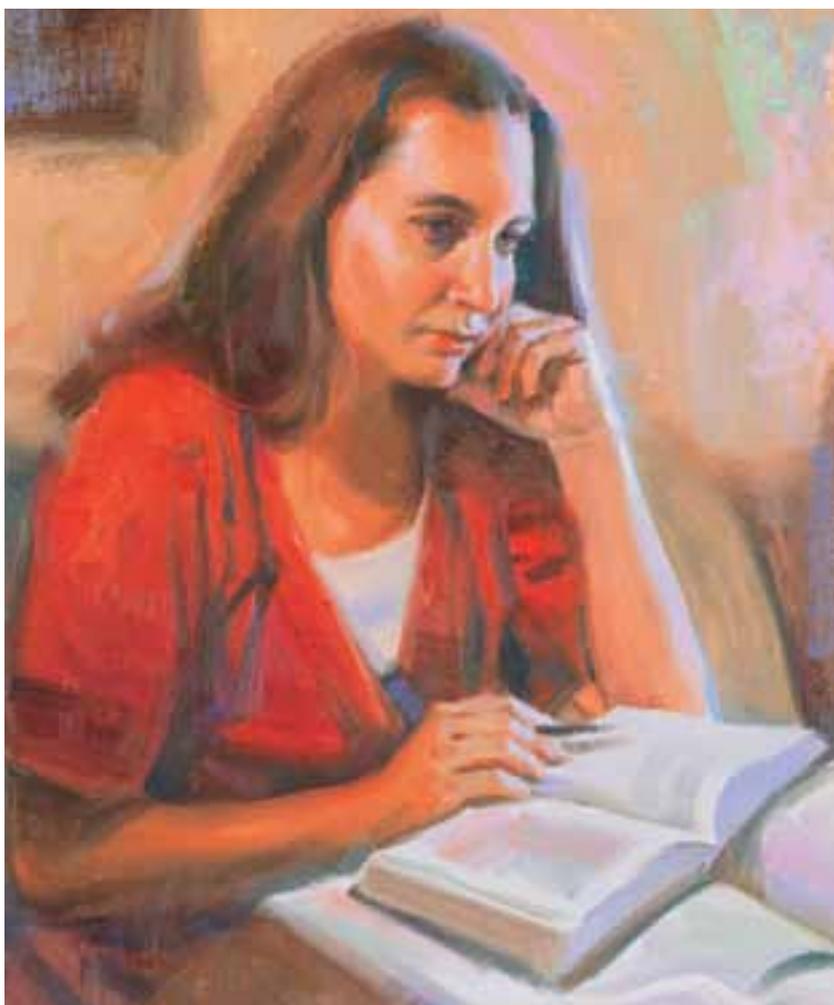
*When it comes to understanding same-sex attraction, I have countless unanswered questions. But I am trying to see my sister's heart as the Savior does.*

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commandments. Was it possible to make room for mutual devotion and loyalty, and if so, was I supposed to do it?

I soon began preparing for a mission. When I left to preach the gospel, however, my relationship with my sister really suffered.

As a missionary, I searched the scriptures and studied modern revelation and teachings on the topic of same-sex attraction. I pondered the doctrines explained in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”<sup>1</sup> and agonized over my sister’s eternal welfare. I grappled with profound questions about our relationship. I wanted to be like the Savior and to love her as He did, but I didn’t know how.



Even now there are days when I think about what to tell my future children when they ask about their aunt and her “friend” or the times when she comes to visit with her partner. In spite of many heartfelt prayers and discussions with ecclesiastical leaders, I admit I have countless questions still unanswered. I am learning, however, to focus on the things I know rather than on the things I don’t.

Every family member—immediate and extended—now knows about Leigh’s relationships with women. We have responded to the reality of same-sex attraction in our family in diverse ways. Some of us are good at dealing with it. Some of us are not. Some of us talk to her every week. Some of us do not. Although as a family we are anything but reconciled to the situation, there are a few things I can now say that I know for certain.

I know the best thing I can do to have a close relationship with my sister is to have a close relationship with Heavenly Father and His Son. Leigh recently commented that it has been through the way our family has loved her that she has felt what she understood to be God’s love. I’ve finally learned that it isn’t a matter of sacrificing one or the other after all. Could it be that it is not only *possible* but also *expedient* to have a simultaneous devotion to Jesus Christ and to Leigh, but not to her lifestyle? Could my devotion to one fuel my devotion to the other? As the Mediator, Jesus Christ intercedes to bring us to God. But I have come to realize that He also intercedes to bring us to ourselves, as the prodigal son experienced (see Luke 15:17), and then to our families.

I know that the Father of my soul is the Father of Leigh’s soul too. I know that as deeply as He knows me, He knows her,



**I** know that the Atonement, being infinite, cannot by nature or design exclude my sister or my family from its effects as we learn how to be a family that hopes for eternity together. I know that Leigh is not the only one in our family in need of the Savior's mercy and help and love. I know I need it too.

and that as He has prepared a way for my return to Him through repentance, so has He prepared a way for hers. I know that the Atonement, being infinite, cannot by nature or design exclude my sister or my family from its effects as we learn how to be a family that hopes for eternity together. I know that Leigh is not the only one in our family in need of the Savior's mercy and help and love. I know I need it too.

I know that my duty as Leigh's sister is not to condemn her but to love her. My task is to try to follow the Savior. The rest is simply out of my hands, and my sister still needs the friend she once had in me. If the gospel has taught me anything, it is how to be a friend.

I know that only by abiding by the precepts and doctrines as taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can we find the kind of happiness that is lasting and eternal. Just as the Spirit witnessed it to me so personally and so unexpectedly 10 years ago, the Spirit can witness it to Leigh according to the Lord's grand design.

I know Jesus Christ is the Son of God, a Savior to my sister, my family, and me.

I know He nurtures and loves us through the ups and downs and between all of our questions. I know He has made this adversity less of a burden for me as I have turned more fully to Him and to a commitment to try to love as He loves. I know He makes impossible things possible. I know charity never fails, even though I sometimes do (see 1 Corinthians 13:8; Moroni 7:46).

While I may never know in mortality how to love Leigh in a way that has power to change her involvement in same-sex relationships, I can learn to love her without condoning her lifestyle, and I can reach out to her in a way that she needs. After all, it is the Savior's role, not mine, to heal her.

I believe that the Lord wants us to "be believing" (Mormon 9:27; D&C 90:24) and that He wants us not to give up on Him or His timing or His ways. I know that this kind of faith—this kind of love—will guide my family and me as we work together to be an eternal family. ■

**NOTE**

1. See *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.