

Arise and Shine Forth

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When we speak of modesty, I am reminded of what Tevya, a character in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, said when he spoke of his beloved village of Anatevka. He said, “In Anatevka everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.” For me, that is the bottom line of any discussion on modesty.

Modesty is often talked of in terms of dress and appearance, but modesty encompasses much more than the outward appearance. It is a condition of the heart. It is an outward manifestation of an inner knowledge and commitment. It is an expression that we understand our identity as daughters of God. It is an expression that we know what He expects us to do. It is a declaration of our covenant keeping. A question in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet really is the question each of us must consider: “Am I living the way the Lord wants me to live?” ([Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001], 40).

Like the people of Anatevka, do we know who we are? Do our daughters and young women know who they are? In speaking to members of the Church, Peter said: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). He clearly

defined our identity. And his use of the word *peculiar* did not mean “odd.” It meant “special.”

In the Book of Mormon, the Lord’s chosen people are described in this way: “Ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers” (3 Nephi 20:25). Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Twelve said, “Once we know who we are, the royal lineage of which we are a part, our actions and directions in life will be more appropriate to our inheritance” (“Thanks for the Covenant,” in *Brigham Young University 1988–89 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1989], 59). Even the Young Women Theme reminds us that we are “daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us” (*Personal Progress* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989], 6).

When we truly know that we are daughters of God and have an understanding of our divine nature, it will be reflected in our countenance, our appearance, and our actions.

Several years ago, a dear friend married in the Salt Lake Temple. She was a convert to the Church from India, and her entire family came for her

Elaine S. Dalton gave this Women’s Conference address at Brigham Young University on 30 April 2004.

wedding. They were not members of the Church, so they waited patiently outside for the wedding to end and the bride to exit the temple. They were dressed in native Indian attire and looked beautiful. When they walked onto the temple grounds, all eyes were upon them. The thing I noticed most was how elegantly they moved and carried themselves and how modest each was. They were not apologetic for their appearance even though it made them stand out in the crowd. They simply knew who they were and were not ashamed. I observed how beautiful they were. The women seemed almost queenly in their attitude and demeanor. In their actions, movements, and conversation, they were dignified and lovely. I thought how much I would like every young woman and woman in the Church to have that same attitude—an attitude of understanding something deeper on the inside that was reflected on the outside.

Our prophet has said,

Of all the creations of the Almighty, there is none more beautiful, none more inspiring than a lovely daughter of God who walks in virtue with an understanding of why she should do so, who honors and respects her body as a thing sacred and divine, who cultivates her mind and constantly enlarges the horizon of her understanding, who nurtures her spirit with everlasting truth. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Responsibility to Our Young Women,” *Ensign*, September 1988, 11]

If our young women know this, they know much more than how to dress—they will know how to live. And they will have the courage they need to avoid the moral decline of the world.

The prophet Brigham Young desired that his daughters reflect their true identity. Visualize this setting with me for a moment. It is 1869, and the prophet Brigham Young became concerned about his daughters and their somewhat worldly interests and actions. He was worried about the general trend toward materialism, commercialism, and sophistication among the younger Church members, and his daughters seemed to reflect that trend. He assembled his children in the Lion

House parlor for family prayer. He looked into the faces of his lovely daughters and said,

All Israel are looking to my family and watching the example set by my . . . children. For this reason I desire to organize my own family first into a society for the promotion of habits of order, thrift, industry, and charity; and, above all things, I desire them to retrench from their extravagance in dress. . . .

. . . I want you to . . . retrench . . . in your speech, wherein you have been guilty of silly . . . speeches and light-mindedness of thought. Retrench in everything that is bad and worthless, and improve in everything that is good and beautiful. [Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 8–10]

We don’t often hear the word *retrench* in our society. The dictionary defines *retrench* as meaning “to cut down, to reduce or diminish, to curtail, to economize” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 1st college ed., s.v. “retrench”). This definition helps us to understand the last sentence of Brigham Young’s declaration. He desired his daughters to curtail and diminish in everything that is bad and worthless and to improve in that which is good and beautiful. He wanted his daughters to be “worthy of imitation” (Delbert L. Stapley, “*Liahona* Classic: A Salute to Youth,” *Liahona*, November 2001, 25).

In the Doctrine and Covenants, we are admonished to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5). Perhaps it is again time to retrench.

In our present day President Hinckley has issued a similar call to the women of the Church. He has said,

It is so tremendously important that the women of the Church stand strong and immovable for that which is correct and proper under the plan of the Lord. . . . If they will be united and speak with one voice, their strength will be incalculable.

We call upon the women of the Church to stand together for righteousness. They must begin in their

own homes. They can teach it in their classes. They can voice it in their communities.

They must be the teachers and the guardians of their daughters.

Then he said, “I see this as the one bright shining hope in a world that is marching toward self-destruction” (“Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, 10 January 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 20).

President Hinckley has said to both youth and adults,

If we are to hold up this Church as an ensign to the nations and a light to the world, we must take on more of the luster of the life of Christ individually and in our own personal circumstances. In standing for the right, we must not be fearful of the consequences. We must never be afraid. Said Paul to Timothy:

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

*“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (2 Timothy 1:7–8). [“An Ensign to the Nations, a Light to the World,” *Ensign*, November 2003, 84]*

Modesty, therefore, is more than the way we dress. It reflects our testimony and the condition of our hearts. It is an outward manifestation of an inward knowledge and commitment. It begins in the little things. It begins with knowing who we are and what God expects us to do. Are we willing to do what is expected of us? Are we willing to do what it takes to dress modestly?

Dressing modestly is a challenge. President James E. Faust said in a General Young Women Conference, “You young ladies may have a hard time buying a modest prom dress. May I suggest that you make your own? You may need some help, but plenty of help is available” (“Womanhood: The Highest Place of Honor,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 95).

Just this March at the General Young Women Meeting, President Hinckley pleaded again with the young women and their mothers to be modest. In his talk titled “Stay on the High Road,” he said,

You are the strength of the present, the hope of the future. . . .

You are second to none. You are daughters of God. . . . But, my dear friends, we cannot accept that which has become common in the world. Yours, as members of this Church, is a higher standard and more demanding. . . .

Modesty in dress and manner will assist in protecting against temptation. It may be difficult to find modest clothing, but it can be found with enough effort. I sometimes wish every girl had access to a sewing machine and training in how to use it. She could then make her own attractive clothing. I suppose this is an unrealistic wish. But I do not hesitate to say that you can be attractive without being immodest. You can be refreshing and buoyant and beautiful in your dress and in your behavior. Your appeal to others will come of your personality, which is the sum of your individual characteristics. Be happy. Wear a smile. Have fun. But draw some rigid parameters, a line in the sand, as it were, beyond which you will not go. [Ensign, May 2004, 112]

The audience laughed when President Hinckley mentioned a sewing machine for every young woman. They thought he was kidding. But I do not think he was. I think he was serious and prophetic. The question that remains for us to answer is “Therefore what?”—what will each of us do to respond to the call of a prophet of our day to arise and shine forth?

President Spencer W. Kimball suggested we establish a “style of our own” (“On My Honor,” *Ensign*, April 1979, 3). And as wickedness progresses in the world, we may have to do just that. We cannot lead if we are like the world. Instead of spending our energy and our money to look like the world, perhaps we should set a pattern that they may choose to follow. We must have the courage and the gospel understanding to be modest. Modesty will not only set us apart from the world, but it will also protect us.

Are we willing to obey the standard of modesty “at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9)?

Modesty is about more than hemlines, necklines, and revealing clothing. It is the appropriate

dress for the appropriate setting. It is caring to dress appropriately to show respect for people, places, and settings.

We hear more and more concern from the Brethren about excessive casualness in our dress. “In your attempt to follow the styles and be casual, do not offend good taste. When we go to worship the Lord, we ought to be dressed in our finest, cleanest, and best” (A. Theodore Tuttle, “Your Mission Preparation,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 71).

When we understand modesty, we know how to be appropriate in any given situation. We know how to dress to run a marathon as well as how to dress to attend a priesthood ordinance. We understand that having young men wear a white shirt and tie to pass the sacrament is more, much more, than a rule. We invite the companionship of the Spirit by the small things we do that show not only our attitude but our understanding.

Just a month ago the choir for the General Young Woman Meeting had a dress rehearsal in the Conference Center on a Saturday morning. Families were invited to attend. As I arrived, I noticed a family of five children reverently waiting in the seats for the practice to begin. Each of the young boys had on a freshly ironed white shirt and tie, and the little girls wore their Sunday dresses. The mother and father were neatly dressed as well. As I shook the oldest boy’s hand, I said, “I compliment you on the way you are dressed on this early Saturday morning. I can tell that you understand and have been taught some things that it takes a lot of people all their lives to realize.” He flashed his mother a sheepish look, and she gave him that knowing look that says, “I told you so.”

The pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* admonishes, “Never lower your dress standards for any occasion. Doing so sends the message that you are using your body to get attention and approval and that modesty is important only when it is convenient” (15).

Are we as mothers willing to do our part to raise modest daughters?

Mothers play a tremendous role in the modesty of their daughters. President Hinckley has great confidence in us. He said that “we must never lose sight of the strength of the women. It is mothers who set the tone of the home. It is mothers who most directly affect the lives of their children” “Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, 10 January 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 21). I might add that it is mothers who can and must influence their daughters to be modest in their dress, attitudes, speech, conduct, and thought.

Mothers teach modesty in the home and model it through their example. Are we as mothers at fault for our daughters’ immodest dress and actions? Are we more concerned about popularity than purity? Some say, “My daughter is a good girl. I don’t want to make an issue of her tight clothing or skimpy T-shirts.” They say, “I won’t die on that hill.” It’s not about hills; it’s about hearts. It’s not about confrontation, it’s about covenants. These are battles in which we should be engaged because modesty has moral implications. This is a different world. By encouraging our daughters to be cute and trendy, we may unknowingly be putting them at great risk.

Several weeks ago, I visited with Liriel Domiciano, a young woman from Brazil who has an extraordinary voice. Her talent has made her famous in Brazil. She insists on performing in modest attire, always wearing her Young Womanhood Medallion as a symbol of her values. When I asked her what kept her strong, she replied, “My mother is my protector.” As mothers, we simply must be our daughter’s protector. We must start early. We must set the example as we dress to easily meet temple standards. We can teach these standards to our daughters and help them as they anticipate and prepare for their own temple attendance. We must never compromise those standards in order that our daughters might be popular or accepted by those with not only worldly standards but worldly intentions. We must not only be their example but their protector.

Recently the Church donated \$3 million to immunize African children against measles and prevent 1.2 million deaths. In Ethiopia mothers walked miles from their villages carrying their children so they could be immunized and protected against this epidemic (see Sarah Jane Weaver, "Church Gives \$3 Million to Fight Measles in Africa," *Church News*, 27 September 2003, 7–9). As mothers, we will go any distance to protect our children physically. It is a "mother bear" instinct. We must be equally anxious to protect their spiritual welfare.

Here is a specific list of things we can do to protect our daughters and young women:

Seek answers in the scriptures. The scriptures contain the answer to every question or problem.

Know the doctrine and teach it. "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior" (Boyd K. Packer, "Little Children," *Ensign*, November 1986, 17). The doctrine is the why—the rules are the how. Our youth must understand both.

Study the For the Strength of Youth pamphlet. It describes how to qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost. We simply must have this guidance in today's world.

Teach them their eternal identity. My mother always called out when I left the house, "Remember who you are and what we stand for."

Help them gain skills. Teaching skills such as sewing, hemming, and sewing on a button builds bonds between a mother and daughter.

Seek experiences with the Spirit. In your home pray, read scriptures, and listen to sacred music.

Serve others.

Don't let them base their identity on designer labels. "Pretty is as pretty does."

Teach covenant keeping and obedience above acceptance.

Live what you know—be an example.

Live the standards generously. Don't teeter on the edge of the line.

Modesty is a daily standard, which, if lived, has eternal promise.

Modesty extends to our actions, our speech, our attitudes, our thoughts, even our desires.

Our modesty is a reflection of our desire to follow a prophet of God. I repeat, being modest is more than how we dress. Modesty is an outward manifestation of our inward commitment and understanding.

We have a dear friend who worked as a gardener at the Oakland Temple. He shared with us the following insight:

*Our temples are kept beautiful on the outside. I spent many, many hours grooming the temple grounds—weeding, watering, planting flowers, doing all I could to make the exterior reflect the sacred spirit inside the Lord's holy house. Surely the Lord expects us to groom and care for our physical tabernacles also—not as the world does, but in order that the Spirit of the Lord may find a fit sanctuary to dwell with our own spirits. [John S. Tanner, "To Clothe a Temple," *Ensign*, August 1992, 47]*

The outward appearance of the temple and the grounds reflect the inner spirit and beauty of the temple. So it is with us.

Paul said,

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. [1 Corinthians 6:19–20]

He also asked: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Our purpose in coming to earth was to gain a body with which to have experience and joy and to exercise our agency. Our body is a precious gift from a loving Heavenly Father. We are made in His image. Our body is the instrument of our agency and the receptacle of our spirit. There is only one to a customer. It is precious. When Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit in the Garden of Eden and became mortal and subject to temptation, they covered themselves with fig leaves. Later, a loving Heavenly Father, in an act of mercy,

placed a covering over their bodies in the form of coats of skins (see Genesis 3:21). He did this not only to protect them from the elements but to protect them from man’s fallen nature (see John S. Tanner, “To Clothe a Temple,” 44). Consequently, personal modesty is evidence that we understand that our bodies are sacred.

Our modesty—in fact, all of our standards and our willingness to live them—are a reflection of our covenants as members of the Church. We have made baptismal covenants. We must prepare our daughters and other young women to make and keep sacred temple covenants.

When I was a new Young Women General Board member, Elder Robert D. Hales helped me to really understand what my baptismal covenant meant. He said, “When you were baptized, you stepped out of the world and into the kingdom.” He said that when we truly understand this, it changes everything. It did for me. Elder Hales’s teaching awakened in me a desire to reflect in every way that I am a woman of covenant. Each time I partake of the sacrament, I remember that I promise to “always remember him” (D&C 20:77). I see myself literally stepping across a line out of an ever-darkening world and into the brightness of the kingdom. Again and again I ask myself, “Am I living the way the Lord wants me to live?”

Our covenants provide protection, direction, and focus. They enable us to navigate a very turbulent world guided by His Spirit. When we are keeping our covenants, it is extremely difficult to still keep one foot in the world and the other in the kingdom. Sister Mary C. Hales said, “A temple standard of modesty is an outward expression of an inward commitment—not just looking modest but actually being modest in every aspect of life” (“An Outward Expression of an Inward Commitment,” in *The Power of His Redemption: Talks from the 2003 BYU Women’s Conference* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004], 178).

Some young women in Kansas received a lesson on modesty and its relationship to covenants and keeping them. They thought about what they could do. They remembered that the parents of the Ammonite 2,000 stripling warriors had repented

of their warlike ways and covenanted with the Lord. They had buried their swords and weapons of war in connection with their covenant. These young women decided that they would go to their closets and take out any immodest clothing. They didn’t want to be the cause of anyone else being immodest, so they took their clothes out to the yard and buried them! Their outward actions reflected their inward desires. They desired to be covenant keepers.

When we are modest, we reflect in our outward actions and appearance that we understand what God expects us to do. We reflect that we are women of covenant—that we understand the covenants we have made at baptism to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9). As we keep our baptismal covenant and “always remember him” (D&C 20:77) our actions and appearance invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost. And we are told in the Book of Mormon that the Holy Ghost will “show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). In the world in which we live, can we risk being without this sure compass and companion? The pressures of the world must not push us into places where the Spirit cannot dwell.

“When you are well groomed and modestly dressed, you invite the companionship of the Spirit and can exercise a good influence on those around you” (*For the Strength of Youth*, 18). It is really all about the Spirit. If you go through the entire *For the Strength of Youth* booklet and circle each mention of the Holy Ghost, you will see that it occurs twenty-four times in forty-two pages. This entire book describes, standard by standard, how to qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

In our day prophets have again issued the call to young women and women to retrench, to arise, to be worthy of imitation. Our standards are clearly outlined for us and they carry with them infinitely great rewards. We are promised by prophets of God that if we live the standards, we

will be able to do [our] life’s work with greater wisdom and skill and bear trials with greater courage. [We] will

have the help of the Holy Ghost. [We] will feel good about ourselves and will be a positive influence in the lives of others. [We] will be worthy to go to the temple to receive holy ordinances. [For the Strength of Youth, 2–3]

What more could a mother want for her daughter or for herself?

The people who assembled at the Waters of Mormon were converted to the gospel. They were about to be baptized and enter into a covenant that included “standing as a witness of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9). When Alma asked them if they were willing to do this, “they clapped their hands for joy,

and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts” (Mosiah 18:11). Why was it their hearts’ desire? Because, just as it was in Anatevka, they had been taught and understood who they really were and what God expected them to do. They wanted to change. They understood and wanted the promises. And they were willing to do whatever it took to have the blessing of the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

As daughters of God and women of covenant, we have stepped out of the world and into the kingdom. Now is the time to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.