

“If the Savior Stood Beside Me, Would I Wear the Things I Wear?”

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Why is modesty so important? Why would a hemline, a neckline, or a T-shirt matter to the Lord? I am the mother of five daughters and two sons, and as you can imagine, the topic of modesty has come up in our home once in a while! But, over the years, I have learned that modesty is taught best by teaching the doctrine and setting a positive example. The doctrine will help our children understand why modesty is so important. Our example will demonstrate the blessings of modesty in happy ways.

What is modesty?

Modesty is a God-given principle to help us learn to use our bodies appropriately here in mortality. The definition of modesty I will use today comes from *True to the Faith*: “An attitude of humility and decency in dress, grooming, language, and behavior.”¹ Modesty is the opposite of boastfulness or vanity. Modest people do not use their bodies or their behavior to seek approval from the world or draw attention to their own real or supposed accomplishments or desirable attributes.

As we talk about modesty today, please remember that these principles apply to both men and women, and that even as we teach and exemplify modesty for our young women, we never condemn those that choose short skirts or “rainbow hair and the many splendored rings.”² Always, we exemplify compassion and Christlike love for the individual while we remain loyal to the standards the Lord has set.

But I do testify that the choice a young man or young woman makes to appear and behave modestly sends powerful messages that they understand their identity as sons and daughters of God and that they have chosen to stand in holy places.

¹ “Modesty,” *True to the Faith* (2004), 106–107.

² Jeffrey R. Holland, “Israel, Israel, God is Calling” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 9, 2012), cesdevotionals.lds.org.

I love the scripture, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? . . . The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). Our bodies are the temples of our mortal lives. They house our spirits, and it is to this bodily temple that we invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost. I believe that when we choose to wear modest clothing and behave with a modest demeanor, *we wear and we live our testimony* of God the Eternal Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ. We witness by our physical appearance that we are disciples of Christ and that we live His gospel.

What is the doctrine of modesty?

In the premortal world, we knew and understood the Father’s plan of happiness. Each one of us, as a spirit daughter of God, knew and worshipped Him as our Eternal Father. We loved Heavenly Father. We felt His love for us, and we wanted to be just like Him. We accepted His plan, by which we could obtain a physical body, be created in His image, and gain mortal experience so that we could progress toward perfection and ultimately realize our divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.

Our precious bodies are a gift from God to each one of us. They are sacred. And as Elder David A. Bednar taught in conference, “To those who know and understand the plan of salvation, defiling the body is an act of rebellion and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God.”³ As daughters of God, we would not treat our bodies as sexual objects. Instead, we care for and protect our bodies so that we may be instruments in the hands of God to bring about His glorious purposes (see Alma 26:3).

The principle of modesty is not new. Adam and Eve, in their purity and innocence, were naked and unashamed in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 2:25). But when they had partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:17), “the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Genesis 3:7). Aprons are described in the footnote as being “things to gird about, or wrap around, the body.” Then when Adam and Eve heard the voice of God, they hid themselves from His presence. In this mortal sphere, we do not live in a state of innocence. We live in a world of good and evil, and the physical body can be used for both righteous and for wicked purposes. So, we must ask ourselves, if the Savior stood beside us, would we feel comfortable in the clothing we wear, or would we want to hide?

To bless and protect Adam and Eve, God gave them coats of skins to clothe them before sending them out of the garden. In like manner, God has given us a covering of covenants in mortality symbolized by our sacred temple garments. “This garment, worn day and night, serves three important purposes: it is a reminder of the sacred covenants made with the Lord in His holy house, a protective covering for the body, and a symbol of the modesty of dress and living that should characterize the lives of all the humble followers

³ David A. Bednar, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2013, 41–44.

of Christ.”⁴ Modesty in dress and appearance and in thought and behavior is outward evidence that we understand the covenants we have made to bless us, to protect us, and to empower us in our preparation to return to His presence. Modesty reminds us to keep the sacred covenants we made at baptism and that we renew each week by partaking of the sacrament. When we were baptized, we stepped out of the world and into the kingdom of God. Everything must be different for us. Elder Robert D. Hales taught, “By choosing to be in His kingdom, we separate—not isolate—ourselves from the world. Our dress will be modest, our thoughts pure, our language clean.”⁵ Elder Bednar added, “as we stand in the waters of baptism, we look to the temple.”⁶ Modesty in dress and appearance and in thought and behavior will help prepare us to make and to keep the sacred temple covenants. Modesty is a principle that will help keep us safely on the covenant path as we progress to the presence of God.

What are the blessings of modesty?

What can we teach our daughters to help them have the courage to choose modesty in a world that would mock and scorn them for their pure and virtuous choices? Does our example strengthen our young women? Do they see us using our bodies to draw attention, or do they see us using them to glorify God?

Modesty in thought, in word, in appearance, and in behavior helps us obtain three empowering and ennobling blessings. First, modesty will help us invite the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Second, modesty helps protect us from the destructive influences of the world; and third, modesty enables us “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9).

Modesty invites the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Elder Hales has taught, “Modesty is fundamental to being worthy of the Spirit.”⁷ Remember the scripture that teaches this truth: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Let’s help our young women understand that they will not want to do anything to deny themselves “the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26). Help them know that precious and powerful spiritual gifts accompany His sacred companionship. God has promised, “I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy; . . . by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which are pertaining unto things of righteousness, in faith believing in me that you shall receive” (D&C 11:13–14). Knowledge, wisdom, and testimony; joy, peace, and happiness; these are some of the great blessings we can promise our young women as we invite them to live modestly and worthy of the Holy Ghost.

⁴ Carlos E. Asay, “The Temple Garment: ‘An Outward Expression of an Inward Commitment,’” *Ensign*, Aug. 1997, 18–23.

⁵ Robert D. Hales, “The Covenant of Baptism: To Be in the Kingdom and of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000.

⁶ David A. Bednar, “Honorably Hold a Name and Standing,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 97–100.

⁷ Robert D. Hales, “Modesty: Reverence for the Lord,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 34–37.

Let our young women know that if we become enamored with the fashions of the world and follow the current trends of thought and behavior, we become one of those about whom King Benjamin referred when he taught, “If ye . . . go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom’s paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved . . . the Lord has no place in [you], for he dwelleth not in unholy temples” (Mosiah 2:36–37).

One of the challenges of modesty is that fashions and socially accepted behaviors change regularly. The world’s definition of modesty changes according to worldly standards. But we do not need to be confused. The standards of the Lord never change. Teach young women to be sensitive to the Spirit as they make choices about what to wear, what to say, and what to do. A young woman living close to the Spirit does not need to be like the world. She believes that her body is a temple to be kept beautiful, clean, and pure.

One of my daughters remembers wearing a red dress to a high school prom that she thought was beautiful and modest. However, once she was out the door, she had an uncomfortable feeling about the dress. She realized that the neckline shifted as she moved, causing it to droop too low. When they arrived at the home for dinner, before she even took off her coat, she immediately sought out the mother of one of the boys participating in the group date for a safety pin. Once pinned in place, she felt good about herself and confidently enjoyed the evening.

Living modestly does not guarantee that life will be easy or that we will never experience rejection or persecution for our standards. But modest appearance and behavior does invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost and the feelings of peace, true joy, and happiness that only come by the Spirit of the Lord. Our daughters are not of this world. They have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and they are traveling the covenant path that leads to the temple and that will return them to the presence of God. They need us to assure them and exemplify for them that they will be guided, protected, comforted, and purified as they live worthy of the Holy Ghost.

Second, we can teach young women that **modest appearance and behavior helps protect us from the destructive influences of the world.** In the Book of Mormon, clothing often represents physical and spiritual protection. When Captain Moroni led his people into battle, he prepared them with breastplates, shields, and thick clothing to protect their bodies. The army of Zerahemnah was not so prepared. They had not received prophetic guidance. They entered battle “naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins” (Alma 43:20). The protection we receive from modest appearance and behavior is as important to us today in the battle between good and evil as it was to Moroni’s armies. Modesty is the first line of defense as our daughters fight a modern day battle against the adversary’s efforts to destroy them in body and spirit.

Satan understands the power of modesty in preserving and protecting us along the covenant path and he will do all he can to thwart our efforts to be modest. He wants us to become consumed with our appearance and the vanities of the world. He wants us to

flaunt, objectify, and defile our bodies and become coarse and profane in our thought, language, and behavior. He understands that by so doing, we lose the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Without the Spirit, we may become dissatisfied and confused about our appearance and about the righteous purposes of our bodies. Immodesty makes us more vulnerable to temptation and worldliness. We may even compromise our ability to do the work of the Lord and to fulfill our divine destiny as daughters of God. Immodesty can become a step toward lost blessings and spiritual destruction unless we quickly repent.

I love the picture “Arise and Shine Forth,” by James Christensen, depicting pure and virtuous young women who have made covenants and who have armed themselves against evil influences of the world. The original of this picture hangs in the Young Women boardroom of the Relief Society Building. As you look at this picture, what impresses you? How does it make you feel?

I love the courage and determination in the faces of the young women. They stand upon a firm foundation of a testimony of Jesus Christ. They know they are daughters of God who stand for truth and righteousness. For me, these young women represent the promise the Lord declares to His sons and His daughters, “Wherefore, lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all, that ye may be able to stand” (D&C 27:15).

I love the feminine armor—the brocade and tapestry. I love that it is modest. Modesty is a shield of faith.

These young women remind me of a conversation one of our daughters shared with us after a Sunday School lesson years ago. This bright, happy, and beautiful daughter was well liked. She also had a well-established reputation among her peers for being a very good girl, completely committed to living gospel standards and keeping the commandments. One Sunday, in a lesson on the Word of Wisdom, the teacher asserted that everyone in the class would, at one time or another, be tempted to break the Word of Wisdom. Feeling that her personal integrity was being challenged, she declared to her teacher and the class that it would never happen to her. She said, “Look at me. Look at the friends I have chosen, the way I dress, the way I talk, and the way I act. No one would ever even invite me to break the Word of Wisdom! I have already made a decision to keep the commandments and live the standards, and everyone knows it.” Making and keeping covenants provided the spiritual armor to defend herself against the very thought of temptation.

I also love that the young women in this picture stand together in strength and unity. They stand together in holy places and will not be moved (See D&C 87:8). As I look at them, I also feel empowered and desire to stand with them in modesty, in strength, in faith, in purity, and in holiness to the Lord.

One of the most deceptive weapons used against our young women is the currently socially accepted attitude that morality is old-fashioned and that in our modern world chastity or sexual purity is outdated and irrelevant. Modesty is a defense against such evil

influences and a protection of chastity and virtue. Listen to these words in *For the Strength of Youth*. “Before marriage, . . . do not do anything . . . that arouses sexual feelings.” And, “pay attention to the promptings of the Spirit so that you can be clean and virtuous.” Immodest appearance and behavior will often arouse sexual feelings and will break down barriers and invite increased temptation to break the law of chastity.

Elder Hales has taught, “Modesty is at the center of being pure and chaste, both in thought and deed. Thus, because it guides and influences our thoughts, behavior, and decisions, modesty is at the core of our character.”⁸ Teach and exemplify modesty to help our young women be prepared to defend and protect the procreative powers within them. Help them hold sacred and preserve the sacred expression of love between a husband and wife for marriage.

Third, **modesty enables us to “stand as witnesses of God** at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in” (Mosiah 18:9). Help our young women understand that as daughters of God who have made covenants to keep the commandments and follow the Savior, we are not our own, we have been bought with a price (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The commandment is to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which both belong to God. We all have a work to do in the kingdom of God, and a modest deportment and demeanor will help us be credible witnesses of Christ.

President Brigham Young understood what it would require for his daughters and for our daughters today to gain *living* testimonies that would help them radiate the light of Christ.

[Show Young Women History video, 4:35 min.]

Did you notice the light in the eyes and the true beauty in the countenances of modest young women past and present? Did you see what Brigham Young asked them to do so that they might gain living testimonies? What daily gospel habits did young women commit to live? He asked them to gain *living* testimonies so that they would be able to hold up the light of Christ to the world. Brigham Young’s prophetic counsel is true today.

The Savior taught, “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24). As sisters in Zion, we have a divine mandate to be a beacon to the world, to demonstrate the joy of gospel living, to teach righteousness, and to build the kingdom of God on the earth. Each one of us is a reflection of the light of Christ when we are modest and pure and keep the commandments. Modesty is a witness of our testimony of the Savior and of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How beautiful and how blessed are the modest young women who are guided by the Holy Ghost, who protect themselves from worldliness, and who stand as witnesses of God to the world. And blessed is the woman who exemplifies and teaches the doctrine of modesty for all the sons and daughters of Zion.

⁸ Robert D Hales. “Modesty: Reverence for the Lord,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 34–37.

As women who have covenanted to follow the Savior and who desire to receive the fulness of the blessings of the Atonement in our lives, there is really only one outfit that matters. Moroni records, “Awake, and arise from the dust . . . yea, and put on *thy beautiful garments*, O daughter of Zion . . . that the covenants of the Eternal Father . . . may be fulfilled” (Moroni 10:31; emphasis added).

The beautiful garments are the robes of righteousness, worn by those who have kept their covenants. Are we preparing our daughters to put on these beautiful garments? Eternal is the reward for those who glorify God in body and spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:20).

May we be among those whose garments are washed white, purified until they are cleansed from all stain through the blood of our Savior, who came to redeem His people from their sin (see Alma 5:21).

I testify that salvation is in Christ, and those who have kept their covenants will “have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (see 2 Nephi 9:14). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.