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Arise and Shine Forth

One of the greatest ways we can arise and shine forth is to confidently obey the commandments of God.

It is a privilege for me to share this evening with you. Every January, I anxiously look forward to the announcement of the new Mutual theme. However, I always take a moment to evaluate whether I've mastered the lessons of the *past* year's theme.

For a moment, let's review recent themes: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly,"¹ "Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works,"² "Be thou an example of the believers,"³ "Be strong and of a good courage,"⁴ and the thirteenth article of faith: "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men."⁵

Studying and focusing on these scriptures for a full year has allowed them to become a part of our hearts, our souls, and our testimonies. We hope you will continue to follow their guidance as we turn our focus to the 2012 Mutual theme, found in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The heading for section 115 explains the year was 1838 and the setting was Far West, Missouri. Joseph Smith was "making known the will of God concerning the building up of that place and of the Lord's House."

The Prophet was optimistic and encouraged. In verse 5, where we find this year's theme, the Lord tells him, "Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations."

What do you think of when you hear the word *arise*? Personally, I think of you—the noble youth of the Church. I picture you diligently arising from your beds each morning for early-morning seminary. I see you faithfully arising from your knees after finishing your daily prayers. I think of you courageously arising to share your testimony and defend your standards. I am inspired by your commitment to the gospel and your good examples. Many of you have already accepted this invitation to arise and shine forth, and your light encourages others to do the same.

One of the greatest ways we can arise and shine forth is to confidently obey the commandments of God. We learn of these commandments in the scriptures, from modern-day prophets, and within the pages of the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*. Each of you should have your own copy. On my personal copy, I have circled the words *for* and *you*, as taught to me

by a respected friend. This simple act reminds me that these standards are not just general guidelines—they are specifically *for me*. I hope you will take the time to circle those words on your own booklet, read it cover to cover, and feel the Spirit testify that the standards are *for you* as well.

There may be those of you who are tempted to disregard or dismiss the standards in *For the Strength of Youth*. They may look at the booklet and say, "See, Mother, the book doesn't talk about [fill in the current issue]." Or they may justify to themselves, "What I'm doing isn't that bad. I'm certainly not as bad as [insert the name of a friend or an acquaintance]."

President Harold B. Lee taught, "The most important of all the commandments of God is that one that you are having the most difficulty keeping today."⁶ King Benjamin explained, "I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them."⁷ If you are struggling with keeping these standards and commandments, I encourage you to look for support within the gospel. Read your scriptures. Spend time on the Church's official website, LDS.org, to find answers to your questions. Talk to your parents, your Church leaders, and those who shine brightly as they live the gospel. Pray. Pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father, who loves you. Use the gift of repentance daily. Serve others. And most important, listen to and obey the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

President Thomas S. Monson encourages us all with these words: "My young friends, be strong. . . . You know what is right and what is wrong, and no disguise, however appealing, can change that. . . . If your so-called



friends urge you to do anything you know to be wrong, *you* be the one to make a stand for right, even if you stand alone.”⁸

Heavenly Father does not want us to look to the world and *follow* its ever-changing trends. He wants us to look to Him and follow His unchanging guidance. He wants us to live the gospel and *lead* others to it by setting the standard high.

The scriptures provide many great examples to illustrate this idea. In the book of Judges in the Old Testament, we learn about Samson. Samson was born with great potential. His mother was promised, “He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”⁹ But as Samson grew, he looked more to the world’s temptations than to God’s direction. He made choices because they “pleaseth [him] well”¹⁰ rather than because

those choices were right. Repeatedly, the scriptures use the phrase “and he went down”¹¹ as they tell of Samson’s journeys, actions, and choices. Instead of arising and shining forth to fulfill his great potential, Samson was overcome by the world, lost his God-given power, and died a tragic, early death.

On the other hand, the scriptures provide the example of Daniel. Daniel was also born with great potential. In the book of Daniel, chapter 6, we read, “Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him.”¹² When worldly challenges came to Daniel, he didn’t look down at the world—he arose and looked to heaven. Instead of following the king’s worldly decree that no one should pray to anyone but the king for 30 days, Daniel “went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward

Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”¹³

Daniel was not afraid to arise and shine forth in following God’s commandments. Although he spent an uncomfortable night in the lions’ den for standing for what was right, he was protected and blessed for his obedience. When King Darius removed Daniel from the lions’ den the next morning, he made a decree that everyone should fear Daniel’s God and follow Daniel’s example of faithfulness. Truly, Daniel shows us what it means to be a standard for the nations and never lower our standards in the face of worldly temptations.

I have been blessed to hear many modern-day examples of youth, just like you, who are not afraid to arise and shine forth and allow their

light to be a standard among their peers. Joanna was one of only three members of the Church in her high school and the only young woman in her ward. She committed to herself and the Lord that she would never use bad language. When she was paired with a young man for a school project who had not made the same commitment, she did not lower her standards. She asked him to respect and honor her values. Over time, with many gentle and some not-so-gentle reminders, her friend formed new habits and used cleaner language. Many people noticed the difference, including his father, who thanked Joanna for being a good influence in his son's life.¹⁴

On a recent assignment in the Philippines, I met Karen, who shared an experience she had as a Laurel while studying for a bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management. A teacher required that every student learn to make and taste the variety of drinks that would be served in their restaurants. Some of the drinks contained alcohol, and Karen knew it was against the Lord's commandments for her to taste them. In the face of serious consequences, Karen found courage to arise and shine forth, and she did not partake of the drinks.

Karen explained: "My teacher approached me and asked me why I was not drinking. He said, 'Miss Karen, how will you know the flavor and pass this important subject if you do not at least taste the drinks?' I told him that I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and as members, we do not drink things that are harmful to us. Whatever he expected of me, even if it meant receiving a failing grade, I would understand, but I would not fail to live my personal standards."



Weeks passed, and nothing more was said about that day. At the end of the semester, Karen knew her final grade would reflect her refusal to taste the drinks. She hesitated to look at her grade, but when she did, she discovered that she had received the highest grade in the class.

She said: "I learned through this experience that God . . . will surely bless us when we follow Him. I also know that even if I had received a failing grade, I would not regret what I had done. I know that I will never fail in the Lord's sight when I choose to do what I know to be the right thing."¹⁵

Dear young women, each of you has been born with great potential. You are beloved daughters of Heavenly Father. He knows you and He loves you. He invites you to "arise and shine forth," and He promises that

as you do, He will sustain and bless you. I pray that each of you will find the courage to accept His invitation and receive His promises, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
2. Mosiah 5:15.
3. 1 Timothy 4:12.
4. Joshua 1:9.
5. Articles of Faith 1:13.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 30.
7. Mosiah 4:29.
8. Thomas S. Monson, "Examples of Righteousness," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 65.
9. Judges 13:5.
10. Judges 14:3.
11. Judges 14:7.
12. Daniel 6:3.
13. Daniel 6:10.
14. For a portion of this story, see Joanna Ehrisman, "The Thing about Being Mormon," in Katilin Medlin and others, eds., *Going on 15: Memoirs of Freshmen* (2010), 93–96.
15. Personal correspondence to author, 2012.