

FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOU

A Conversation with the Young Women General Presidency



The Young Women general presidency—Susan W. Tanner (center), president; Julie B. Beck (left), first counselor; and Elaine S. Dalton (right), second counselor—talk about ways parents and leaders can help youth increase their desire and resolve to live gospel standards. Since the conversation, Sister Beck has been called as the Relief Society general president, and Mary N. Cook has been called to the Young Women general presidency.

What might parents and leaders focus on when talking to youth about standards?

Sister Susan W. Tanner: As a presidency we have a motto: “I can do hard things.” Our priesthood adviser, Elder John B. Dickson, suggested we change it to “When I know who I am, I can do anything He asks me to do.” We feel strongly that if youth understand who they are as children of God, then they will keep standards. The sense of their

identity gives them self-confidence.

Sister Elaine S. Dalton: Talking about standards is not about rules; standards are about qualifying for the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Standards are about standing in holy places so you’re worthy to have the companionship of the third member of the Godhead. He will be your guide along the path you entered at baptism and confirmation—the path that leads to the temple.

Sister Julie B. Beck: I remember a reporter who attacked our standards as restrictive. She had read the *For the Strength of Youth* book, and she felt that it was all about rules. So I talked to her about safety and choices, and I used the words *liberate* and *free* and *protect*. I said, for instance, if a young woman keeps our standard not to drink alcohol or take drugs, she will never be a slave to those habits. She’ll be free, and her ability to make choices will be multiplied because she won’t have the problem of addiction. The reporter started to nod her head when she understood that standards are not a fence to keep us in. Standards are what help us go out and function in a world full of choices. We can contribute in this world and live happy, productive lives because we are protected.

How can parents and leaders get standards into the hearts of youth?

Sister Tanner: Sometimes we look at the difficulties youth face and have an immediate instead of a long-range vision. It’s interesting to read *For the Strength of Youth* looking for



PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUNG WOMEN, GENERAL PRESIDENCY BY BUSATH PHOTOGRAPHY; OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUTH SIPLIS, POSED BY MODELS

promises; it's interesting to read the scriptures looking for promises. Whenever we're admonished to do anything, generally it's followed by a promise. Parents and leaders who have lived standards are a great example. Youth can see that good things have happened in our lives, that we've been able to establish eternal families. Those are promises being fulfilled in our lives.

Sister Dalton: I have never met anyone who didn't want the promises in *For the Strength of Youth*: "You will be able to do your life's work with greater wisdom and skill," you will be able to "bear trials with greater courage," "you will have the help of the Holy Ghost,"

"you will feel good about yourself," you "will be a positive influence in the lives of others," and "you will be worthy to go to the temple" (pp. 2–3).

Sister Beck: If you're unapologetic about blessings, then you can't be apologetic about what gets you the blessings.

Sister Dalton: Sometimes parents think a standard is a small thing. They say, "I'm not going to fight that battle or die on that hill." But it's not about hills; it's about holiness. A standard is about understanding who you are as a son or daughter of God.

How can parents and leaders overcome the fear of offending or alienating youth?

Sister Beck: I think of some scriptures: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee" (Jeremiah 1:8) and "Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled" (Moses 6:32). The Lord expects His leaders—and every parent is a leader—to speak the truth.

Sister Tanner: Doctrine and Covenants section 121 says that when "reproving betimes with sharpness," you show "forth afterwards an increase of love" (v. 43). If youth know first that you love them, they're more willing to listen. And if you also follow up with your love, you can say the hard things.

Sister Beck: I think we underestimate youth. They're in a searching

age—it's the "why" age. There's a reason for that: the Lord wants them to get their own testimonies. It's leaders' and parents' job to give them the doctrinal "whys" and to back up standards by teaching about the reasons for them. I remember some conversations I had with a daughter about Sunday dress. I explained how I felt she should dress to attend sacrament meeting. I also taught her about the sacrament and bore my testimony about why we go to church. It was done with love. She didn't change the way she dressed that Sunday or the week after. But very soon she

adopted a more formal standard of dress for sacrament meeting. I was patient while she got her own confirmation. And she never went back to dressing the way she had before. She had been taught the doctrine, and her "why" question was answered.

How can *For the Strength of Youth* help parents and leaders answer the "why" questions?

Sister Tanner: I love *For the Strength of Youth* because it's based on doctrine. Doctrine is eternal truth, set from before the foundation of the world. And standards are based upon doctrine, so the standards aren't going to change either. They're not

something out-of-touch adults made up just to make life difficult. *For the Strength of Youth* states doctrine and standards probably clearer than any other resource. It also talks about consequences. So you can see what the eternal truth is, what it is we should do or should not do, and why we should or should not do it. This book can be a huge help to parents. Sometimes when I think, "I want to explain this correctly in understandable terms," I go to that book, and the idea I need is encapsulated in a sentence.

What are other ways parents and leaders can use *For the Strength of Youth*?

Sister Beck: You can discuss it a standard at a time in family home evening and in each section mark the doctrine, the standards, and the consequences. As a Church teacher, you could use it in any lesson. It has helped me to memorize some key phrases that I really want to emphasize, and I find that when I'm talking to youth, those sentences just pop out.

Sister Dalton: For example, one key phrase is "Satan wants you to think that you cannot repent, but . . ."

Sister Dalton and Sister Beck, together: ". . . that is absolutely not true" (p. 30)!

Sister Tanner: Youth are often the best teachers of each other. One of the things we love to do when we speak to youth is hand a *For the Strength of Youth* book to some young people and say, "I'd like you



HELPING YOUTH FIND STRENGTH

One way to begin making the teachings in *For the Strength of Youth* (item no. 36550) part of our lives—and to get them into the hearts of youth—is to identify the doctrines, the standards, and the consequences in each section of this book. For example, consider the “Sexual Purity” section.

Doctrine answers the question “Why do we live these standards?”: “Physical intimacy between husband and wife is beautiful and sacred. It is ordained of God for the creation of children and for the expression of love between husband and wife. God has commanded that sexual intimacy be reserved for marriage” (p. 26).

Standards teach us what we should and should not do: “Do not have any sexual relations before marriage, and be completely faithful to your spouse after marriage” (p. 26).

Consequences are the positive and negative results of living standards: “When you obey God’s commandment to be sexually pure, you prepare yourself to make and keep sacred covenants in the temple. You prepare yourself to build a strong marriage and to bring children into the world as part of a loving family. You protect yourself from the emotional damage that always comes from sharing physical intimacies with someone outside of marriage” (p. 26).

to choose any one of these standards and in a few minutes give a little talk on it.” I’ve had so many spontaneous talks fill the room with the Spirit. When youth share their experiences and bear their testimonies, *they* feel the Spirit and start learning the power of the book.

Sister Beck: Having a standards night once a year isn’t enough. We can use *For the Strength of Youth* at camp; we can use it at youth conference and in formal and informal situations. It’s a resource that has to be always in front of our youth. And parents and leaders have to live it. You can’t be the leader who tells youth what movies to avoid, and then you go to those movies. You can’t be the mother who says, “Don’t wear that immodest dress,” and then you’re wearing one. You can’t be the father who says, “Pay your tithing,” but you don’t.

Then does *For the Strength of Youth* have a role for people who aren’t youth?

Sister Dalton: I call it *For the Strength of “You.”* It applies to all of us.



Sister Beck: My copy has my name on it, and it's marked for me. The standards are not gender or age specific; they're for children of God.

What are some immediate blessings we receive by living the Lord's standards as taught in For the Strength of Youth?

Sister Dalton: Peace of mind.

Sister Beck: The companionship of the Holy Ghost.

Sister Dalton: And self-confidence. It ties with the 2007 Mutual theme: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God" (D&C 121:45). Those immediate

blessings are important because sometimes youth think, "If I choose this, I won't have any friends." Unfortunately, that could be true.

Sister Tanner: It was true for me in seventh grade. I was honest, going against what a popular group of girls wanted me to do. Because of that, I didn't have friends and I was sad, but I had confidence that what I had done was right. And I'm sure that's what sustained me through a period of time. I knew I could face whom I really needed to face—my Heavenly Father and my family. But even that knowledge doesn't mean it doesn't hurt.

Sister Dalton: *For the Strength of*

Youth doesn't promise you a life free of problems if you live standards, but it does say that "you will . . . bear trials with greater courage" (p. 2). Although I didn't realize it the night I walked out of a party and closed the door on my whole social future—the popular kids shunned me from that time on—I know now that living standards enables you to be a leader. *One* young woman or *one* young man with the courage to live these standards and walk out of an inappropriate situation gives others the courage to follow.

What are the long-term blessings of living the standards in For the Strength of Youth?

Sister Beck: Last week I was shopping with my granddaughters. I noticed a sales clerk watching our fun. Later I gave her a pass-along card. She told me, "I'm at a point in my life where I'm trying to take charge, and I don't know how." So we talked. My closing comment to her was, "If you want this when you're my age"—and I pointed to my little granddaughters—"you have to be really careful what you're choosing now. The choices I made at your age determined who I am now."

Sister Dalton: Long-term blessings ripple through generations, and one small thing you're doing right now can make a lot of difference in where you end up and where the generations that follow you end up. And we can't forget that generations before us sacrificed for us to have the gospel and to know about standards.





SHARING STANDARDS



A young woman I know was a little frustrated with friends questioning her standards: “Why can’t you date before 16?” “Why don’t you drink?” When she prayed about how to handle this situation, this idea came to her mind: “I’m going to put a *For the Strength of Youth* booklet in my jeans pocket. When people question me about, for example, dating, I’ll give them the book and tell them to read the section on dating.”

It turned out to be a great idea! In three months she gave out 52 copies of *For the Strength of Youth*. And three new friends started attending church with her.

This young woman was bold in a friendly way and didn’t apologize for her standards. When youth live standards clearly and without apology, others will respect them and look to their example.

Mary N. Cook, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency

How can youth handle temptation and receive those immediate and long-term blessings?

Sister Dalton: When I ask youth, “What’s the hardest thing you do?” many say, “It’s going to parties and being offered a drink and not drinking it.” So I ask, “Why are you at the party?” And they say, “I go to be a good example to others.” Then I always

respond, “You bring your friends to places where they can feel the Spirit. Don’t ever walk into places where the Spirit won’t go. Avoid them!”

Sister Beck: Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy has an analogy. He says that if you’re on a non-chocolate-chip-cookie diet, yet you go into the kitchen just after the cookies have been baked—it smells delicious and

you can picture the chocolate chips melting as you pull the cookie apart—how long is it going to be before you sample one? How strong are you really? That’s *resisting*—or trying to resist. But if you’re on a non-chocolate-chip-cookie diet and you don’t go into the kitchen where they’re baked and you don’t bake them yourself, then you are *avoiding* temptation. That’s easier!

What can youth who live these righteous standards accomplish?

Sister Beck: Satan is coming at our youth from all sides. But we have a defense, so we don’t need to be afraid. We can trust in the Lord’s promises. He says young men and women will dream dreams and see visions, that He will pour out His Spirit upon them in the last days and He will flood the earth with righteousness and truth (see Joel 2:28–32; Moses 7:62). There’s nothing righteous youth can’t do!

Sister Dalton: Our youth are major players in the winding-up scenes on the earth. We read about the calamities and things that will happen, but living the standards in *For the Strength of Youth* will preserve and protect and strengthen our youth in such a way that they’ll be able to serve and do what nobody else will be able to do.

Sister Tanner: Today’s youth are like the army of Helaman! Those youth were raised up to save the Nephite generation, and our youth are being raised up to save this generation. ■