

MODESTY

Reverence for the Lord

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As the General Authorities and auxiliary Church leaders travel across the earth, it is apparent to us that the world is becoming increasingly casual and informal. This is manifested in many ways but particularly in the way people dress. This is also true among some members of the Church.

Such informality may come in part because of indifference. It may come from a lack of understanding or a lack of proper example. We are now two to three generations into wearing casual apparel, and we may not all have had good parental examples of appropriate and modest dress. Popular culture generally has not provided good examples either. The declining trend may also come in part because it is difficult to buy modest attire in today's market.

It is with these observations and these challenges in mind that I wish to emphasize the need for reverence for our Heavenly Father and for keeping the covenants we have made with Him, particularly as relating to modesty and appropriate dress.

The Principle of Modesty

Some Latter-day Saints may feel that modesty is a tradition of the Church or that it has

evolved from conservative, puritanical behavior. Modesty is not just cultural. Modesty is a gospel principle that applies to people of all cultures and ages. In fact, modesty is fundamental to being worthy of the Spirit. To be modest is to be humble, and being humble invites the Spirit to be with us.

Of course, modesty is not new. It was taught to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Unto Adam . . . and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21; see also Moses 4:27). Like Adam and Eve, we have been taught that our bodies are formed in the likeness of God and are therefore sacred.

"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 spirits. Additionally, our bodies are the means by which we can bring souls from the presence of God to their mortal state. When we recognize our bodies as the gifts they are and when we understand the missions they help us fulfill, we protect and honor them by how we act and dress.

In everyday living, immodest clothing such



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as short shorts, miniskirts, tight clothing, shirts that do not cover the stomach, and other revealing attire are not appropriate. Men and women—including young men and young women—should wear clothing that covers the shoulder and avoid clothing that is low cut in the front or back or revealing in any other manner. Tight pants, tight shirts, excessively baggy clothing, wrinkled apparel, and unkempt hair are not appropriate. All should avoid extremes in clothing, hairstyle, and other aspects of appearance. We should always be neat and clean, avoiding sloppiness or inappropriate casualness.¹

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. Our clothing is more than just covering for our bodies; it reflects who we are and what we want to be, both here in mortality and in the eternities that will follow.

Modesty in Dress for Church Meetings

When we attend a Church meeting, our purpose is to worship our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ. Our clothing should show our reverence for Them. We do not dress to attract attention to ourselves, thus distracting others and causing the Spirit to depart.

It is the responsibility of parents to teach their children how to dress and prepare for worshipping in the houses of the Lord. Mothers and fathers can teach their children by taking special care to dress in such a way as to show modesty and reverence in their own appearance and behavior.

When I was a boy, my mother taught me that I should wear my “Sunday best”—in other words, my best attire—to church. What happens in your home as you are preparing to come to church? Is there a moment before you



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leave your home when you pause to look at yourself in a mirror or have a member of the family observe how you look?

Show respect for the Lord and for yourself by dressing appropriately for Church meetings and activities, whether they are on Sunday or during the week. If you are not sure what is appropriate, ask your leaders for guidance.

Modesty in Dress for Temple Attendance

Imagine yourself approaching the temple ready to enter the house of the Lord. In your mind’s eye, are you wearing flip-flops, blue jeans, and a T-shirt with your hair casually unkempt? Of course not. But is it appropriate to



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wear casual clothes of *any* kind to the temple? If you are coming to the Lord's house, shouldn't you be wearing your Sunday best?

The next time you approach the temple, pause to look at the temple grounds. Have you ever considered why the temple is surrounded by beautiful plants, reflecting pools, and architecture? They give an outward presence and feeling that prepares the patron for the sacred ordinances that await inside the temple. Even if a temple is in the center of a large city, the architecture outside separates the building from surrounding structures.

Our clothing is equally important. It is the "landscaping" for presenting our bodies as temples. Just as the temple grounds portray the sacredness and reverence for what

takes place inside the temple, our clothing portrays the beauty and purity of our inner selves. How we dress portrays whether we have proper respect for temple ordinances and eternal covenants and whether we are preparing ourselves to receive them.

In the classic fairy tale, Cinderella wore a magnificent gown to the royal ball. Even her slippers reflected the significance of the evening! It would have been unthinkable for her to come in her working clothes. In fact, no one arrived at the ball dressed in inappropriate, casual clothing. They were all elegantly dressed for the occasion.

There will be no more significant occasion in your life than your wedding day. Your marriage will be one of the *most sacred* events of your life, and hopefully it will take place in the holy temple—Heavenly Father's *most sacred* edifice here on earth. If you truly understood the nature of the covenants that you will be making, you would reflect that in your dress. Brides, you would choose a white temple dress with a bodice and sleeves that are appropriate for the wearing of temple garments. You would do this because of the endowment ceremony and covenants you took upon yourself in preparation for your sealing ceremony. Grooms, your clothing and appearance would be modest and clean. You would not wear a rumpled shirt or slouchy pants in the temple.

When that day comes for you, you will make holy covenants with Heavenly Father. You will want to look your very best as you reverently kneel at an altar before God.

Parents, just as Cinderella's fairy godmother helped prepare her, you can help prepare your sons and daughters. Help them understand the significance of the covenants they will make. Honoring our covenants, starting with baptism, affects who we are and what we do, including the kinds of things we say, the music we listen to, and the clothing we wear. When we make and keep covenants, we are coming out of the world and into the kingdom of God. Our appearance should reflect that.

Before you attend the temple, whether it is to be married, to receive the endowment, or to perform work for the dead, pause for a moment and ask yourself these questions:

“If the Lord were to be at the temple today, how would I dress? How would I want to present myself to Him?” Of course, the answer is clear. You would want to look and feel your best.

Ask yourself the same questions about attending church on Sunday at your local meetinghouse. There you will renew your baptismal covenants through partaking of the sacrament. Remember, you are coming to a house of the Lord that has been dedicated for worshipping Him.

Outward Appearance— the Messages We Send

Imagine that you are watching a play. An actor comes on stage dressed as a clown but starts playing the serious part of the lead. You might react by thinking that this is inappropriate—there must be some mistake in the costuming or casting.

Now think of how inappropriate it is to go out into the world or come to church dressed in clothes that do not represent who you really are in spirit. Our outward appearance and behavior give a message. What message are we sending? Does it reflect that we are children of God? When we go to church or the temple, it is important that we dress to demonstrate that we are prepared to worship and to indicate that we are mentally and spiritually ready to invite the Spirit to be with us always.



Years ago, as a father and bishop in the Church, I could not understand the rationale of youth who dressed in wild colors and provocative fashions to show their “in your face” independence from modest, conservative dress codes and traditions. Then I would observe that, ironically, the rigid compliance of these youth to their bizarre dress codes required far greater obedience and conformity to peer-group pressures than that desired by society as a whole.

When we dress for attention, we are not inviting the Spirit to be with us. We act differently when we are dressed for the world’s attention. Moreover, what we wear will influence the behavior of others toward us.

Consider why missionaries dress conservatively in a skirt and blouse or in a suit with a white shirt and tie. How might someone respond if the missionary had unkempt hair and if he or she were dressed in blue jeans, flip-flops, and a T-shirt with a tawdry printed message? That person might ask, “Is this a representative of God?” Why would that person want to

engage in a serious conversation about the purpose of life or the Restoration of the gospel with such a missionary?

Of course we don’t need to dress like missionaries all of the time. There are certainly times when modest casual clothing is appropriate. The point is this: How we dress affects

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how people react to us. It also demonstrates where our heart and spirit really desire to be.

How we feel on the inside shows on the outside. We show love and respect for ourselves and others by our attitude, speech, and dress. We show love and respect for Church leaders and ward or branch members by speaking, dressing, and behaving in a manner that does not bring inappropriate attention to ourselves. We show love and respect for friends and associates when our language, dress, and behavior are not provocative or unduly casual. And we show love and respect to the Lord through humble dress and behavior. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Putting on “the Whole Armor”

When we know who we are—children of God—and understand that our outward appearance affects our inward spirituality and ultimately our behavior, we show respect for God, for ourselves, and for those around us by being modest in dress and behavior.

My father, who was an artist, helped me understand this concept when I was a boy. He drew me a picture of a knight in armor and labeled the critical elements of “the whole armor of God” as described in the scriptures (see Ephesians 6:11–17; D&C 27:15–18). That picture hung in my bedroom and became a reminder of what we need to do to remain

true and faithful to gospel principles.

Just as we are to “put on” the armor of God, we are to “put on” our clothes as protection for us and others. Clothing ourselves with modest dress and modest actions—mercy, kindness, humility, patience, and charity—will invite the companionship of the Spirit and will positively affect those around us (see Colossians 3:12, 14).

Are we determined to be Saints in the kingdom of God, or are we more comfortable in the ways of the world? Ultimately, how we dress will greatly influence our obedience to commandments and devotion to covenants. Dressing modestly will guide our attitudes and behavior as we conduct our daily lives. In time our dress may even determine who our friends and associates may be, thus influencing whether we live worthy of enjoying the blessings of happiness in this world and for eternity.

It is my fervent prayer that we will hold to our covenants and be modest in our dress and behavior as we attend church, visit the temple, and go about our daily lives. As we

do so, we will show respect for ourselves, our parents, our Church leaders, and others, and we will show reverence to our Heavenly Father and invite the Spirit to be with us always. ■

NOTE

1. See *For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling Our Duty to God* (2001), “Dress and Appearance.”



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The Whole Armor of God

The “helmet of salvation” guards our reasoning, intellect, and thoughts.

The “breastplate of righteousness” helps us to have the Spirit with us always, guarding our heart and soul.

Having our “loins girt about with truth” gives us the foundation to build faith and develop our testimony.

The “sword of the Spirit” is the word of God to pierce the darkness so that we may have light and truth to guide our way in life.

The “shield of faith” helps us withstand the fiery darts of the adversary.

Having our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” by reading and studying the scriptures helps us be obedient to the laws, ordinances, commandments, and covenants of God.

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