

# 5 WAYS

## TO HELP YOUTH Tackle Tough Social Issues

*Our youth need to develop more confidence in the gospel than they have in pop culture, the media, and academic philosophies.*

By Angela Peterson Fallentine

For the past decade, I've had the opportunity to work with youth, their leaders, and their parents in a variety of Church callings in both North America and overseas. Through this service, I've found that one of the greatest concerns parents and leaders have is how they can help their youth understand doctrine and eternal truths in relation to current—often serious and confusing—social issues. Here are a few things we might want to consider as we teach the rising generation how to stand strong in the world.

### 1 HELP YOUTH UNDERSTAND GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL TRUTH

We need to assure our youth that Heavenly Father loves us and has provided ways for us to know the truth. As President Thomas S. Monson has explained: “To help guide us we have the words of God and of His Son found in our holy scriptures. We have the counsel and teachings of God’s prophets. Of paramount importance, we have been provided with a perfect example to follow—even the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Knowing there are very real attacks waged against our children of all ages, let’s better arm them with all the tools they need to discern between the world’s teachings and the Lord’s and to help them “stand as witnesses of God at all

times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9).

The world bombards our youth with messages that are filled with half-truths, misleading headlines, falsified studies, and all types of immorality. These things are hitting them at an alarming speed and coming at them from every direction. Some of the errors are obvious, while many are subtle and require a great deal of discernment. We need to better equip youth to question what they learn from the world—especially those things that contradict gospel teachings. In their quest to find and understand truth, our youth need to develop more confidence in the words of the prophets and the scriptures than they place in pop culture, the media, and many of the philosophies of academia.

### 2 TEACH THE DOCTRINE CLEARLY

One of the sources that teaches doctrine clearly and that we should refer to often is “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Satan’s attacks are directed against everything the proclamation stands for: marriage between a man and a woman; the law of chastity; the sanctity of life; the birth of children within marriage; the divine roles of mothers and fathers. Parents and leaders need to have a testimony of this prophetic document in order to help youth tackle these



Blessings

Atonement

Same-Sex  
Marriage

Jesus  
Christ

Family

Faith

Substance  
Abuse

Charity



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issues head-on—and to speak out when necessary. Let's not just assume that youth will somehow get the drift of these beliefs on their own.

Remember, Satan is bold and unapologetic in teaching youth his false doctrines. I think we do our youth a great disservice if we apologize for the Lord's standards and commandments or shy away from boldly teaching truth.

The adversary is using false teachings and confusion to undermine our youth's ability to progress spiritually. With the rapid growth of alarming social trends, we need to teach the doctrine clearly, concisely, and without apology. It is critical to keep up to date with current social issues and trends in order to understand what the youth are dealing with at school and online. We have to be better prepared and willing to talk to them about tough issues candidly—without tiptoeing around the doctrine. Youth and young adults can handle it! They want to talk about these things. They are craving guidance and direction on these tough issues.

### 3 HELP YOUTH EXAMINE SOCIAL ISSUES USING A LENS OF ETERNAL DOCTRINE

We can hope our children don't accept false doctrines mixed with elements of truth, but if we aren't helping them look at specific, real-life examples from the perspective of gospel teachings, they may fall for the philosophies that make sin look reasonable and justifiable.

For example, the importance of looking at sexuality from an eternal perspective cannot be overemphasized. Much of the misunderstanding youth have about their bodies and human sexuality comes from not fully understanding the sanctity of the body and its connection to the spirit. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us that “the spirit *and* the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15; emphasis added). If we can help our youth understand that our bodies are sacred and are an essential part of our souls, they will be better able to discern truth amidst the very confusing messages they receive from the world.<sup>3</sup>

For doctrinally based discussions on this and other social and doctrinal issues, parents and leaders may want to consult some of the “Gospel Topics” essays on the Church's website ([topics.lds.org](http://topics.lds.org)). Essays now available include “Chastity,” “Pornography,” “Race and the Priesthood,” “Same-Sex Attraction,” and “Same-Sex Marriage.”<sup>4</sup>

### 4 TEACH YOUTH THAT GOD'S TRUTHS ARE UNCHANGING

Our young people can easily fall into the trap of believing that truth is only relative or that popular messaging or societal pressures create or change truth. Each day they face moral relativism among their peers, in their high schools and universities, and in the media (witness, for instance, current discussions on gender identity). Elder

Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “Unlike other organizations that can change their policies and even their doctrines, our policies are determined by the truths God has identified as unchangeable.”<sup>5</sup>

In the words of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency:

“There is indeed such a thing as absolute truth—unassailable, unchangeable truth.

“This truth is different from belief. It is different from hope. Absolute truth is not dependent upon public opinion or popularity. Polls cannot sway it. Not even the inexhaustible authority of celebrity endorsement can change it.”<sup>6</sup>

## 5 HELP YOUTH HOLD FAST TO GOD’S TRUTHS BUT SHOW LOVE

An increasing number of our youth are getting confused about how to adhere to gospel truths while also trying to be kind to those who believe differently. Through scriptures and the teachings of modern-day prophets and apostles, the Lord has clearly set the standards of morality. Our youth need to understand that we cannot lower our standards to embrace or tolerate popular social trends that go against the commandments of God. We need to teach them that they are not being judgmental, unkind, or un-Christlike when they adhere to God’s standards.

As Elder Oaks has taught, “If a person understands the teachings of Jesus, he or she cannot reasonably conclude that our loving Heavenly Father or His divine Son believes that Their love supersedes Their commandments.”<sup>7</sup>

Teaching both obedience to God’s laws and love for others, including the wise use of righteous judgment, must be done so clearly that it cannot be misunderstood. Social trends that go against God’s commandments will often focus solely on love, ignoring moral laws.

In the words of Elder Holland: “Christlike love is the greatest need we have on this planet in part because righteousness was always supposed to accompany it. So if love is to be our watchword, as it *must* be, then by the word of Him who is love personified, we must forsake transgression and any hint of advocacy for it in others. Jesus clearly understood what many in our modern culture seem to forget: that there is a crucial difference between the commandment to forgive sin (which He had an infinite capacity to do) and the warning against condoning it (which He never ever did even once).”<sup>8</sup>

It is my hope—borrowing language from Elder Holland—that we will teach our youth to be strong; to live the gospel faithfully, even if others around them don’t live it at all; and to defend their beliefs with courtesy and with compassion but to *defend* them. A long history of inspired prophets, apostles, parents, and leaders can point them toward the path of Christian discipleship. If the rising generation will courageously pursue such a course, they will forge unshakable faith, find safety against ill winds that blow, and feel the rock-like strength of our Redeemer, upon whom if they build their unflinching discipleship, they cannot fall.<sup>9</sup> ■

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### NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Ponder the Path of Thy Feet,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 86.
2. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
3. A good place to start a conversation with youth on this topic is an address by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Personal Purity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 75–78. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, *Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments* (2001); David A. Bednar, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 41–44.
4. For working with younger children, try “Lesson Helps for Teaching Children” ([lds.org/children/resources](http://lds.org/children/resources)), which includes material on such topics as bullying, pornography, and the Word of Wisdom.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “No Other Gods,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 74–75.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “What Is Truth?” (Church Educational System devotional, Jan. 13, 2013), 4, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “Love and Law,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 28.
8. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 8.
9. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” 9.



### A BATTLE WE MUST WIN

“We are engaged in a battle with the world. In the past, the world competed for our children’s energy and time. Today, it fights for their identity and mind. Many loud and prominent voices are trying to define who our children are and what they should believe. We cannot let society give our family a makeover in the image of the world. We must win this battle. Everything depends on it.”

Elder Bradley D. Foster of the Seventy, “It’s Never Too Early and It’s Never Too Late,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 50.