

Modesty: A Timeless Principle for All

BY SILVIA H. ALLRED

First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency



The way we dress demonstrates our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the challenges members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints face today is obeying principles of modesty in an increasingly immodest world. Difficult though it may be, we can show our discipleship to the Savior Jesus Christ by obeying the Church's standards of modesty. Modesty encompasses dress, language, thought, and personal conduct, but here I would like to focus on dress.

Originally, the main purpose of clothing was to cover our bodies and protect them from the elements. Those purposes continue, although clothing now serves more complex purposes too. Today it can be an expression of many things such as wealth, social status, individuality, or belonging. But clothing also reflects our attitudes and values. For Latter-day Saints, the way we dress demonstrates our understanding of and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In a world that constantly tries to undermine our sense of who we are and what we can become, observing the principle of modesty can improve our confidence. By living and teaching this principle, we can help instill that same confidence in the next generation.

What Is Modesty?

The pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* offers basic guidelines for modesty. This booklet is valuable for both youth and adults: "Immodest clothing includes short shorts and skirts, tight clothing, shirts that do not cover the stomach, and other revealing attire. . . . Women should wear clothing that covers the shoulder and avoid clothing that is low-cut in the front or the back or revealing in any other manner. . . . Men should also maintain modesty in their appearance. All should avoid extremes in clothing, appearance, and hairstyle. Always be neat and clean and avoid being sloppy or inappropriately casual in dress, grooming, and manners. Ask yourself, 'Would I feel comfortable with my appearance if I were in the Lord's presence?'"¹

Seek the guidance of the Spirit as you choose modest apparel. Additionally, as you consider the principles associated with modesty, you might also benefit from asking yourself specific questions like these:

- Am I exposing too much of my body when I sit down, bend over, reach up, or climb stairs?

DON'T BE A DUMMY



A MANNEQUIN WEARS WHATEVER THE WORLD IS SELLING. YOUR STANDARDS ARE HIGHER THAN THAT.

- Do I call attention to myself by wearing clothing that is revealing or provocative?
- Do I need to adjust, tuck, or rearrange my temple garments in order to wear a particular item?

Why Modesty?

When we better understand the doctrine behind the principles of modesty, we realize that modesty is the virtue that guides and moderates action.

The doctrine behind modesty begins with our knowledge that we are children of God, created in His image (see Moses 2:27). Our bodies are sacred gifts from Heavenly Father and have specific purposes that He has planned. As grateful recipients, we acknowledge this gift by treating our bodies as He has asked us to (see D&C 88:33). We learn to train, control, and bridle our bodies and their physical uses to become like Heavenly Father.

ARE YOUR STANDARDS SHRINKING?



IF IT'S TOO TIGHT, TOO SHORT, OR TOO REVEALING, IT DOESN'T FIT CHURCH STANDARDS. DON'T STRETCH YOUR STANDARDS TO FIT THE WORLD'S. (SEE FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH, 14-16.)

From the beginning, the Lord has asked His children to cover their bodies. After Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened and they became aware that they were naked. Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves with simple aprons made of fig leaves. But the aprons were not enough, so the Lord made them more modest coats of skins. (See Genesis 3:7, 21.)

God had a higher standard then, just as He does now. His standards are not those of the world. As He says in Isaiah 55:8-9:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

A Timeless Principle

Because modesty is one of the Lord’s “higher ways” and not a passing social trend, it has been taught throughout the ages. Consider these other scriptural examples about clothing and what they teach us about modesty.

Modesty shows humility. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob denounced pride and love of riches. He admonished his people to prevent their prideful hearts from destroying their souls. One of the ways they had showed their excessive pride was in their manner of dress. Jacob told them, “Because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they” (Jacob 2:13).

The idea of being humble in how we dress is further reflected in Doctrine and Covenants 42:40: “Thou shalt not be proud in thy heart; let all thy garments be plain.” Does this mean that we cannot dress stylishly? No, we should dress appropriately for the occasion, but we should not consume ourselves with brand names or with always having the latest fashion. It is better to use financial resources for more lasting and meaningful purposes.

The way we dress for worship shows our reverence for the Lord. The Lord asked Moses to prepare sacred clothing that would be worthy of use in His holy house (see Exodus 28:2). It is clear from this commandment that the Lord felt everyday clothing was inappropriate for such a

purpose. Do we, like Moses, reflect our feelings of love for Heavenly Father by dressing appropriately for worship?

As these examples show, “prophets of God have always counseled His children to dress modestly.”² In our own time we have been reminded that “the way you dress is a reflection of what you are on the inside. Your dress and grooming send messages about you to others and influence the way you and others act. When you are well groomed and modestly dressed, you invite the companionship of the Spirit and can exercise a good influence on those around you.”³



STANDARDS

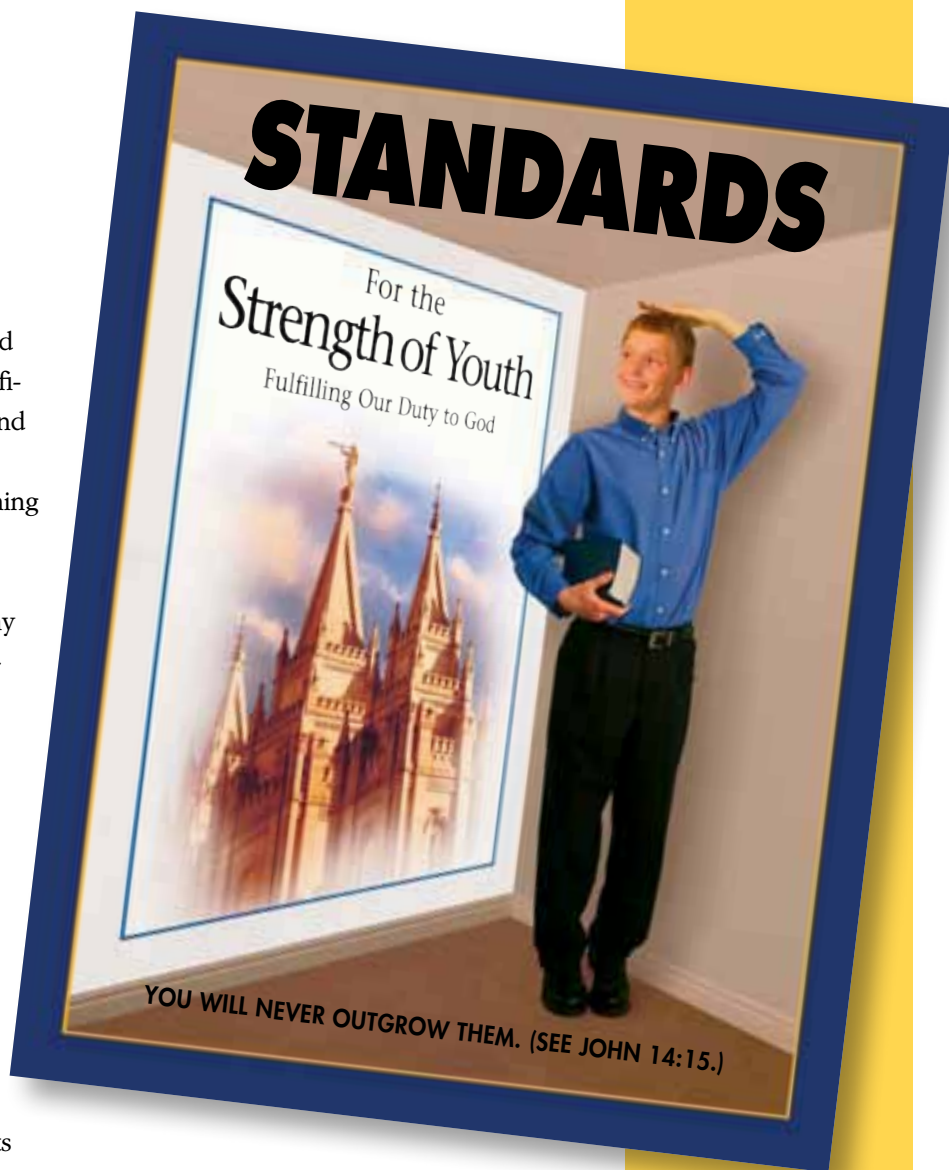
Blessings Associated with Modesty

One of the foremost blessings associated with modesty is an increased sense of confidence. One sister shares the story of a friend who learned—and was blessed by—the principle of modesty in the course of learning about the gospel:

“Several summers ago, a colleague attended church with me. She arrived at my home beforehand dressed in what is traditional for our warm climate: a sleeveless sundress. I appreciated her sense of occasion in wearing a dress to church, and off we went. Other ward members welcomed her to our congregation, and she returned several times in the ensuing weeks. She even began attending home, family, and personal enrichment meetings and bringing her several children to Primary and youth activities. During those midweek activities on those hot summer days, she usually wore a sleeveless blouse and shorts that reached mid-thigh. She was not vulgarly dressed, but it was apparent that she did not yet understand Latter-day Saint standards.

“After several weeks, I asked her if she would be interested in learning more about the Church from the missionaries. She told me that she was shy and that she was uncomfortable talking to people she didn’t know. She wanted simply to continue to participate in our ward’s worship and activities and assured me that if she had any questions, she would ask me or some of the other people in the ward with whom she was already acquainted.

“It was interesting to me that as she continued to come to church and Church activities, she began wearing longer skirts, longer shorts, and shirts that had sleeves. Initially



I thought it had to do with the oncoming autumn weather, but I soon realized that she was simply taking note of how her Latter-day Saint associates dressed.

“I don’t know that her change in apparel was solely responsible for the increase in confidence I started to notice in her, but I think it was part of it. As she continued to learn gospel principles, such as her divine heritage as a daughter of God, her sense of self-worth seemed to escalate. Her confidence increased as she began to better understand the reasons behind some of the things we do. And as her confidence increased, she was eager to learn more about the gospel—including taking the missionary discussions, something that had previously made her nervous.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

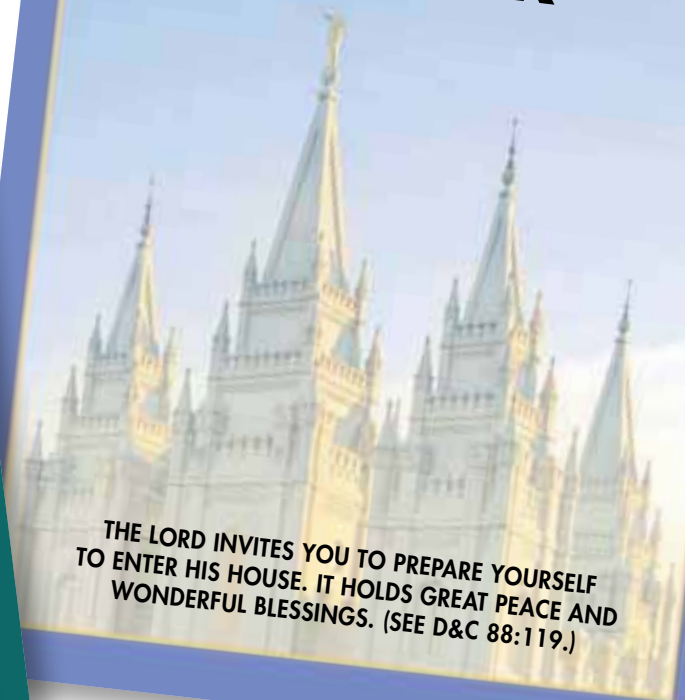


DRESS APPROPRIATELY. DON'T LET A BAD CHOICE TRIP YOU UP. (SEE FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH, 14–16.)

“Her dress was just one aspect of her coming to know and understand gospel principles and standards, but as she found she was able to adjust that area of her life, she saw that she could make more significant changes too. Eventually, these changes led to her conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ and her joining the Church. Later, she was endowed in the temple, and her wardrobe required no change because she had already been practicing the principles of modesty.”⁴

As modesty becomes the virtue that regulates and moderates action in our lives,

ASPIRE TO SOMETHING HIGHER



THE LORD INVITES YOU TO PREPARE YOURSELF TO ENTER HIS HOUSE. IT HOLDS GREAT PEACE AND WONDERFUL BLESSINGS. (SEE D&C 88:119.)

we too will find an increased sense of self-worth. Recall the promises of Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46:

“Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

“The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth.”

May we all endeavor to qualify for these blessings. ■

NOTES

1. *For the Strength of Youth* (pamphlet, 2001), 15–16.
2. *For the Strength of Youth*, 14.
3. *For the Strength of Youth*, 14–15.
4. Personal correspondence.