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COURAGE TO **CHOOSE** **MODESTY**



What can we teach our sons and daughters to help them have the courage to choose modesty in a world that would mock them for their virtuous choices?



Why is modesty so important? Why would a hemline, a neckline, or a T-shirt matter to the Lord? I am the mother of five daughters and two sons, and as you can imagine, the topic of modesty has come up in our home once in a while. But over the years, I have learned that modesty is taught best by teaching the doctrine and setting a positive example. The doctrine will help our children understand why modesty is so important, and our example will demonstrate the blessings of modesty in happy ways.

What Is Modesty?

Modesty is a God-given principle that can help us learn to use our bodies appropriately here in mortality. The definition of modesty in *True to the Faith* is “An attitude of humility and decency in dress, grooming, language, and behavior.”¹ Modesty is not vain or boastful. Modest people do not use their bodies or their behavior to seek approval from the world or to draw attention to their own real or supposed accomplishments or desirable attributes.

Please remember that the principles of modesty shared here apply to both men and women, sons and daughters, and remember that even as we teach and exemplify modesty, we never condemn those who choose short skirts or “rainbow hair and the many splendored rings.”² Always we exemplify compassion and Christlike love for the individual while we remain loyal to the standards the Lord has set.

I testify that the choices we make to appear and behave modestly send a powerful message that we understand our

identity as sons and daughters of God and that we have chosen to stand in holy places.

I love this scripture: “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. It is to this bodily temple that we invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost. I believe that when we choose to wear modest clothing and behave with a modest demeanor, *we wear and we live our testimony* of God the Eternal Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ. We witness by our physical appearance that we are disciples of Christ and that we live His gospel.

Why Is Modesty Important?

We live in a world of good and evil, and the physical body can be used for either righteous or wicked purposes. But we know that our precious bodies are a gift from God to each of us. They are sacred. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “To those who know and understand the plan of salvation, defiling the body is an act of rebellion [see Mosiah 2:36–37] and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God.”³ We choose to care for and protect our bodies so that we may be instruments in the hands of God to bring about His glorious purposes (see Alma 26:3). If we desire to stand for the Savior and do His work, we must ask ourselves, If the Savior stood beside us, would we feel comfortable in the clothing we wear?

Modesty in dress, appearance, thought, and behavior is evidence that we understand the covenants we have made that bless us, protect us, and empower us in our preparation to return to His presence. When we were baptized, we stepped out of the world and into the kingdom of God. Everything must be different for us. Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “By choosing to be in His kingdom, we separate—not isolate—ourselves from the world. Our dress will be modest, our thoughts pure, our language clean.”⁴

Modesty is a principle that will help keep us safely on the covenant path as we progress to the presence of God. Modesty in dress and appearance and in thought and behavior will help prepare us to make and keep sacred temple covenants. To bless and protect Adam and Eve, God gave them coats of skins to clothe them before sending them out of the garden. In like manner, God has given us a covering of covenants in mortality, symbolized by our sacred temple garments.

What Are the Blessings of Modesty?

What can we teach our sons and daughters to help them have the courage to choose modesty in a world that would mock and scorn them for their pure and virtuous choices? Do they see us using our bodies to draw attention or to glorify God?

Modesty in thought, word, appearance, and behavior helps us obtain three empowering and ennobling blessings.

1. Modesty invites the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Elder Hales has taught, “Modesty is fundamental to being worthy of the Spirit.”⁵

Let’s help our children understand that they will not want to do anything to deny themselves “the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26). Help them know that precious and powerful spiritual gifts accompany His sacred companionship. God has promised, “I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy; . . . By this shall you



know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which are pertaining unto things of righteousness, in faith believing in me that you shall receive” (D&C 11:13–14). Knowledge, wisdom, and testimony; joy, peace, and happiness—these are some of the great blessings we can promise our children as we invite them to live modestly and be worthy of the Holy Ghost.

One of the challenges of modest dress is that fashions and socially accepted behaviors change regularly. The standards of the Lord never change. Teach young men and young women to be sensitive to the Spirit as they make choices about what to wear, say, and do. As they live close to the Spirit, they do not need to be like the world.

Our children have received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and they are traveling the covenant path that leads to the temple and will return them to the presence of God. They need us to assure them and exemplify for them that they will be guided, protected, comforted, and purified as they live worthy of the Holy Ghost.

2. We can teach our sons and daughters that modest appearance and behavior helps protect us from the destructive influences of the world. One of the most deceptive weapons used against all of us is the socially accepted attitude that morality is old-fashioned. Modesty is a defense against such evil influences and a protection



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of chastity and virtue. Listen to these words in *For the Strength of Youth*: “Before marriage, . . . do not do anything . . . that arouses sexual feelings.”⁶ Immodest appearance and behavior will often arouse sexual feelings and will break down barriers and invite increased temptation to break the law of chastity.

Elder Hales has taught: “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.”⁷ Teach and exemplify modesty to help our young men and young women be prepared to defend and protect the procreative powers within them. Help them hold sacred and preserve the expression of love between a husband and wife for marriage.

3. Modesty enables us to “stand as witnesses of God at all times” (Mosiah 18:9). The Savior taught: “Hold up your

light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24). We have a divine mandate to be a beacon to the world, to demonstrate the joy of gospel living, to teach righteousness, and to build the kingdom of God on the earth. Each of us reflects the Light of Christ when we are modest and pure and keep the commandments. Modesty is a witness of our testimony of the Savior and of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How beautiful and how blessed are they who are guided by the Holy Ghost, who protect themselves from worldliness, and who stand as witnesses of God to the world. And blessed are they who exemplify and teach the doctrine of modesty for all the sons and daughters of Zion.

As we have covenanted to follow the Savior and desire to receive the fulness of the blessings of His Atonement in our lives, there is really only one outfit that matters. Moroni records, “Awake, and arise from the dust, . . . yea, and put on *thy beautiful garments*, O daughter of Zion; . . . that the covenants of the Eternal Father . . . may be fulfilled” (Moroni 10:31; emphasis added).

The beautiful garments are the robes of righteousness, worn by those who have kept their covenants. Are we preparing our children to put on these beautiful garments?

I testify that salvation is in Christ and that those who have kept their covenants will “have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14). ■

From an address given on May 2, 2013, at the Brigham Young University Women’s Conference.

NOTES

1. *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (2004), 106.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling,” Church Educational System devotional, Sept. 9, 2012, cesdevotionals.lds.org.
3. David A. Bednar, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 43.
4. Robert D. Hales, “The Covenant of Baptism: To Be in the Kingdom and of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 8; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 8.
5. Robert D. Hales, “Modesty: Reverence for the Lord,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 34; *Liahona*, Aug. 2008, 18.
6. *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), 36.
7. Robert D. Hales, *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 35; *Liahona*, Aug. 2008, 19.