

BEING YOUR BEST SELF

By David A. Edwards
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What sets Latter-day Saint youth apart?

While discussing this question in a group of eight youth in Indiana, four young men give an example that illustrates, in a slightly quirky way, what they feel is one important aspect of who LDS youth are.

"You wouldn't see people doing the Chicken Dance at prom," says Robert, "but you'd see people doing the Chicken Dance at Church dances."

Everyone in the group laughs, and Thomas adds, "*Everybody* would be doing the Chicken Dance!"

"It's a regular thing," says Skyler.

Then Connor observes, "And they'd be doing the Chicken Dance to a song that's *not* the Chicken Dance song."

Again, everyone laughs and nods in agreement. To them, this small anecdote demonstrates something that gives a sense for what it means to be a youth in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and no, doing a funny dance is not what it's all about. It means that, among other things, you're confident and comfortable with who you are and you draw strength from being with other Latter-day Saint youth in an environment that's wholesome, accepting, and supportive.

A Support System

Drew H., Grace E., Hayden K., Robert B., Connor S., Skyler F., Tyson C., and Thomas S. know that they stand out. For them as well as their friends and peers, that's a good thing.

"Being an LDS youth means that I have strong beliefs, I stick to them, I have a strong support system, and I know what I'm going to do before the question arises," says Hayden.

Thomas agrees. "The big thing that I like about being a youth in the Church and in this group is that I always know I'll have someone to come to. We have a very good support structure. We all look out for each other. We notice when people are having a bad day, and we try and help them out. We all stick together and keep each other on the right path."

Sometimes this support system even extends to friends who are not members of the Church, says Robert. "All my friends know my standards or have the same standards as me. And I don't have to worry as much about all the bad influences, because people know that I'm a member and respect it."

An Outward Reach

Grace believes that "being an LDS youth means following the standards that the Church and my parents have set for me and trying to be a good example and share my standards with other people."

Because they're confident in their standards and beliefs, these youth have opportunities to share the gospel with their friends. Skyler recalls, "Last year in my English class, we had free reading time, and I just happened to have two copies of the Book of Mormon in my backpack. Two of my friends asked me if I had a book they could read, so I gave them both a copy.

"I didn't expect them to read it," he says, "but they actually did, and they came to me with some pretty good questions. I've talked to them some more, and one of them wants to come to church to see what it's like. The other one says every now and then he reads the book and that someday he might want to come to church, too."

Robert says that Church members participating in the school band also have

These youth in Indiana feel confident that they can be their best selves as they live the gospel and draw strength from one another.

BE TRUE TO YOUR BEST SELF

"As each realizes his own potential and what our Heavenly Father expects of him, a determination to live proper standards, to be true to one's best self, and to act always in accordance with a high sense of true values, there will follow incomparable joy and lasting peace."

President Thomas S. Monson, "The Upward Reach," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 49.

opportunities to share the gospel. "In band, we kind of stick together. Some people are like, 'Oh, you guys are LDS,' and then they start talking about the Church. One of the girls has been asking about the Church, and she might come to church sometime soon."

Seminary has also been a conversation starter for many of them. For instance, Drew says, "Because I'm on the wrestling team and sometimes we have morning practices, I had to explain to the coach that I wasn't going to be there because I would be at church doing scripture study. Some guys on the team asked me about that, so seminary became an opportunity to tell people about the Church."

Reaching out to others in this way is a defining trait of Latter-day Saint youth, according to Drew. "Being an LDS youth means that I have a knowledge of the gospel, which allows me to help other people with their problems and help bring them closer to Christ, like the gospel's done for me."

A Wealth of Blessings

Tyson also believes that the gospel has given him much to

be grateful for—and to share. "The gospel helps me—like if I have a bad week at school and then I go to church, I just feel so much calmer. It helps me to see the big picture—how a decision now is going to affect me later in life, so I have to make my decisions wisely. Not everybody has that."

The peace and comfort of the gospel, as well as the acceptance and support of other LDS youth, mean a great deal to this group. Drawing closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ gives a sense of identity and purpose, and the strength these youth feel from one another gives them confidence to live the way they truly want to live and be who they truly want to be—followers of Jesus Christ. In a way, being LDS means these youth get to really be themselves—their best selves. And this is an attractive thing to the other youth around them.

And those dances?

As Hayden says, "People ask about coming to our dances. They say, 'We've been looking for the Mormons, because we know you guys know how to have real fun.'"

And Grace sums up everyone's feelings neatly: "Best dances in the entire world." **NE**

