

# *Zion Is the Pure in Heart*

ELAINE S. DALTON

**I**t is a privilege to stand before you this evening. I want to thank everyone in the choir for that beautiful music. Thank you so much for the spirit that you brought. And thank you for the beautiful prayer. I am happy and humbled to be here, and I pray that tonight each of you will know how much the Lord loves you. I want you to know how deeply I love you.

I am happy that my husband, Steve, and members of my family are also here. I love my husband. He and I attended Brigham Young University, and it is here where we made the decision to marry. I think it is interesting that I am standing before you on our wedding anniversary. Happy anniversary, dear! You know, we have been married as long as it took to build the Salt Lake Temple! Or for the children of Israel to wander in the wilderness! And everything we have to show for it is sitting right here on the front row. Our children are our treasures. I love them. I love being their mother. I have watched them grow in the gospel and be tutored from pulpits of the Church. And I am grateful that they have chosen to heed the counsel of prophets, seers, and revelators.

I have watched the youth of the Church grow in the gospel. I have a unique and special

connection with the young women because of the years in which I have served as a member of the Young Women general presidency. We have essentially gone through the Young Women years together. We've earned our Young Women medallions together. We have stood every week and repeated the words of the Young Women theme together: "We are daughters. . . . We will 'stand.' . . . We believe . . . , we will be prepared."<sup>1</sup> I think of you as my young women. And I have seen many of you young men as you have received and advanced in the priesthood, honored your covenants and priesthood power, and prepared for and served missions throughout the world. I have met many of you in your mission fields. You are my heroes! You are amazing in your strength and courage and desire for righteousness.

## **The Lord Will Help You Make Important Decisions**

Each one of you has embarked on a journey as a Latter-day Saint, and you are in the most critical time of life. This is the time for you to

---

*Elaine S. Dalton was the Young Women general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given on 13 September 2009.*

form eternal habits and make lasting decisions. You are the future of the Church and of the nations in which you live. You have been reserved “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). You will be presented with opportunities that far surpass your greatest expectations, and you will be blessed, as I was, with defining moments that will influence and affect this decade of decisions.

It was here at BYU, in a devotional such as this, that it all began for me. I had been dating a young man. One night he began talking about marriage, and he was very persistent! I didn’t sleep well that night because of the things he said, and I knew I had to make a decision. I prayed that the Lord would help me know what to do, but I received no instant answer. The next morning we attended a devotional together. While sitting in that devotional, I listened in amazement as the speaker, Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, stood and began to speak about the process of making important decisions. It was as if he were speaking directly to me. He knew my heart, and his words went deep into my soul. He outlined the process of decision making by referring to Doctrine and Covenants section 9. Everyone else seemed to be very familiar with this section of the scriptures except me. You are all familiar with it too, but for me, that day, it was pure revelation and provided a pattern for me to receive an answer to my prayers. He read:

*Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.*

*But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.*

*But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong.* [D&C 9:7–9]

Though this passage was originally directed to Oliver Cowdery, in that moment it became personal for me and was a direct answer to the question I had asked the night before in prayer. Elder Tuttle also outlined a process of listing positives and negatives, making a tentative decision, and then taking that decision back to the Lord in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

I knew that I had to *act!* I couldn’t just keep doing what I was doing. I had to decide to decide. I knew it, and I knew God knew that I knew it. After I made a tentative decision to move forward, I can’t say that my answer came as a burning in my bosom. But it did feel right and comfortable and good. I was no longer perplexed or troubled. I felt peace. I knew what to do, and I was happy. And so I went forward, and that persistent young man is here with me tonight. I am grateful for his goodness, his insistence, and his patience.

Was it always easy after that answer came? No. My husband says, to this day, that he can show you the heel marks in the sidewalk outside the door of the Salt Lake Temple where I got a little scared and thought that I wanted to wait. But this is what I learned: As you exercise your faith through prayer, the Lord will help you make defining decisions in defining moments. He will hear and answer your prayers through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. You will not be left alone. You have been given the blessing to be able to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost. In Doctrine and Covenants section 8, the Lord promises each of us, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart” (D&C 8:2). That is what happened for me, and that will happen for each of you.

I bear witness that the Lord hears and answers our prayers and that He will guide and direct us as we seek to do His will and keep His commandments. This is the process of receiving personal revelation. And so I pray that this evening the Spirit of the Lord will accompany you as you listen to the message I have prepared—that it will be crystal clear.

I pray that this message will take root in your heart and that it will become very personal to you. I pray that the Holy Ghost will impress upon you the importance of this simple message so that you might be able to incorporate it into the important decisions that you will make during the defining moments of your life.

### Lead the World in a Return to Virtue

The message I bring this evening is a clarion call for you, the young adults of this chosen generation, to lead the world in a return to virtue. What is virtue? Why is it important? And how can each of us join together in this noble and sacred cause?

Let me begin with a simple story of a pioneer girl named Agnes Caldwell. Agnes told of her experience in the Willie Handcart Company in 1856. At the time, she was only nine years of age. She related:

*Although only tender years of age, I can yet close my eyes and see everything in panoramic precision before me—the ceaseless walking, walking, ever to remain in my memory. Many times I would become so tired and, childlike, would hang on the cart, only to be gently pushed away. Then I would throw myself by the side of the road and cry. Then realizing they were all passing me by, I would jump to my feet and make an extra run to catch up.*

She goes on to share:

*Just before we crossed the mountains, relief wagons reached us, and it certainly was a relief. The infirm and aged were allowed to ride, all able-bodied continuing to walk. When the wagons started out, a number of us children decided to see how long we could keep up with the wagons, in hopes of being asked to ride. At least that is what my great hope was. One by one they all fell out, until I was the last one remaining, so determined was I that I should get a ride. After what seemed the longest run I ever made before or since, the driver . . . called to me, “Say, sissy, would you like a ride?” I answered in*

*my very best manner, “Yes sir.” At this he reached over, taking my hand, clucking to his horses to make me run, with legs that seemed to me could run no farther. On we went, to what to me seemed miles. What went through my head at that time was that he was the meanest man that ever lived. . . . Just at what seemed the breaking point, he stopped. Taking a blanket, he wrapped me up and lay me in the bottom of the wagon, warm and comfortable. Here I had time to change my mind, as I surely did, knowing full well by doing this he saved me from freezing when taken into the wagon.<sup>3</sup>*

*Agnes Caldwell and her family arrived safely in the Great Salt Lake Valley November 9, 1856. They settled in Brigham City, Utah, where Agnes met and married Chester Southworth. They became the parents of thirteen children [and] helped settle an LDS colony in Cardston, Alberta, Canada.<sup>4</sup>*

Had the driver of that wagon taken Agnes into the wagon without making her run, she would have surely succumbed to the bitter cold. And had Agnes chosen to give up and fall behind, her story may have ended much differently. However, for Agnes this became her defining moment, and though the decision to run did not make perfect sense at the time, she ran anyway. She ran toward Zion—following in the footsteps of the prophet Brigham Young and heeding the voice of the Lord, who said, “Let them awake, and arise, and come forth, and not tarry, for I, the Lord, command it” (D&C 117:2).

This was the run of her life! It was hard, and she resisted. But by running she was able to generate enough body heat to keep warm and keep her from freezing during her ride in the wagon. Each of you is on a journey to Zion, and, like it did with Agnes, what the Lord has said applies: “Awake, and arise, . . . come forth, and [do] not tarry” (D&C 117:2), for Zion is not only a place—Zion is “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21). And purity of heart must be your goal in order to reach that final destination! Never before has

there been a generation quite like yours. You are better prepared and better equipped. You have what it takes, and now is the time for the run of your life—your run to Zion!

President Thomas S. Monson and those before him have shown us the way. The path is clearly marked, and the pace is steady and strong. You, like Agnes, are being asked to cross the plains. You may not have to give up all your earthly possessions, but the journey to Zion requires that you give up all of your sins so that you may come to know Him—the true and living Christ. You may even be asked to run to the point of exhaustion, but by doing so, the warmth of the Lord’s love will preserve you for the great work yet to come.

What you are being asked to do is the same thing the Lord asked when He named His Church The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In Doctrine and Covenants 115 we read, “Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (verse 5). Little Agnes Caldwell ran toward Zion, and by so doing she and all those like her set forth a standard for the nations and for this generation. Her journey to Zion had everything to do with her faith and testimony. It had everything to do with Joseph Smith and Moroni and Oliver Cowdery and Nephi and Moses and Joshua and even Thomas S. Monson. And it had and has everything to do with you and me. Agnes ran because she had a testimony. Her mother knew the gospel was true and taught it to her daughter. They sacrificed their all in order to come to Zion and there build a temple to our God. They knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon was true. They knew that the blessings to be bestowed in holy temples were necessary for the plan to be accomplished. And they knew, as Moroni repeatedly taught Joseph Smith, that “if it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (JS—H 1:39).

Zion was then, and is now, the goal. It is the cause of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

And now is the time, as Mormon and Moroni exhorted, to “be faithful in Christ” (Moroni 9:25) and to “lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30). Now is the time to “awake, and arise from the dust, . . . that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled” (Moroni 10:31). Now is the time to return to virtue!

### **A Return to Virtue Is a Return to Purity**

*Virtue* means purity. It begins in the heart and in the mind. “It is a pattern of thought and behavior based on high moral standards.”<sup>5</sup> At the very core of virtue is chastity—meaning sexual purity. Virtue and chastity are inseparably connected. You cannot have one without the other. A return to virtue is a return to purity. Some have said that virtue means being kind or honest or having integrity. But the center of a virtuous life is chastity, and one simply cannot be honest or possess integrity in the absence of sexual purity. It is impossible. One cannot tamper with the divine spirit and precious body—the eternal soul—of another and be deemed as possessing any kind of virtue or be virtuous. To do this compromises the very agency we fought for in our premortal life. Some have said that virtue is only for women, but it is not gender based. The Latin root word for *virtue* is *virtus*, which means “strength.” One contemporary meaning states that virtue is an “effective power or force; [especially], the ability to heal or strengthen.”<sup>6</sup> Thus virtue does not just apply to women but to all.

When the woman in the streets of Jerusalem reached out and touched the hem of the Savior’s garment, she knew she would be healed. Why? Because she recognized His purity and His power. The Savior Himself said, “I perceive that *virtue* is gone out of me” (Luke 8:46; emphasis added; see also Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19). The kind of virtue to which He was referring is power, priesthood power, which always

accompanies Latter-day Saint men who are pure and practice “virtue and holiness before [the Lord]” (D&C 38:24).

Last year on a cold April day after general conference, I climbed Ensign Peak with my two counselors, Mary Cook and Ann Dibb. There we unfurled a gold Peruvian shawl—a banner calling for a return to virtue. There atop that peak, as we looked into the valley and viewed the majestic Salt Lake Temple, we knew that a return to virtue meant a return to moral purity. Virtue is the golden key that unlocks temple doors. As Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, the temple is really the reason for everything we do in the Church: “Every activity, every lesson, all we do in the Church points to the Lord and His holy house.”<sup>7</sup> Brigham Young knew that, and there atop Ensign Peak we also knew that to be true.

As we unfurled this banner to the world, we knew that a return to virtue is not only essential, it is critical. We must be worthy to enter the Lord’s holy temple and make and keep sacred covenants and to do the work we have been prepared and foreordained to do. No unclean thing can enter into His house. Just as the driver of that rescue wagon saved Agnes Caldwell from freezing to death, we too have been given the opportunity and privilege to become saviors on Mount Zion—to do for others something they cannot do for themselves. This can happen only when we are worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple.

#### **“Ye Are a Chosen Generation”**

Each of you has a great work to do. What you do and what you decide matters because *you* matter. You are “choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work, including the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein” (D&C 138:53–54).

No wonder Satan has increased the intensity of his attacks. If you can be distracted, delayed, or disqualified from entering into the temples and doing the very work you have been prepared and reserved to do, he wins. What becomes clear is that you must be pure and worthy in order to receive the promptings from the Holy Ghost that you need for the decisions you are making now. What also becomes clear is that you must remain worthy to enter the Lord’s holy temples.

All the sacrifice and work of all the prior generations have led to this moment. Pioneers sacrificed everything, even their lives, in order that we might see this day because, you see, your advent on the earth is not random. This was all part of the plan you embraced in the premortal realm. You are positioned in a remarkable place in the history of the world. It has been said of you that you are “a pivotal generation.”<sup>8</sup> Peter said of you, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). Never before has so much been expected. Never before has so much been given: prophets, scriptures, priesthood, ordinances and covenants, temples, the Book of Mormon, and the gospel in its fulness. You have been prepared, called, and chosen. This is your time. I believe that the contributions of your generation will be listed in bold print in any review of these turbulent times in which we are living.

To accomplish the tasks you have been foreordained to do, your faith must be firmly centered on our Savior, Jesus Christ. You must remember that faith is not only a principle of power but of action. You must act on the faith you already possess. In the premortal realms you exhibited not just faith but “exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). As Alma said, each of you were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God” (Alma 13:3). Young men, you were prepared to receive the priesthood, which would enable you to exercise the

power of God while here on the earth. Young women, you were given the noble gift and responsibility to nurture others and become mothers to other choice spirits. You were entrusted with the very powers of godliness—to create a mortal life. Virtuous people are committed to the sanctity of life. They respect God’s counsel on how life is to be conceived, protected, and nurtured. There is no strength that is greater than the strength of virtue nor any confidence that is more sure than the confidence of a virtuous life.

In the premortal realm you participated in a war. You fought with your faith and testimony to accept and sustain the plan that was presented by God the Father. You knew it was right, and you knew that the Savior would do what He said He would do because *you knew Him!* There were no neutral spirits in the War in Heaven, and there can be no neutral positions now where choices between right and wrong are to be made. The Lord Himself said, “He that is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). You stood with Him! You were eager for your assignment. You knew what was going to be required of you. You knew how difficult it would be, and yet you were confident you could not only accomplish your divine mission but that you could make a difference. As one prophet said of you and your day:

*For nearly six thousand years, God has held you in reserve to make your appearance in the final days before the Second Coming of the Lord. . . . God has saved for the final inning some of his strongest children, who will help bear off the Kingdom triumphantly. And that is where you come in, for you are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God.*

*All through the ages the prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes on us. Make no mistake about it—you are a marked generation.<sup>9</sup>*

### **Return to Virtue Could Save a Nation**

When Peter wrote his epistle to the early Saints, he told them to “add to [their] faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5). Faith without virtue would soon languish and die because without virtue there is no purity. Without virtue there is no strength. And without virtue there is no spirituality. It is clear that once you really understand who you are, you must be pure because purity precedes spiritual power.<sup>10</sup> The power of which I am speaking is not the kind of power we see in the world. It has nothing to do with fame, position, good looks, celebrity, or wealth. The power and strength of which I am speaking has everything to do with virtue, which is chastity and sexual purity.

We live in a world that is concerned about cleanliness and purity—the cleanliness of our air and the cleanliness of our environment, our water, and even our food. In some places we legislate against pollution and even have government-funded environmental protection agencies to ensure that we are not made ill by contaminants that get into our air, our water, or our food supply. Yet society tolerates moral pollution in the form of pornography on billboards, television, and the Internet and in entertainment and other media. We tolerate filth that invades our minds through suggestive lyrics, music, and language. In some respects we are an organic generation ensuring purity and quality in our lives, and yet we are polluting our moral fiber. I believe that the lack of virtue in our society is directly responsible for many of our social, financial, and governmental ills. I believe that the disintegration of faith and families and the financial unrest are directly related to a lack of virtue in our society. And I believe that a return to virtue could save an entire nation.

We call for a social reform, but what is really needed is a moral reform—a call for a return to virtue. And if we who have been given so much, including the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, don’t lead the world in that return to

virtue, who will? You were leaders in the pre-mortal world and stood for everything that is now threatened in society. You who are preparing to be influential in every sector of society, the young adults of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, can and must lead this return.

During the critical days of World War II, Winston Churchill aroused an entire nation when he said:

*You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: victory. Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.*<sup>11</sup>

Young men and young women, I echo that call for the war in which we are engaged today by paraphrasing the words of Winston Churchill for you: You ask, what is our aim? I can answer with one word: virtue. Virtue at all costs, virtue in spite of all opposition, virtue, however long and hard the road to repentance may be; for without virtue, there can be no victory.

In the Book of Mormon, Helaman and his stripling warriors are known for their virtue and their ability to trust in their mothers' testimonies. They were "true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted" (Alma 53:20). They were covenant keepers, and they fought to ensure that their parents could also keep their covenants. Victory was their aim and virtue was their strength.

Mormon wrote to his son Moroni about the degenerate society in which he lived. He reported that they had become so base and immoral that they didn't value those things that were "most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue" (Moroni 9:9). Could it be that we have reached this point in our society? In a bygone era, those who violated the law of chastity were branded with a scarlet letter. Now that brand and letter seems to be worn by the chaste.

What will your generation be known for? Will you be known as the tolerant generation, the consumer generation, Generation X or Y? Will you be known as the generation who was seduced into living your lives *virtually* instead of *virtuously*? Or will you, could you, be known for your purity and virtue and for your courage and strength in leading the rest of the world in a return to virtue—a return so stunning that the very purity of your lives and the strength of your conviction change the course of society and change the world?

You are preparing for the Savior's return. You must abhor sin. You must position and prepare yourselves now to be "more fit for the kingdom."<sup>12</sup> It has been prophesied that in a coming day, people of all nations will say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, . . . and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law" (2 Nephi 12:3). Will you be the generation to lead this ascent?

### **Be Guardians of Virtue**

In order to do this, each of us must be guardians of virtue. Young women, guard your personal virtue. It really is, as Mormon described, "most dear and precious above all things" (Moroni 9:9), and so are you. You are daughters of God. You carry within yourselves the sacred power to create mortal life and to become mothers of Heavenly Father's choice and pure spirits. It is one of God's greatest gifts to His precious daughters. Safeguard that power by living the standards, dressing and acting modestly, and remaining virtuous. Safeguard your power through purity of thought and action. Do not allow anyone to tamper with your God-given gifts. By so doing, you, your family, and the generations that follow will be strengthened and blessed.

Young men, you too are guardians of virtue. You hold priesthood power—the power to bless and to act for God here on the earth. The Lord has said to all priesthood holders,

“Practise virtue and holiness before me” (D&C 38:24). Guard your personal virtue, your thoughts, what you view, what you say, and your actions. Do not allow pornography to diminish your personal power. Remain pure so that you can exercise the power of the priesthood with which God has entrusted you. Moroni summarized the ancient prophetic teaching about virtue when he told us:

*Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God.*  
[Mormon 9:28]

Several years ago I was running early in the morning on the day before Thanksgiving with a group of women. We called it our Thanksgiving run, and as we ran we called out things for which we were thankful. I had just finished saying that I was thankful for a strong, healthy body when I slipped and fell on a patch of black ice on the road. As I tried to get up, I realized that I was badly hurt. I knew I had broken my leg just above the ankle—and I won’t say how I knew or I could faint right here on the spot. My husband said that if I had been an NFL football player, I would have made the highlight films that night.

As I lay there in the road in the shadows of the early morning light, waiting for help to arrive, I saw the lights of a car come speeding down the road right toward where I lay. The car screeched to a stop, and a man jumped out. He said he had thought I was a garbage bag in the road and almost kept going. I asked if he were a member of the Church, and he replied that he was. I asked if he could give me a blessing because the pain was so severe I didn’t know how long I could stay in that condition. He paused and then said: “I can’t. You better wait for your husband to do that.” Then he got in his car and drove away.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was wheeled into a little cubicle in the emergency room where I waited to be taken into surgery. As they moved the curtains to the side, there were my husband and all five of our sons. As they encircled me and laid their hands on my head, I felt their purity, their power, and their strength. Young men, priesthood men, keep yourselves pure so that you may be able to use your priesthood power at a moment’s notice. That day I was blessed by their priesthood power, which they exercised in virtue and holiness.

### **Remain Virtuous in a Toxic World**

I truly believe that one virtuous young woman or young man, led by the Spirit, can change the world! But before we can change the world, we must change ourselves. President Boyd K. Packer said we live in an environment that “is becoming toxic, poisonous to the spirit.”<sup>13</sup> So what are some of the things that we can do right now in order to remain virtuous in a toxic world?

*First, repent.* I am very aware that there are some listening tonight who don’t feel virtuous or who have made mistakes. That is why a *return* to virtue is so important. You must know that you can return. You can change.

If I were going the wrong way in the middle of a marathon, and I realized my mistake, would I keep going? I would immediately turn around! Why? Because I would have lost valuable time and precious energy and strength, and it would be much harder for me to finish the marathon because of this extra distance and added time. I wouldn’t stay on the wrong course because no matter how long I ran there, I would never reach the finish line. And yet for many who have made a moral mistake, a little voice keeps saying: “You blew it. You can’t change. No one will ever know anyway.” To you I would say, Don’t believe it. “Satan wants you to think that you cannot repent, but that is absolutely not true.”<sup>14</sup> A return is always



possible because of the Savior's Atonement. President Monson has said to each of us who have made mistakes:

*If any of you has slipped along the way, there are those who will help you to once again become clean and worthy. Your bishop or branch president is anxious and willing to help and will, with understanding and compassion, do all within his power to assist you in the repentance process, that you may once again stand in righteousness before the Lord.*<sup>15</sup>

Some of you have been abused and are victims of the sinful acts of others. As Mormon said, you have been deprived "of that which [is] most dear and precious above all things, . . . chastity and virtue" (Moroni 9:9). Please know that because of the Savior's Atonement, healing is possible. You are not to blame, for you have not sinned and repentance is not required. The Savior suffered not only for our sins and imperfections, but He also took upon Himself our sorrows (see Alma 7:11). Through His infinite Atonement He will heal you and give you peace. Run to Him. Because of our Savior's Atonement, God the Father will hear your prayers. He will answer through the Holy Ghost and others who will be placed in your path.

I am so grateful for this doctrine and for the principle of repentance. Without it, none of us could ever return to our heavenly home pure and worthy to dwell in the presence of God the Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. I am grateful for the restoration of priesthood power on the earth in these latter days that enables us to receive the help we need to return to virtue. This power also enables us to remain "unspotted from the world" (D&C 59:9) as we partake of the sacrament worthily. Each week as we renew our covenants, we promise to keep His commandments, to take His name upon us, and to always remember Him. And He, in turn, promises that we can always have His spirit to be with us. (See D&C 20:77, 79.) In a world that

is so enticing and so appealing, it is imperative for each of us to receive, recognize, and rely on the guidance of the Holy Ghost. This wondrous gift will show each of us "all things [that we] should do" (2 Nephi 32:5). That is an absolute promise because the Holy Ghost is a member of the Godhead. Some of His roles are to teach, testify, comfort, and warn. This precious gift also purifies and sanctifies. Thus the Holy Ghost and virtue are inextricably connected. We can be purified "by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:17). When this occurs, "we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).

*Second, be careful about your choice of friends.* In today's technological society, we may spend more time with nonhuman companions than we do with our peers. While we may be very careful about our *human* companions, sometimes we give little thought to the other companions that we allow to influence us. Media of any kind can be a very powerful social influencer. We have all been given three precious gifts for our mortal experience. These include our body, our agency, and our time. If Satan can entice us to use our time in unfocused or unproductive or, even worse, nonvirtuous pursuits and then deceive us into believing that if we do this in private our actions don't affect anyone, he is victorious. "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we [must] seek after these things" (Articles of Faith 1:13).

Seek the companionship of *virtuous* friends, not *virtual* friends. Remember, "virtue loveth virtue [and] light cleaveth unto light" (D&C 88:40). This is a relationship scripture. In your pursuit of friendships and an eternal marriage partner, you cannot just make a list of all the qualities you are looking for in another or in an eternal companion. You must *be* your list at all times and in all things and in all places.

*Third, enter a program of strict training.* When training for a marathon, one has to have a strict training plan in order to be prepared to go the

distance. This same concept applies to life. We are in the run of our life, and there must be a strict training plan. The success components of this plan include things we will do every single day, without fail, in order to invite the Spirit's companionship into our life. They will be different for each of us but will always include daily prayer. Our Heavenly Father hears our prayers, and He will answer them. I testify that that is true. Our challenge is to be in a place where we can hear and recognize the answers.

Strict training will also include daily reading of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith said that "a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."<sup>16</sup> The Book of Mormon will increase your faith in Jesus Christ, and it is through your faith that you will be able to withstand temptation. This record is for you and your generation. Reading just five minutes every single day will change your life. I know this is true because I have been doing it, and so have thousands of others. Think of the change in five years if every one of us would commit to do this even for just five minutes every single day.

*Lastly, smile!* And when you smile, remember who you are. You are sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. He knows you. He knows your name. He trusts you, and He loves you. So, smile! This is just basic training, but it must be strictly done every single day.

**Press Forward—Don't Get Discouraged!**

Let me add just one more suggestion to this list: "Press forward with . . . a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Nephi 31:20). *Don't get discouraged!* Your journey will be challenging at times, and it will not always be easy.

As I have studied the scriptures, it has become increasingly clear to me that the Lord takes His chosen people out of comfort zones again and again and tutors them on the things that really matter. For example, on the first leg of the Jaredites' journey, they landed on a beach, and they stayed there for four years.

They were really in a comfort zone! In fact, they became so comfortable that they forgot to call upon the Lord. But the Lord had a different experience in mind for them. He chastened the brother of Jared for three hours. He told him in advance that the next leg of the journey would be difficult—that he would be submerged in the depths of the sea and driven by the winds. But He also reassured him with six beautiful words: "I prepare you against these things" (Ether 2:25). The Lord will prepare you, and He will prepare a way for you!

Sometimes I think we totally underestimate the great blessings we might have and the knowledge we might gain if we were willing to move out of our comfort zones. Perhaps that is why Nephi observed:

*Wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!*

*Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!*

*Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! [2 Nephi 28:24–26]*

It has been said that we are becoming a generation of spectators and critics. Let me share with you one of my favorite quotes. I keep it on my mirror. It says:

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least [he] fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.<sup>17</sup>*

Do not be just a spectator or a critic. You didn't do that in the premortal realm. You weren't neutral then. You stood firm. Do not allow the very voices who cry for tolerance to not tolerate you or your view. This is the arena where all that you defended and chose *then* is taking place *now*. Do not get tired or distracted or disqualified! Be willing to step out of your comfort zones and "press forward with . . . a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Nephi 31:20).

### **Unfurl Your Banner of Virtue**

All over the world young Latter-day Saint women are declaring their commitment to remain pure and chaste. Young women, along with some young men, have climbed mountains and unfurled their personal banners declaring their commitment to return to virtue and to remain pure and chaste. Will you join with them? Contemplate your personal banner. What would you put on your banner if it were your only or last message to the world? What would your banner be or look like?

In another time and another place, another banner was unfurled. It was done by one courageous man, Moroni, who was committed to the cause of righteousness. The society in which he lived was in turmoil. The desire for power and wealth and status had caused some of the strongest and most determined to, as the Book of Mormon describes, be "poison[ed] by degrees" (Alma 47:18). In other words, those who were initially fixed and determined not to compromise were slowly persuaded to do just that. Alexander Pope expressed what it means to be poisoned "by degrees" this way:

*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*<sup>18</sup>

It was in this climate that Moroni unfurled his banner—the title of liberty—calling for a defense of families, of women and children,

and of religion and God. He was not neutral. He was not passive. He was not tolerant. He was right! He went forth boldly. The scriptures describe Moroni in words that I believe describe many of you:

*If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. [Alma 48:17; see also Alma 46:12–13, 18, 21]*

You are the banner! Your lives of purity and virtue are the banner that will cause the nations of the earth to look up—to come to the temple. As you remain virtuous, you will be led by the Holy Ghost, and your personal virtue will qualify you to go to the temple often. If you don't have a recommend, now is the time to become worthy to receive one. This is your work. The temple will be a strength and a protection to you in an ever-darkening world, and it will become an ensign not only to you but to the nations. A return to virtue is a return to the temple, and a return to the temple is a return to the Savior.

### **Virtue Brings the Blessings of Eternity**

Forty-one years ago I knelt at an altar in the Salt Lake Temple and there entered into a covenant relationship with this wonderful man on the stand beside me. That decision has made all the difference in the decades that have followed. I guess what I am trying to tell you is to *be there!* Don't get distracted now! Don't forget who you are! And don't allow anything to disqualify you for the blessings that await you in the Lord's holy temple.

I feel prompted to share the words in Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46. They are for those who are called and chosen and who endure valiantly. They are for you in these trying days, just as they were for Joseph Smith and the Saints in those trying days of the early Church: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts

unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God [and] the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion.”

When we are virtuous, we are promised we shall confidently stand in His presence—holy and like Him. We are promised priesthood power, the very power of godliness, because we are virtuous! We are promised the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, who testifies, directs, warns, comforts, and sanctifies. And finally, we are promised that we shall have eternal life, the greatest of all God’s gifts. We will be gods, living a godlike life, when we are virtuous. We will be like Him—pure even as He is pure.

The journey to Zion—the pure in heart—will take everything you and I have. I pray that each one of us will have the desire and strength to move out of our comfort zones as we prepare for the run of our lives and, like Agnes Caldwell, reach up and take the Master’s hand. His promise is for each of us: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). I testify that our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, live and They will prepare us for the great work to be done in the holy temples of our Lord in preparation not only for the Savior’s Second Coming but also for our eternal exaltation. And I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. “Young Women Theme,” *Young Women Personal Progress* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 5.

2. See A. Theodore Tuttle, *Becoming Goodly Parents* (2 December 1967), in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1967–68* (Provo: BYU Press, 1968).

3. Agnes Caldwell Southworth, in Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion: True Stories of Young Pioneers on the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 57, 58–59.

4. Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion*, 59.

5. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 118.

6. *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (2002), s.v. “virtue,” 1597.

7. Russell M. Nelson, in *CR*, April 2001, 40; or “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 32.

8. See Sheri L. Dew, “You Are a Pivotal Generation,” BYU–Hawaii devotional address, 17 February 2009.

9. Ezra Taft Benson, “In His Steps,” BYU fireside address, 4 March 1979.

10. See M. Russell Ballard, in *CR*, October 1990, 45–49; or “Purity Precedes Power,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 35–38.

11. Winston Churchill, address to the British House of Commons, 13 May 1940; [www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/winstonchurchillbloodtoiltearssweat.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/winstonchurchillbloodtoiltearssweat.htm).

12. “More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 131.

13. Boyd K. Packer, “Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement,” address at seminar for new mission presidents, 27 June 2009, 5.

14. *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 30.

15. Thomas S. Monson, in *CR*, April 2008, 66; or “Examples of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 65–66.

16. Joseph Smith, in *HC* 4:461.

17. Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic,” address delivered at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, 23 April 1910; *Presidential Addresses and State Papers and European Addresses, December 8, 1908, to June 7, 1910*, vol. 8 of *Presidential Addresses and State Papers*, Homeward Bound edition (New York: Review of Reviews Co., 1910), 2191.

18. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man* (1733–1734), Epistle II, lines 217–20.