

Outward Expressions of the Inner Self

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

I appreciate both what Sister Samuelson has said about your wonderful and positive examples and also the privilege it is to share this pulpit with her today. One of the special blessings of our assignment here at BYU is that we have the opportunity to do much together. I often remind her that she is the one primarily responsible for the high honor that has been given to us to be here with you.

Just before Christmas I received a letter from a retired teacher and member of the BYU class of 1953. She really believes, as I do, that teachers can make a difference in the attitudes and behaviors of their students. She is also very concerned about her own granddaughters. I resonate with her opinions. Let me share a paragraph of her letter. She said:

After listening to President Hinckley talk about pornography and its evil influence on people and their lives, then reading in the Church News dated November 29, 2003, I have decided to follow through with my impression of the dress standards of the Church. I acknowledge that we try to teach our children to dress modestly. It shocked me to see so many tummies on the campus while I was attending my 50-year reunion in October.

I don't know how many "tummies" she actually saw on campus, but it doesn't take all the fingers on one hand to count "too many." You might not be surprised that this was not the first time such issues have been drawn to my attention. Some adult women I know have mentioned that a few of you look like you are wearing your much younger sister's T-shirts.

Therefore today I would like to talk about a very important and significant subject. It is a matter I have thought much about for a long time and almost daily since my arrival on campus. Although I have mentioned it in some settings, I have apparently been guilty of giving it insufficient attention—at least in some people's eyes. In this devotional I hope to change that. I do so with the sad recognition that some of the few who might most benefit from what I will say may not be with us. Without wishing to be preachy or confrontational, I would hope that you will not be shy in sharing my message with your friends and associates, should they not be here today.

Although one of you students, in addition to the grandmother I have quoted, may be

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especially responsible for today's message, a few others of you have kept the matter at the forefront of my attention. At the outset I must commend and praise the vast majority of you for your appearance and your conduct, your deportment, and your attitudes. I have chosen my topic with some risk because it is possible that those who most need to hear what I will say will be most likely to think that I am speaking to someone else. I would hope that every one of you, even the most consciously exemplary, would ask the selfsame question posed by the Savior's original apostles when He explained that He would be betrayed by one of their number. The question that applied to them and applies to each of us is, "Lord, is it I?"

The one of you who is most directly responsible for my comments today has a mother who made the following observation to me. After expressing her respect for Brigham Young University and her gratitude that her daughter is able to attend, she said something that penetrated me like a sharp dagger. This faithful mother said she was trying to help her daughter dress more modestly and wear less-tight clothing. Her daughter, one of you, said something to the effect that her professors and even, on one occasion, the president himself had seen her and not said anything critical of her dress and appearance. I plead guilty for apparent past deficiencies and consider my message today to address not only the past but also the present and future. Again, my comments apply to the relatively few, but since everyone in our university family is important, I will ask that we all—students, faculty, staff, and administration—consider what we can do about the serious issues of modesty in dress, speech, deportment, and attitude.

We all have much about which we should be modest. None of us is perfect, and, as has been observed by a special friend and longtime member of the BYU family, the concrete sidewalks at BYU develop cracks just as they do everywhere else.

I also want to be clear that these matters should be a concern for you men as well as you women. I might have used for an initial example the discomfort caused for some and also raised with me about haircuts, or the lack thereof, estrangement from razors, and the like.

I do not sense I have been shy or reluctant to share my views and concerns. Recently I felt strongly motivated to comment on my feelings about the importance of good sportsmanship here at BYU. In spite of my willingness to offer correction when warranted, I do believe that you are all brilliant, devoted, and appropriately wise. Why else would you have chosen to come to BYU or why would you have been admitted?

I have assumed, and still do, in large part, that you understand the doctrines underlying modesty, personal appearance, and agency and that you will make correct decisions and judgments when you take time to think carefully about the issues before you. My purpose today is to help all of us seriously and personally consider the specific matters of modesty and deportment in dress and appearance as well as the broader issues related to what we represent externally to others as a reflection of our inner selves.

Part of my reluctance to speak as candidly to you as I will today is that I want you to like me and be comfortable when you see and are with me. I also want to be comfortable when I am with you. I feel a little like Jacob, the brother of Nephi, must have felt when he had to say some difficult things to his people. Jacob loved his people, but in some of them he saw behaviors that troubled him. He said that they had begun to "indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices" (Jacob 1:15).

I do not perceive that his concerns were exactly the same as mine. I am sure that they are not, but there are some similarities, including the fact that those most needing correction are usually the slowest to recognize it. I have thought about Jacob and us and have pondered and prayed. Let me share his words and counsel because I believe they fit our circumstances

very well, although the specifics happily differ for most of you in some important ways. As I follow Nephi's suggestion to "liken all scriptures" unto ourselves (1 Nephi 19:23), I see striking parallels to Jacob's words. Let's return to them.

Wherefore I, Jacob [or President Samuelson], gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple [or the Marriott Center], having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi [or Gordon B. Hinckley].

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. [Jacob 1:17–19]

I don't know how those verses strike you, but they hit me between the eyes as one consecrated to be a teacher for you. As timid as I might be to call any of your behaviors or attitudes into question, my reservations pale in the face of my understanding that if I do not try to teach you with all diligence—making my very best efforts—I will bear the burdens of your shortcomings and mistakes. I don't want them! I have enough deficiencies of my own!

Therefore I will do my best to be as clear as I can concerning that which I draw to your attention. Let me do so by again returning to the words of Jacob. He said:

For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given you.

. . . I can tell you concerning your thoughts, how that ye are beginning to labor in sin. . . .

And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before

your [brothers and sisters], many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God. . . .

But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you [of your potential wickedness], in the presence of the pure in heart. . . .

Wherefore, I must tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God. [Jacob 2:4–5, 7, 10–11]

That is pretty serious stuff, and it is certainly straightforward! I don't read these words of the prophet Jacob to scare you or to criticize you. I do share them because it is necessary to be sure that we have your attention and understanding. Once you are really thinking about these matters with all of their implications, I am absolutely convinced that you will make proper decisions and considerations and will more clearly reflect externally what you are inside.

External appearances do matter. It is not only the military or athletic teams that wear uniforms or distinguishing apparel. You and I can think of many examples, such as the school uniform our daughter Sara wore while we lived in England, certain kinds of paraphernalia worn by gang members, and even the white shirts common to our missionaries and priesthood leaders. Although the specific messages, both good and bad, are usually intended by clothes worn, makeup applied, hairstyles, jewelry, and the like, it is also true that we may inadvertently send signals by our appearance that we don't intend to send to others.

Please forgive a personal example. On most days, since serving as a missionary, I have worn neckties. (Now, every day I wear one!) On weekdays, until I was called as a General Authority, I usually wore colored or striped shirts. I was not making any conscious statement, but a few years later I learned that my work colleagues knew when I had a Church meeting after work because of the white shirt I would be wearing. They didn't particularly

care; they just knew. I hadn't thought that my shirt color would affect anyone but me, but it did. In a similar vein, before March of last year, no one ever cared about the color of my ties. I have had yellow, blue, green, and red ties, and no one mentioned the pattern or the hue—other than any spilled soup on it. Now a day does not go by that someone does not remark on the color of my tie, and my red ones have been securely retired!

Perhaps some of you may also not be aware of the unintended messages you give by your apparel. Surely none of you wish to send a negative message about your feelings of modesty, propriety, or the sacredness and beauty of your bodies. All of you wish to be attractive and appropriately fashionable. All of us—the administration, faculty, staff, trustees, parents, Church leaders, and friends—want you to be beautiful or handsome in every way.

The great challenge we all face as we live in the world but are not part of the world is that standards of modesty, dress, and personal conduct have rapidly changed from a societal perspective but are constant in the eyes of the Lord and His Church. Things that once might have been considered slovenly or totally inappropriate are now celebrated and even modeled by those in the public eye, who often seem to revel in their capacity to shock and “push the envelope” of propriety.

Some seem to believe that any attention, however personally degrading, is better than being out of the limelight. Some believe they are expressing newfound freedoms, when all they are really doing is expressing ignorance or disdain for things sacred and significant while being trapped with the milling hordes of low-class conformity. Some simply take their fashion advice from the crowd and fail to heed useful counsel from parents, Church leaders, teachers, loyal friends, and even their own mirrors!

Most in this audience know well the sustaining doctrines of the great plan of happiness, and

yet we may fail to make connections between sacred truths and practical applications we should employ as we live our lives. The Apostle Paul understood this potential disconnect in our thinking and actions when he asked this important question: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” He then went on to explain not only what we all should know but what we should use to measure how we see ourselves and how we choose to present ourselves to others: “The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

I hope that what I will soon read to you is very familiar and absolutely consistent with your beliefs and practices. If not, I hope you will seriously consider, in light of my previous straightforward and direct invitation, what it means to you personally, now and in the future, to be at variance with what the Lord's servants have asked of you.

In the years immediately preceding my appointment here at BYU, I had an assignment in the Priesthood Department of the Church working with the Priesthood Executive Council, which includes members of the Quorum of the Twelve, the Presidency of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric. We worked very closely with the Young Women and Young Men general presidencies in preparing the new version of the booklet *For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling Our Duty to God*. You may have seen an excellent summary in a recent edition of the *Church News*.

After much effort, prayer, and preparation, these materials were submitted to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve for their adjustments and finally their approval. I watched our senior leaders review and revise what is said in this publication word by word. I thus have tremendous respect for this wonderful booklet and recommend it to you with full confidence that it represents the current best counsel of our leaders. Let me share two sections with you. The first is the introductory “Message from the First Presidency”:

Our beloved young men and women, we have great confidence in you. You are choice spirits who have come forth in this day when the responsibilities and opportunities, as well as the temptations, are the greatest. You are at the beginning of your journey through this mortal life. Your Heavenly Father wants your life to be joyful and to lead you back into His presence. The decisions you make now will determine much of what will follow during your life and throughout eternity.

Because the Lord loves you, He has given you commandments and the words of prophets to guide you on your journey. Some of the most important guidelines for your life are found in this pamphlet. We testify that these principles are true.

We promise that as you keep these standards and live by the truths in the scriptures, you will be able to do your life's work with greater wisdom and skill and bear trials with greater courage. You will have the help of the Holy Ghost. You will feel good about yourself and will be a positive influence in the lives of others. You will be worthy to go to the temple to receive holy ordinances. These blessings and many more can be yours.

We pray for each of you. May you keep your minds and bodies clean from the sins of the world so you can do the great work that lies before you. We pray that you will be worthy to carry on the responsibilities of building the kingdom of God and preparing the world for the Second Coming of the Savior. [For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling Our Duty to God, 2001, 2–3]

The next section is the statement on “Dress and Appearance” from this same publication. It begins with the scriptural citation from the Apostle Paul I mentioned earlier: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?”

Your body is God's sacred creation. Respect it as a gift from God, and do not defile it in any way. Through your dress and appearance, you can show the Lord that you know how precious your body is. You can show that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Prophets of God have always counseled His children to dress modestly. 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.

Never lower your dress standards for any occasion. Doing so sends the message that you are using your body to get attention and approval and that modesty is important only when it is convenient.

Immodest clothing includes short shorts and skirts, tight clothing, shirts that do not cover the stomach, and other revealing attire. Young women should wear clothing that covers the shoulder and avoid clothing that is low-cut in the front or back or revealing in any other manner. Young 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?”

Someday you will receive your endowment in the temple. Your dress and behavior should help you prepare for that sacred time.

Do not disfigure yourself with tattoos or body piercings. If girls or women desire to have their ears pierced, they are encouraged to wear only one pair of modest earrings.

Show respect for the Lord and for yourself by dressing appropriately for Church meetings and activities, whether on Sunday or during the week. If you are not sure what is appropriate, ask your parents or leaders for help. [For the Strength of Youth, 14–16]

Some of you may feel that now you are in Relief Society or the elders quorum, these standards no longer apply. Some of you have been to the temple. Let me state clearly that these standards apply to all of us, whatever our age and station. Much like the Word of Wisdom, where some things are specifically proscribed and others are left to our own judgment and

inspiration, we need to consider carefully our dress and appearance. Why have we received the counsel and direction we have received? I think the Word of Wisdom advice from the Doctrine and Covenants applies to the issue of modesty as well.

Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.

Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men [and women] in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom. [D&C 89:3–4]

Most of you have no problems concerning the Word of Wisdom with respect to tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol and recognize the dangers to those who experiment with these prohibited substances as well as anything else that is addictive or mind-altering. What we may not realize is that there are other seductive pressures and temptations that the adversary will employ on those who do not realize that what we put *on* our bodies may be as equally corrosive and dangerous as what we might ingest *into* our bodies.

Some of you are probably thinking by now that your president is old-fashioned and out of touch on many things. I cheerfully plead guilty. I also seriously declare to you that I know what I speak today is true and vital for you to hear but even more important for you to understand and practice. I have absolute faith in you and your integrity and capacities for good. I also have great confidence in the statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he was asked how he governed the people. He said, “I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves” (Joseph Smith, quoted by John Taylor in “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star* 13, no. 22 [15 November 1851]: 339; James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966–75], 3:54; also

see *JD* 10:57–58). That is what we are attempting to do with you.

I have reminded you of correct principles. They are true, and they are vital if we are to achieve the success in mortal life that our Heavenly Father hopes and expects for us. I believe that I have discharged a major duty to and for you, in the parlance of Jacob’s teachings. I have shifted the responsibility to you with full confidence in your abilities and willingness to be sure that your lives are fully congruent with the principles taught by the Lord’s servants. I am hopeful that you will be willing to make your outward appearance and conduct a testimony to everyone around you that you know you are “a child of God, And He has sent [you] here” (“I Am a Child of God,” *Songbook*, 2–3).

As I have attempted to fulfill my charge in part by shifting it to you, I also remind you of your responsibilities to and for each other. You young women will have a greater influence over the appearance and deportment of young men than will others if you will kindly but directly share your concerns and commendations. Likewise, young men, you will be of the greatest assistance to our young women when you carefully and charitably share your encouragement for modeling modesty in every way.

When we show that we really know who we are, we benefit not only ourselves but others. The counsel of the Apostle Paul to his young associate Timothy in the same chapter mentioned by Sister Samuelson earlier seems as current and appropriate for our day as it was in theirs: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear [or see] thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

May we take heed of ourselves in the light of our doctrine and the counsel of our leaders with the confidence that we—and others—will be blessed through our devoted and thoughtful expressions of who we really are and who we wish to be. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.