

In the World but Not of the World

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Learning to be in this world and not of this world is not easy, and as we discuss this subject today, I hope that you will listen with the Spirit to the things the Spirit wants to teach you and write down an action list that the Lord gives you that is personal and directed to you. That should be part of our learning in any situation of this kind. In my current calling as a counselor in the Young Women general presidency, I hear daily of the challenges that our youth and their parents are facing in living gospel standards. And it might be easy for us to get discouraged about this and the conditions we live in, but I also hear of much good that is happening with our youth in these days. President Hinckley has complimented them twice in the last two conferences. In this most recent conference, he said, "We commend our wonderful youth who for the most part stand up to the evils of the world, who push these evils aside and live lives pleasing to the Lord" ("Closing Remarks," *Ensign*, May 2005, 102).

Our youth do have many questions regarding standards. They are in a season of asking why: "Tell me why. Give me a reason why I should do these things." I think sometimes they have a lot in common with three-year-olds. They need good reasons to make good choices, and the choices they make must be based on gospel standards. I would like us to watch a short video production that talks about how the standards are bedrock issues. As you watch this, you might want to list what those doctrines are that are talked about here. This focuses on the words of two latter-day prophets and helps answer the questions some of our youth have regarding standards:

[Video]

Young Woman

Why are there so many rules?

Young Man

Yeah, why do we have to have standards?

Young Woman

What's wrong with my shirt? It's not that tight!

Young Man

Can't I make my own decisions? It's my life.

Young Woman

My boyfriend says I should prove to him that I love him. I'm scared. What should I do?

Young Man

So I make a mistake. No big deal. I'll just repent--later.

President Packer

It is my purpose to explain to the youth and young adults, and to their parents, why we hold so rigidly to high standards of moral conduct; why we avoid addictive drugs and tea, coffee, alcohol, and tobacco; why we teach standards of modesty in dress, grooming, and speech. You need to know where our standards came from and why we cannot loosen up and follow what the world does.

Narrator

Our standards are grounded in eternal truths, which come from an Eternal Father.
President Gordon B. Hinckley.

President Hinckley

I know that God, our Eternal Father, lives. He is the great God of the universe. He is the Father of our spirits, with whom we may speak in prayer.

President Packer

Before we came into mortal life, we lived as spirit children of our Father in Heaven. All human beings--male and female--are created in the image of God. Each of you is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, you have a divine nature and destiny.

Narrator

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.

President Packer

We came to earth to be tested and to gain experience, with a promise that "through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (Articles of Faith 1:3).

Narrator

Heavenly Father has given you agency, the ability to choose right from wrong and to act for yourself. You have been given the Holy Ghost to help you know good from evil. While you are here on earth, you are being proven to see if you will use your agency to show your love for God by keeping His commandments.

Narrator

Look to the Savior as your example. Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him. Jesus Christ gave His life for us and suffered for our sins. Through the Atonement, you can receive forgiveness and be cleansed from your sins

when you repent.

President Hinckley

Like the polar star in the heavens, regardless of what the future holds, there stands the Redeemer of the world, the Son of God, certain and sure as the anchor of our immortal lives. He is the rock of our salvation, our strength, our comfort, the very focus of our faith. In sunshine and in shadow, we look to Him, and He is there to assure and smile upon us.

President Packer

The great plan of happiness enables family relationships to last beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants, available only in the temple, make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

Narrator

Our family is what makes the standards we live and keep so important, not only our earthly families, but also our eternal family with our Heavenly Father. The standards will help you make correct choices that lead you back into His presence.

President Packer

We do not set the standards, but we are commanded to teach them and maintain them. However out of step we may seem, however much the standards are belittled, however much others yield, we will not yield--we cannot yield.

Young Man

As I live the standards of this Church, I feel good about myself. I love our Savior, and the Spirit touches me so much when I think of Him and all that He has done for me.

Young Woman

Especially after I've had a hard time and I just go and pray and ask for His help, and immediately I feel that He's there with me.

Young Woman

You sort of have this warm feeling come over you, and you just know that everything's going to be okay, and without Him, nothing would be possible.

President Hinckley

We must stand firm. We must hold back the world. Live by your standards. Pray for the guidance and the protection of the Lord. He will never leave you. He will comfort you. He will sustain you. He will bless and magnify you and make your reward sweet and beautiful.

[End of Video]

Don't you just love the testimony of our prophet and his affirmation that we can stand firm and we must stand firm. Faithful and true we will stand! That is a confident statement, and the prophet knows that we live in a world that has ever-changing standards. President Packer has said recently that "society is on a course that has caused the destruction of civilizations and is now ripening in iniquity". That's sobering.

But we also have always had prophets to counsel us and strengthen us. And the scriptures are full of teachings from prophets, such as Alma, that say, "Follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things" (Alma 5:57).

Every boy and girl needs parents and leaders who follow the Good Shepherd, as we watched in that testimony, who know how to be separate from the world. Young people need adults in their lives who live and teach the Lord's standards without equivocation.

I would like to explore with you three ways that maybe we can help uphold the counsel of the prophet and things we can implement in our lives to be separate from the world and to not be in the world.

The three things are: First, *avoid* and *resist* evil; second, *prune* out the bad things and *graft* in things that will bear good fruit in our lives; and then we need to *teach the doctrine* that was taught by our prophets in this little short example, doctrine that is the basis for our standards.

First of all, avoiding and resisting.

The scriptures say: "Go ye out . . . from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness" (D&C 133:14). We have to do that.

President Hinckley just said recently to the young women: "Modesty in dress and manner will assist in protecting against temptation. . . . Stay away from sleazy entertainment. . . . I plead with you to avoid disfigurement. . . . I again mention drugs. . . . Stay away from them as if they were a foul disease". Avoiding temptation--that's what the prophet is telling us.

And avoiding is much easier than resisting, I can tell you that. Elder Lynn Robbins has given us a great example. He taught me a story of how to equate avoiding and resisting. He said: "Picture yourself walking into a warm kitchen that smells of the aroma of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. There in front of you is a plate of cookies. The chocolate is still warm and melting a little bit. How hard is it to resist eating one?"

Can you do it? I don't know about you, but I don't think I have ever passed up that opportunity. It is just too much to resist, and if there is a glass of milk handy, I have to eat more cookies to go with the milk until it comes out even. So it isn't just one cookie, it has to come out right. That's something I know about self-mastery, that it is much harder resisting temptation than avoiding it. We must do both.

In the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, it talks about this in the section about entertainment and the media. It gives counsel about avoiding. For instance, here's an avoidance phrase: "Do not attend, view, or participate in entertainment that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way" ([2001], 17). Avoid it.

And then here is something about resisting: "Have the courage to walk out of a movie or video party, turn off a computer or television, change a radio station, or put down a magazine if what is being presented does not meet Heavenly Father's standards" (19).

Now the first option is about avoiding. Don't go to the bad movie in the first place. Be ye separate, or go out from Babylon.

Resisting is possible, but imagine how much more difficult it is when you go to a movie with a group of friends. You buy a ticket and popcorn and a soda, and you sit down through the previews, and the movie begins, and you realize you should not be there. Do you have the courage to stand up, walk past your friends, go out into the lobby, and wait for them until the movie is over with? That is powerful resisting. It is much easier not to have gone to the movie in the first place, to have avoided it, as the counsel has been given.

We need to learn to avoid as much as possible the people, the places, and the things that pull us down. Our youth need help with that. They need restraints so that they can avoid that. The scriptures say--this is in 2 Corinthians, it's one of my favorite ones: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). That is promise and counsel about avoiding that is centuries old. It's not a new idea to come out from that and be resisting to the temptation.

Now pruning and grafting.

Young people are active. They are loaded with energy, ideas, imagination, enthusiasm. They have to be doing something. It's not fair to expect them to sit home in a stark room, doing nothing, learning nothing, experiencing nothing, merely to avoid being exposed to bad things.

So I call this the Jacob 5 principle of grafting and pruning. And think of our lives and our youth as the trees and the instances as spoken of in Jacob 5, and we can learn a lesson from these verses that tell us about changing for the good: "And as they [the trees] begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit. . . . For it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard; wherefore ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, . . . and the bad shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. . . . And the branches of the natural tree will I graft into the natural branches of the tree" (Jacob 5:65-66, 68).

Pruning is a concept that I think that most of us understand. We say things like, "I'm not going to do that!" or "I'm going to stop that bad habit!" or "It's time to make a change!" And we want to cut things out of our life that aren't productive. Often we work very hard at stopping bad behaviors. But change is always much easier if, along with the pruning, we graft in something good to take its place. Pruning leaves a gap, and so what will we replace that will bear good fruit? President Hinckley suggested a few things that we can graft into our lives just this last conference in the priesthood meeting when he was speaking about the evils of gambling. He gave some suggestions of things we can graft into our lives. He said:

"There are better ways to spend one's time. There are better pursuits to occupy one's interest and energy. There is so much of wonderful reading available. We are not likely to ever get too much of it. There is music to be learned and enjoyed. There is just having a good time together--in dancing, in hiking, in cycling, or in other ways--boys and girls

together enjoying one another's company in a wholesome way" ("Gambling," *Ensign*, May 2005, 61).

Five suggestions from a prophet of good things to graft into your lives--that's a great list. There are myriads of activities that all of us can take part in that will bear good fruit, and the Holy Ghost is the one who inspires us with these ideas. This concept is taught to us in Moroni. This is in chapter 7, and you've heard these verses before, but think of these in terms of grafting in good things:

"For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

"For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God" (Moroni 7:15-16). You'll have the ideas, if you think and pray about them, of things to graft into your lives that will bear good fruit.

Now the third idea is teaching the doctrine; it goes back to the words of the prophets.

I began by showing you that video, which taught some of those doctrines upon which our gospel standards are based. I hope you wrote a list of what some of those were.

Parents and leaders could strengthen themselves and our young people morally if they answered questions--those whys--with true doctrinal principles from the scriptures. The scriptures are a great untapped resource for us in teaching about standards.

Not long ago, I spoke to a father, and he expressed to me about his son and his son's appearance, which did not meet the gospel standard. In a way, he did not want his son to be different from the other teen boys in his school, but he was wondering if fitting in was more important for the young man than looking the part of someone who held the priesthood of God.

As we talked, the father said that he had often spoken with his son about his appearance, but they had not spent time in conversations that involved deeper understanding and testimony that changes behavior. So together we identified some of the things that might strengthen that son and his testimony. Just on the pages in here [the scriptures], there are some gospel principles that can help you focus on appearance and dress, such as:

- His identity as a child of God. Does he have a testimony of that? Do you talk about that with regard to dress and appearance?
- How about the body as the temple of your spirit?
- Another one: qualifying for and utilizing the Holy Ghost. There is much teaching in the scriptures on those principles.
- The doctrine of the priesthood. The young man held the priesthood. What did that mean in his life? Did he have a testimony of that?
- How about the sacrament and the sacredness of the sacrament and that young man representing the Savior at the sacrament table?

All those teachings are found in the scriptures, and when we open the scriptures and teach from them, the Spirit attends our teaching, and we have a powerful partner.

Not long ago, I had this opportunity when I was in a situation with some young women and their leaders, having a discussion with regard to the question of Sunday dress and the girls' appearance at Church meetings. The leaders were concerned that casualness had become the fashion, and most of you understand what that means--everything from headwear and hairstyles to footwear becomes extremely casual sometimes. They were hoping that I would be able to settle their dilemma and answer the girls' questions and tell them exactly what they should wear to church. And so I quickly pondered, wanting to do something, teach something, that would have meaning and not just recite the rules again. And with a prayer in my heart, I turned to some scriptures. I said, "Please open your scriptures with me." Turning to D&C 19, we began reading:

"For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

"But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

"Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit--and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink--

"Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men" (D&C 19:16-19).

After reading those verses, we had a short discussion. We talked about who was the voice in the scripture. It's the Savior, Jesus Christ, talking about His atoning sacrifice. We talked about the intensity of His suffering as He atoned for our sins and His promise to us that we don't have to suffer as He did if we repent. We talked about sacrament meeting as being the place where that repentance takes place week after week and what a gift that is that that can happen in our lives.

Then I bore my testimony to those young women that when I partake of the sacrament, I am serious. It's a serious occasion for me. I go to sacrament meeting to repent, because I've been commanded to do so, and because it's my great privilege and the gift of the Lord to me. And when I go, I dress in a serious fashion. Now there are times when I dress casually--which means nonchalant, unplanned, offhand--and I go places that are casual places. But when I go to take the sacrament, I go with a serious purpose, and I dress in a serious way in order to honor the Atonement of the Savior. That was my testimony to those young women about dress and appearance at church.

A few months later, the Young Women leader found me, and she told me that, following our conversation, the girls gathered together, and they said: "We didn't understand. We're going to establish our own guidelines for our class for Sunday meetings." And they changed the way they dressed based on an increased understanding of the sacrament. Doctrinal principles matter to these young people.

President J. Reuben Clark has said, and this is still a true statement:

"The youth of the Church are hungry for the things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted. . . .

"You do not have to sneak up behind [them] and whisper religion in [their] ears. . . . You do not need to disguise religious truths with a cloak of worldly things; you can bring these truths to [them] openly". The doctrine is important in their lives.

It is possible to be in this world and not of this world. We can do this if we avoid and resist evil. As the scriptures say, we have to be separate from it. We can prune out the bad in our lives and graft in the good by seeking after "anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Articles of Faith 1:13).

Then we can also teach the doctrine. That is important. Those principles have to be in their lives. Now President Hinckley gave us this strong teaching: "While standards generally may totter, we of the Church are without excuse if we drift in the same manner. We have standards--sure, tested, and effective. To the extent that we observe them, we shall go forward. To the extent that we neglect them, we shall hinder our own progress and bring embarrassment to the work of the Lord. These standards have come from [the Lord]. Some of them may appear a little out of date in our society, but this does not detract from their validity nor diminish the virtue of their application. The subtle reasoning of men, no matter how clever, no matter how plausible it may sound, cannot abridge the declared wisdom of God".

My friends, this is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We are children of our Heavenly Father, who loves us. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, atoned for our sins and gave us the example of His perfect life. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come is my testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.