

In the World but Not of the World
Rebecca Gardiner

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For further information write:
BYU Women's Conference
352 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

When I received this speaking assignment, my first response was, "These are tough questions!" I struggle with my own children, trying to influence them to live these standards, which is ironic because anyone who knows me will tell you that I have purchased or read practically every parenting book that has ever been written. I guess Heavenly Father finally took pity on my floundering and decided that if I had to speak at Women's Conference, I would have to turn to Him for the answers--to pray, to meditate, to ask for inspiration. I did that, and I share with you today what I learned.

Recently a friend of mine from BYU-Idaho sent me a copy of a devotional speech given by Sister Lili Anderson on February 1 of this year. In this talk she states that the world that we're living in today is less civil than it used to be. When our parents were parenting, respect was almost in the air we breathed, and that was reflected in the popular TV shows of the day. But today's culture shows a lot of disrespect from children to adults, and as a result, we need to parent more proactively. She states, "Society won't teach our children to be respectful; we'll have to." She says that "society won't teach our children the difference between modest beauty as defined from God and immodest and popular clothing; we'll have to." And I would add that society will not teach our children sexual abstinence and purity; that we'll need to do. I believe that teaching these standards requires consistent effort and hard work. This can be physically and mentally draining. As any parent of a teenager knows, it can take a psychic toll, especially since the influences and trappings of the world are incompatible with the teachings of the gospel. How then do we as parents and leaders encourage our youth toward cleanliness in thought and speech, wholesome media choices, modesty, and chastity? I asked Heavenly Father these specific questions, and the answer I received was very clear.

I felt directed to read and study the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, to have it firmly in my mind and, if possible, commit parts of it to memory. This answer puzzled me. I had read the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, and I felt very comfortable with what was written. However, it was impressed upon my mind that I needed to internalize these principles so that I could effectively teach them to our children. As I sat down and read the First Presidency's message, I was inspired: "Because the Lord loves you He has given you commandments and the words of the 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" ([2001], 2). As I pondered the phrase "these principles are true," I knew that I wanted our children to have this same conviction. However, as a parent, I realized I had never taken the time to sit down and discuss in depth these principles and why they matter. If I was going to influence our children to live these higher standards, I needed to know what the prophet had stated. Then I could teach with confidence and conviction and, hopefully, motivate them to ask, "Am I living the way the Lord wants me to live?" I felt further impressed that as I taught these standards, I needed to speak the truth in love. Our children would respond to truth, but they too must have it firmly implanted in their minds.

I felt prompted that if every time one of our children strayed from these standards I would simply teach what was written, they would respond and obey! So the first time our daughter let out a choice word, I responded, "Foul language harms your spirit and degrades you" (22). Well, she gave me that blank stare that only a teenager can give, and she said, "What are you talking about?" I responded that this was the standard that was stated in the *For the Strength of Youth* chapter under language. Let me just say it was not well received. When our son was disrespectful, I followed, "Do not insult others or put them down, even in joking" (22). Things were going from bad to worse; but one night, as I was tucking our son into bed, I brought up an incident that had happened earlier in the day. I told him that what he had done was wrong and that he needed to apologize. He became defensive and angry, but into my mind came the words from *For the Strength of Youth* that I had recently studied. I felt prompted to quote a particular sentence. I could see his resistance starting to soften. Now maybe he was just tired, but it did seem to have an effect. As I continued to study and read *For the Strength of Youth*, I was very impressed with how specific the standards were, and I knew that I had to teach with the same frankness.

One afternoon I was having a conversation with our teenage daughter when the subject of kissing and making out came up. Realizing it had been a long time since I was a teenager, I thought I had better ask her for today's current definition. After she told me, and not wanting her to see my shock, I went and found my copy of the *For the Strength of Youth* chapter titled "Sexual Purity," and I read to her these words: "Do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person's body, with or without clothing. Do not allow anyone to do that with you" (27). That's specific! These words then allowed me to go on and explain to her my feelings about sexual purity and why the Lord feels so strongly about chastity. I was glad that we could have this talk, but as a parent you wonder if it really has an impact. You only hope that, like the stripling warriors, they will remember the words their mothers have taught them.

Another way that I found to teach these standards and to be effective was in family home evening. Each week we would take a different chapter and discuss in depth the standards so that our children would have a very clear understanding of what they were. When we talked about language, we emphasized that good language invites the Spirit to be with them. We discussed and made suggestions to them about other ways they could express their anger and their frustration without using crude words, profane or vulgar gestures. Often a lot of bad language is just exposure and habit, and I found that out walking down the halls of our local high school. But in our homes we need to have the Spirit, and how we communicate with each other really has an impact on the rest of our family.

In the chapter on dress and appearance, we discussed the differences between modest and

immodest clothing, and we read the definitions stated in the pamphlet. Like you, as a mother who has been on many shopping trips with children, I realize how difficult it is to find modest clothing, but we need to make the effort. After all, we're the ones paying for that clothing. Even if our children have their own money, I still don't think it gives them license to buy whatever they want, and I feel strongly about this because I believe that there is a direct correlation between the way a child dresses and his or her sexual and other behaviors. There are forces in advertising manipulating and controlling our children's decisions, and we need to protect them. Let me give you an example.

Last year I talked to a senior executive at a national clothing chain. I had called him to complain about the loud music, semipornographic pictures, and immodest clothing they had in their Salt Lake store. I told him that on a recent shopping trip with my daughter, as we entered the store, the music was so loud you had to practically shout to be heard. As I was trying to have a conversation with the store manager, I asked her if she could just turn the music down a little so that we could hear each other speak. She refused my request, stating that she wasn't "empowered" to do so, that the music had to be kept at a certain decibel level. I couldn't believe it. I asked him if this were true, and he said yes. He stated that all marketing decisions were made at headquarters and that everything in their store was there on purpose to "duplicate a club experience." The loud music would seem inviting and enticing to the people that shopped there, and they'd want to stay longer. And if they did leave and go to other stores, they would find them boring and quickly return. I told him that I wasn't looking for a club experience when my 14-year-old daughter went shopping, to which he replied that their store was never intended for adolescents, which I found really surprising since the store was full of teenagers and the clothes they sell appeal to them. He then asked me my definition of immodest clothing. After I told him, it led to a discussion about the Church and our values. However, he was quick to point out to me that their Salt Lake store was very successful. He did seem responsive to my concerns, especially about the pictures, and said changes would be made. He then thanked me for my feedback and told me to call back anytime. I found this conversation to be quite a wake-up call!

We discussed the chapter on entertainment and media, which stresses that whatever our youth read, listen to, or look at has an effect on them. If we're going to encourage them toward wholesome media choices, we need to teach them to choose entertainment that is uplifting and doesn't drive the Spirit away. That's really tough to do considering what's being offered today, but as parents we need to be involved, and we, as parents, need to help them find other options. As I've continued to teach and try to inspire our children to live these standards, they frequently remind me that I'm irritating and annoying, and it's really easy to get frustrated and want to give up. But one day it occurred to me that I had not spent enough time focusing on the blessings that will come to them as a result of living these standards. The First Presidency has stated that our children will be able to "do [their] life's work with greater wisdom," meet life's trials and challenges, "feel good about [themselves]," increase their opportunities, and "be [able] to go to the temple. These blessings and many more can be [theirs]" (2-3).. What parent doesn't want that for their children?

All of this teaching and encouraging to higher standards leads to the question, how do we raise the bar in our own lives to become the needed role models for our youth? I was prompted to read D&C 93:43, and it states, "And now a commandment I give unto you-- if you will be delivered you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house." As I read this scripture, I felt prompted by the Spirit to

concentrate on the words "your house." I think sometimes we get so focused on changing our children's behavior that we forget that we need to raise the bar in our own lives to become better examples. As parents and leaders, are we modeling in our homes what we believe? As parents, are we living the standards found in *For the Strength of Youth*? Do our children hear us speaking kindly and positively about others, or do they hear gossip, backbiting, and criticism? Are we well groomed and modestly dressed? Does our Sunday appearance reflect reverence and respect, or have we become too casual, like our children? Do the movies, the videos, and the TV shows we watch and the magazines we read reflect the Lord's standards?

About five years ago, I was prompted to stop reading a particular magazine. Now this was hard for me, because I really enjoyed reading this magazine and I thought it was harmless. But the impression that I received from the Spirit was that I was to stop filling my mind with material that wasn't edifying or uplifting. As I've thought about this counsel, I know that it also applies to the music, the TV shows, and the computer usage that we have coming into our homes. We need to raise the bar in our own lives and decide what we will allow and will not allow in our homes, not only regarding ourselves but also our children. I confess that sometimes I get lazy, and I give into demands for video rentals and computer games when I don't always know the full content. One night, realizing that I needed to take more responsibility, I decided to sit down to watch one of our children's favorite TV shows. I had never seen the show before, and I had no desire to see it, but I wanted to know what they were exposing themselves to. The themes that night were homosexuality, fornication, and intermittent swearing. The few examples that I brought up to them afterwards did not seem to upset or concern them. In fact, they told me that it was mild compared to other programs. While this may be true, I realized that our youth are in a precarious situation: they have been born into a world that legitimizes sin and makes it seem normal. We do need to raise the bar, to teach them to have the courage to turn off the videos and walk out of movies and put down magazines if what is being presented does not meet Heavenly Father's standards. And we as parents need to have the courage to do the same thing in our own lives.

Another way that we can raise the bar in our lives is in our parenting methods. I believe that too many of us have become permissive and weak. It's easy to take the path of least resistance. We have a limited amount of time and energy, and if we're using it elsewhere, parenting gets shortchanged. In Sister Anderson's talk, she quotes Elder Neal Maxwell as stating: "I have no hesitancy, brothers and sisters, in stating that unless checked, permissiveness by the end of its journey will cause humanity to stare in mute disbelief". She says this is a sobering statement and one that we should heed.

An example of permissive parenting is found in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel we read the story about a high priest, a judge, and a father named Eli. We are told that he was a good man and did many wonderful works, but the Bible Dictionary tells us that the blot on his character was his toleration of the wickedness of his own sons. In 1 Samuel 2:23-24 we read--and this is Eli talking to his sons:

"And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

"Nay, my sons; . . . it is no good report that I hear: [for you] make the Lord's people to transgress."

From that conversation we learn that Eli knew of his sons' transgressions, but apparently he did nothing to stop them, because the Lord tells him in further verses that his house will be rejected and that they will be destroyed if his behavior doesn't change. In chapter 3, verses 12-13, we hear the Lord speak again:

"In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

"For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

This, to me, was a powerful indictment against Eli: "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Why did the Lord feel so strongly, and what application does this story have for us today in our parenting? First, the story teaches us that the Lord expects us to restrain our children's behavior that is sinful or offensive to Him. In her talk, again, Sister Anderson makes a profound statement when she says regarding our children: "We can't change hearts, but if their behavior is no longer offensive to God or their fellows, the Spirit is able to work on their hearts". I believe that we restrain our children's sinful behavior by setting rules, limits, by enforcing consequences, or by withholding privileges. If we do this with consistency, then the Spirit will be able to change their hearts. In Eli's case, he did not do this--or restrain the sinful behavior of his children--and the Lord was displeased with his permissive parenting. Are we guilty of the same mistakes? We need to examine our own lives and make the needed changes if we've become permissive or weak.

Another area in which we need to parent more proactively is being more aware of what's happening to our children outside of our home. We need to ask them direct questions about their activities and behavior so that we're aware of the challenges and temptations they face. As we know as parents, many problems occur outside the home where there is no parental supervision or where limits and rules are too lax, especially in the area of computer usage. We need to be more vigilant in this area.

Another thing that we need to keep in mind as we parent is that the teenage brain is still developing. In a recently published book, some scientists say that "the prefrontal cortex of a teenager's brain isn't fully developed. This is the part of the brain that controls memory, inhibition, and impulse control". That's why teenagers often don't see the consequences of their action. They have passion and strength but no brakes, and often they don't get a good set of brakes until their early 20s. We need to help them down the right path. This is hard because teenagers want their autonomy, but sometimes we simply have to be the parent and set limits on their behavior. This knowledge should give us confidence in our parenting and the ability to be strong.

In addition, as we've continued to teach our children to live the standards found in *For the Strength of Youth*, we are firm that they attend their Mutual and Scout meetings each week. Our experience has shown time and again that when they go to these activities, even against their wishes, they come home happy and uplifted from their associations. That's because they've been in a positive, spiritual environment having fun!

Let's raise the bar in our parenting. If we're permissive and weak, we can pray for strength. If we're tired and exhausted, we need to look at where our energy is being consumed. And if we're distracted with too many good activities, we can refocus. I know

that the Lord will personally show each one of us the changes we need to make in our own lives to become effective parents and leaders. The Spirit has challenged me to raise the bar in my life. I know that I've made mistakes in my parenting, but I find encouragement in D&C 38:14-15: "For verily some of you are guilty before me, but I will be merciful unto your weakness. Therefore, be ye strong from henceforth." I know that as parents and leaders, as we come unto Christ and ask for His help, this strength will be ours. I testify that as we encourage our youth to live the standards found in *For the Strength of Youth*, restrain them from evil, and raise the bar in our own lives, we will become the role models they need to be in the world but not of the world. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.