

*Arise and Shine Forth: A Return to Virtue*  
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From my window in the Young Women office, I have a spectacular view of the Salt Lake Temple. Every day I see the Angel Moroni, standing atop the temple, as a shining symbol of not only his faith but ours. He is my hero. I love Moroni because in a very degenerate society, he remained pure and true. He stood alone. I feel somehow he beckons to us today to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”<sup>1</sup>

In another time, another Moroni, Captain Moroni, also lived in a society that had become so polluted and wicked that He rent his coat and put it on a pole “In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children”<sup>2</sup> and “he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in the land.”<sup>3</sup> When he did this “the people came running together...rending their garments [and covenanted] that they would not forsake the Lord their God.”<sup>4</sup> Then Moroni prepared the people to stand firm for those things that would preserve their families and society.

Gathered here today are some of the elect women of the world. As I look at you, I feel that there could be no more influential group for good in all the world than the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I see your nobility and feel a deep sense of your divine identity. The call for a return to virtue is a call for all of us. It is a call for the world now. It is for you and for me and for our daughters and granddaughters. It is for our families. Now is the time for a return to virtue. Now is the time for women everywhere to “arise and shine forth that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”<sup>5</sup> A standard is a rule of measure by which one determines exactness or perfection. We are to be a standard of holiness for the world to see! It is absolutely true that we, the women and mothers of this rising generation, can teach and exemplify that it is possible to be pure in a polluted world. We can teach and exemplify that purity is power and is

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<sup>1</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 115: 5

<sup>2</sup> Alma 46: 12

<sup>3</sup> Alma 46: 36

<sup>4</sup> Alma 46: 21

<sup>5</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 115: 5.

not prudish. We can teach and exemplify that virtue enables us to have the Spirit and with the Spirit, we can be absolutely confident “at all times and in all things, and in all places.”<sup>6</sup>

Today more than ever before, we are living in a polluted moral environment. And while we regulate and insist on the purity in our food, our water and even the air we breathe, because of the health risks to our bodies, we seem to be more tolerant about living in an environment that is toxic to our spirits. This polluted moral environment is present everywhere. Immorality, immodesty, and pornography are rampant on billboards, advertisements and the internet. These things have invaded our schools and the education of our children. One young woman said, “If my parents knew what was going on at school, they wouldn’t send me there every day.” And another confided, “I am required to read things that are degrading to my spirit.”

Immorality has not only invaded our schools, it has invaded our homes in the form of media, entertainment and internet. Could this gradual intrusion be likened to the poem of Alexander Pope? -- “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>7</sup>

Our society is spending millions and millions of dollars for social programs to care for women who have been abused, used and discarded. Moroni described a totally decadent society as having reached the point where they have become “past feeling.”<sup>8</sup> Have we as a society become “past feeling?” Are we becoming numb to the enticements of Satan to erase virtue from the moral landscape? Are we so surrounded by sights, sounds and immoral messages that the still small voice and the guidance of the Spirit are not present in our lives?

What would happen if all the elect and noble women simply said, “enough is enough?” What would happen if we refused to be objectified and sexualized? What if we refused to be consumers of those things which subtly undermine our divine identity and our moral character? Who is financing this flood of filth? Could the answer be—we are? Who is buying the immodest clothing? Who is wearing it? Do we make little compromises on the scale of descending mediocrity thinking it is “not as bad as?” Are some decisions based upon wanting to be popular and hip rather than wanting to be pure and holy? Can we really have it all? These are hard questions you and I will need to ponder and answer and then act upon. I know that years ago, I simply decided I would not purchase several name brand products because they objectified young women in their marketing. I have kept that commitment.

We do not have to accept the present state of moral pollution. We can change the world by beginning the change within our hearts and our homes. This change will show in our priorities and in our desires. It will show in our relationships and in our environment and it will show in our homes and families. For it is true--holy women stand in holy places. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell so wisely stated, “The city of Enoch was not prefabricated and put up in a day. The city

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<sup>6</sup> Mosiah 18: 9

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Pope quotes (English Poet, 1688-1744)

<sup>8</sup> Moroni 9: 20

was built incrementally and spiritually as the individuals in that city were built incrementally and spiritually. That near celestial culture was constructed only as individuals were improved.”<sup>9</sup> This can happen as we understand our divine identity, seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and keep our covenants.

## IDENTITY

The Lord revealed our identity when He said, “Behold . . . thou art an elect lady, whom I have called.”<sup>10</sup> He has admonished each of us “to walk the paths of virtue”<sup>11</sup> We are daughters of God. We are noble and even elect. We will never be able to live as women of God if we let the world define what that means. We have a great work to do. We really must individually come to understand who we are, the potential we have, and the incredible trust we have been given by our Father in Heaven to be here on the earth now in this Last Dispensation of the Fullness of Times. Just as Esther came to understand her identity and mission, we must do the same. “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?”<sup>12</sup> This is why the injunction is given to us in the Doctrine and Covenants to “arise and shine forth that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”<sup>13</sup> We *have* come to the kingdom for such a time as this! We can energetically lead the world in everything that is virtuous, praiseworthy and of good report—a return to virtue and to moral strength and character. As Eliza R. Snow said to the women of her day, I repeat today—“It is not for you to be led by the women of the world; it is for you to lead...the women of the world, in everything that is ...purifying to the children of men.”<sup>14</sup> As daughters of God, we were born to lead.

## HOLY GHOST

In order to do this we will need to rely on the guidance of the Holy Ghost. As women, we have the opportunity to create an environment where the Holy Ghost can dwell and influence. It has been stated that, “When it comes to drawing upon the promptings and the blessings which flow from the Holy Ghost, we often ‘live far beneath our privileges.’”<sup>15</sup>

The Holy Ghost does not dwell in unclean temples and so we will need to take inventory of our habits, our homes, and our hearts. All of us will need to change something—to repent. As King Lamoni’s father stated, “I will give away all my sins to know thee.”<sup>16</sup> Are we willing to do the same?

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<sup>9</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, *Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 25:3

<sup>11</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 25:2

<sup>12</sup> Esther 4: 14

<sup>13</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 115: 5

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the General Board of the Relief Society, 17 March 1914, 54

<sup>15</sup> Keith K. Hilbig, “Quench Not the Spirit Which Quickens the Inner Man,” *Ensign*, Nov 2007, 38 and Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John S. Widsoe, [1954], 32

<sup>16</sup> Alma 22:18, emphasis added

It is so important that we teach our children, especially our daughters, the principle of repentance. Recently, I visited with a group of young women in a drug rehabilitation program. I asked what had gotten them to this place and each responded that they did not understand that they could repent. They thought that all was lost. They became discouraged, despondent and disobedient. They didn't feel comfortable going to their mother or their father, their bishop, or to the Lord. "We are aware that there are those who have already engaged in conduct inconsistent with this sacred standard of morality. Please understand that through the Savior's Atonement, all can repent and return."<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to repent; it requires a broken heart and a contrite spirit.<sup>18</sup> But when the steps to repentance are righteously followed, Alma's words to his son Corianton, who had been involved in moral transgressions, apply to all: "And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance."<sup>19</sup> The Savior's infinite Atonement makes it possible for each of us to repent, to change, to return.

## COVENANTS

A return to virtue is a return to the temple, and a return to the temple is a return to the Savior. Virtue is the golden key that opens temple doors. Temple ordinances and covenants enable us to be endowed with power. Recently my husband met a mother and her daughter in the baptistery of the Salt Lake Temple. They had flown into Salt Lake City to attend this young woman's first General Young Women Meeting and had gotten off the plane and come straight to the temple to do baptisms. My husband was so impressed that this was first on their list to prepare them to attend the meeting. He observed, "They didn't go shopping, they didn't go sightseeing, the temple was their priority." Mothers, take your daughters to the temple. I believe that the temple is a gift to parents that will lead their family safely home. Attending the temple will not only protect, but direct each of us.

In the temple we find the pattern for making our homes holy places. Like the temple our home can become "a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, . . . a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God."<sup>20</sup> The temple is a place where we make covenants and where we may review, remember, recommit and renew ourselves. It is a house of personal revelation and refinement. Refinement is present in the lives of all women who cherish virtue and keep their covenants. This is reflected in everything we do. It has been well said that "Women of God who honor their covenants look differently, dress differently, respond to crisis differently, and act and speak differently from women who have not made the same covenants."<sup>21</sup> The blessings of

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<sup>17</sup> Quentin L. Cook, "Stewardship, A Sacred Trust," October 2009 General Conference.

<sup>18</sup> See D&C 20:37; 2 Nephi 2:7; Alma 39; 3 Nephi 9:20. President Ezra Taft Benson defined a broken heart and a contrite spirit this way: "Godly sorrow . . . is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that . . . our sins caused Him [the Savior] to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having a 'broken heart and a contrite spirit' " ("A Mighty Change of Heart," *Tambuli*, Mar. 1990, 5; *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, 4).

<sup>19</sup> Alma 42: 29

<sup>20</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 109: 8

<sup>21</sup> Sheri Dew, *No Doubt About It*, p. 50

virtuous women who keep their covenants are so vast and so grand they are almost incomprehensible.

Since the beginning of this dispensation, the many contributions of the women of the Church have been truly incredible. Never in the history of the world has there been a greater need for your example, your virtue and your influence to move forward this holy work than now. You must be the guardians of virtue.

I hope every time you think of Captain Moroni, you will think of the words used to describe him, as words that describe you: “if all...had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni,...the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.”<sup>22</sup>

I hope that every time you see the Angel Moroni standing atop a temple, you will be reminded of his final words. At the close of his life, Moroni’s prophetic call to us is for a return to virtue: “Come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing...Awake and arise from the dust...and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion...that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee...may be fulfilled.”<sup>23</sup>

Now today, we stand with you and call for the women of the Church to “arise and shine forth that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”<sup>24</sup> We call on the women to stand firm and immovable for virtue. Will you join us? Together, we can become a mighty force for a return to virtue in the world. And when the history of our day is recorded, I pray that it may be said, “The women were incredible.”<sup>25</sup> They helped change an entire generation and assisted in laying the foundation for an entire society—a Zion Society—because they understood their identity, they were guided by the Holy Ghost, and they kept their covenants. This is our destiny.

I truly believe that one virtuous woman, led by the Spirit, can change the world. Let this day be the beginning of that mighty change. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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<sup>22</sup> Alma 48: 17

<sup>23</sup> Moroni 10: 30-31

<sup>24</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 115: 5

<sup>25</sup> Wallace Stegner, “The Gathering of Zion,” University of Nebraska Press, copyright 1964 and 1981, p.13