

For the Strength of Youth: A Resource for Parents and Leaders
Young Women General Presidency
Elaine S. Dalton, Mary N. Cook, Ann M. Dibb

This address was given Thursday, May 1, 2008, at the BYU Women's Conference

© 2008 by Brigham Young University Women's Conference. All rights reserved

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>

SISTER ELAINE S. DALTON: It is really a sacred trust to be women, mothers, and leaders on the earth today. You are noble and elect women of faith and testimony. We recognize this. We are bound together by our shared faith and by ordinances and covenants.

On April 8th, just two days after we were sustained as a new Young Women general presidency in that historic session of general conference, we had our first meeting as a presidency.

SISTER MARY N. COOK: We met in the parking lot of the Church Office Building dressed in our hiking gear!

SISTER ANN M. DIBB: The other auxiliary presidencies were arriving in their normal office attire—skirts and heels. They wanted to come too.

SISTER DALTON: We drove to the base of Ensign Peak to hike to the top. It was a cold, clear spring day. It had snowed the day before, but despite the weather, I knew as the newly-called president that we had to have our first meeting in that spot. I knew that we needed inspiration and vision. It seemed fitting that we climb that peak and look out on the valley and ponder all that had gone before to make possible where we now stood.

As we looked at the valley below, there stood the temple with Angel Moroni shining in the sun. For me it was clear: the vision for our presidency was the same vision that Brigham Young had when he climbed that peak. It was the temple. The temple is really the reason for everything we do in the Church—every lesson, every activity, everything we do leads to the Lord and His holy house. Brigham Young knew that, and there atop Ensign Peak, we also knew it. The temple was the reason women left their established homes and came west. It was the reason they broke their beautiful china to make the temple walls glitter in the sun. It was the reason they suffered privation and even death. The temple was the reason that babies were buried along the way, and the reason they sang: “Come, come, ye saints, no toil nor labor fear, but with joy wend your

way.” Some lost everything—but came into the valley with everything, really—temple ordinances and sacred covenants and the promise of eternal life together as families.

I think it is significant that as sick as Brigham Young was with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, he made the same hike only three days after arriving in the valley. There on the top of that peak, he and his band unfurled a banner—a yellow bandana attached to a walking stick. Nine years earlier, they had received a revelation asking them to, “Arise and shine forth that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5).

There that day, we three women also unfurled a banner which, ours made from a walking stick and a gold Peruvian shawl. It was our ensign to the world, a banner calling for a return to virtue. It was our standard, signifying that the young women would arise and shine forth, that their standards would be a light to the nations!

Our desire is to help young women be worthy and pure and to prepare every young woman to receive the blessings and ordinances of the temple. The definition of an *ensign* is a *standard*. So today as we talk about the standards in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, we unfurl our commitment to you that we will work tirelessly with your daughters, with you, and with priesthood and Young Women leaders to protect and strengthen and prepare our precious young women to be virtuous and pure and live the standards that will help them be free and happy and allow them to reach their divine potential. We know that we are all elect daughters of God. We also know that each one of us has a great work to perform.

SISTER COOK: As we hiked, we noted that we were on a slippery, rocky trail. In places, we needed to help each other to ascend any higher. I pointed out warning signs on the trail that kept us on the right path—even a sign marked: “Do not go further: Rattlesnake Danger!” At one place, the trail separated. One way looked easier, even grassy, but the trail dead-ended with a barbed-wire fence.

SISTER DALTON: I know, because I’m the one who took that path and needed help to get back on the right one.

SISTER COOK: We noted how similar this hike was to the young women’s journey through these days when worldly voices beckon them to follow other seemingly appealing paths. We came down changed. Determined. Blessed with inspiration and vision.

SISTER DIBB: There were things that helped us stay on the path and reach our destination. We knew where we were going. We had a destination in mind. The trail was well-marked with warning signs along the way. We were together. And besides that, it was a short, doable hike!

SISTER DALTON: Today we want to talk about four things that will help young women stay on the path—the path of righteousness.

Identity: Every young woman needs to know that she is a precious daughter of a Heavenly Father who loves her.

Standards: Young women need to look to the prophets now for protection as the world shifts around them. Standards are the guardrails, the aids, and the footholds.

Repentance: Change is always possible because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Revelation: Young women need to know they are never alone. Because of the gift of the Holy Ghost, knowing what is right and wrong is always possible.

IDENTITY

SISTER DIBB: As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we should feel confident as to who we really are: “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us and we love Him.” Latter-day prophets have received revelations from God that provide this knowledge for us. We know we have an eternal purpose. In our pre-mortal estate, we chose to get on the path because we knew who we were, and we knew where we wanted to go.

Young women struggle with knowing who they are. Some of you may struggle with knowing who you really are and are being pulled away from where you hope to go. We must choose to exercise faith in God’s plan for our individual life, and for that of our family. We must remain confident and sure.

For the Strength of Youth is a booklet that contains the words of those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. It has been written for youth, but we know it applies to each of us, to me, to you!

SISTER COOK: I put my thumb over the “TH” and it really says, “for the strength of you.”

SISTER DIBB: We’d like to share with you a quote taken from the booklet. We’ve put it in first person for you to ponder:

I am a choice spirit who has come forth in this day when the responsibilities and opportunities, as well as the temptations, are the greatest. I am on a journey through this mortal life. My Heavenly Father wants my life to be joyful and to lead me back into His presence. The decisions I make now will determine much of what will follow during my life and throughout eternity.

Like your sons and daughters, do you know who you really are? One stake Young Women leader, widowed suddenly at a young age, shared her testimony of her divine identity. Iris White from Ft. Meyers, Florida, wrote, “I have to tell you what my ‘mission’ has been as a Young Women leader. It is to tell these young women who they are—they are daughters of God! I’ve tried to make it my goal to teach that concept over and over again. Sometimes I think the only person who has truly learned that is *me!* And believe me . . . I think I needed to learn that!”

SISTER COOK: Having this individual testimony of our divine identity also helps us to remain strong as a parent to teach our children important truths. President James E. Faust has acknowledged our challenge as parents:

In my opinion, the teaching, rearing and training of children requires more intelligence, intuitive understanding, humility, strength, wisdom, spirituality, perseverance and hard work than any other challenge we might have in life. This is especially so when moral foundations of honor and decency are eroding around us. To have successful homes, values must be taught, and there must be rules, there must be standards, and there must be absolutes (James E. Faust, “The Greatest Challenge in the World—Good Parenting,” Ensign, Nov. 1990, 32).

SISTER DIBB: Having an experience where the Spirit confirms to us that Heavenly Father is mindful of us, individually, is central to the strength of our personal testimony. It helps us to have the faith, obedience, and confidence that is necessary so that we can do all that our Heavenly Father wants us to accomplish in our mortal existence. It helps us focus on the importance of our eternal covenants and always be worthy to enter His holy house.

I listened to the conversation of two five-year-olds, a little boy and a little girl, who were best friends. When they grew up, they wanted to marry each other. They also knew that they wanted to get married in the temple. The biggest problem that they envisioned was expressed by the boy: “When we get married, who will drive us to the temple? We can’t drive, and we don’t have a car.”

The little girl remarked, “I know—my parents can drive us to the temple.”

Five-year-olds are not distracted on their path. Unfortunately, five-year-olds mature into teenagers, and the biggest challenge is no longer, “who will drive,” but becomes the importance of personal worthiness.

As a young woman learns and internalizes the fact that she is a daughter of God and has inherited His divine attributes, she will remain strong and live her life in continued worthiness.

STANDARDS

SISTER COOK: Even when young women know who they are, they need standards to help them on the path. Standards are prophetic warnings. On our hike, we saw several warning signs. And remember, the most foreboding said: “Rattlesnake danger!”

SISTER DALTON: Someone had tried to deface the sign and disguise the danger.

Like the five-year-olds, most young women start on the path and want to be on the path, but in today’s world there are more distractions and more “rattlesnakes” than ever to deal with.

SISTER DIBB: In fact, the rattlesnakes are glamorized!

SISTER COOK: Last year we were asked by our priesthood leaders to identify issues that we felt were getting in the way of young women’s progression to the temple—the “rattlesnakes” in their lives. Independent of one another, we each made a list. It was amazing how closely our lists lined up.

If you were given this assignment, what issues would be on your list?

SISTER DALTON: Have you already started thinking of the issues that would be a part of your list? Write them down. Send them to us. We want to know. We *need* to know.

SISTER COOK: Let me share with you some of the issues we identified:

- **Lack of kindness.** It is a tough world, and the girls are being unkind—even in our own wards and families.
- **Peer pressure to fit in.** It’s hard to stand alone. At times you will be rejected.
- **Language and communication.** The impersonal feel of the Internet and cell phones have brought about a boldness and brashness of language that we would never use face-to-face.
- **Families in turmoil.** Parents are confused; divorce, separation, and abuse are becoming more common, and children’s actions are placing their families in turmoil.
- **Dishonesty and living a dual life.** The common attitude is, “It’s okay if I don’t get caught,” or, “I only have to act that way at home around my parents and at Church with my Church friends.”

SISTER DIBB: They rationalize, “What I’m doing isn’t as bad as what my *friends* are doing.”

SISTER DALTON: The concern goes back to President Uchtdorf’s conference talk about “one degree off.”

SISTER COOK:

- **Emotional health.** Youth are looking for happiness, but often follow the world’s definition of “happiness.” They don’t understand what “true joy” is.
- **Selfishness.** It’s an, “all about me” world.

SISTER DALTON: These issues are not exclusive to the youth, either. In many respects, they are rattlesnakes in all of our lives.

SISTER COOK: That’s so true. Like the warning signs on our hike, *For the Strength of Youth* is a book for *now*. It’s a book of warnings from prophets, seers, and revelators that will keep us away from danger and protect us as the world shifts around us.

As we studied each issue, it became clear that the answers are found in this little book. Listen to some of the statements in it that address three of these issues:

Regarding peer pressure: “You are a child of God with great strength. You have the ability to choose righteousness and happiness, no matter what your circumstance.”

SISTER DIBB: Here’s one on honesty and living a dual life: “Don’t rationalize that wrong is right, even though many people around you may think there is no harm in being dishonest. Be true to the Lord and to His Church in all circumstances.”

SISTER DALTON: And regarding language: “How you speak says much about who you are. . . Do not insult others or put them down, even in joking. . . . When you use good language, you invite the Spirit to be with you.”

SISTER DIBB: Even when you are texting.

Remember, it is, “for the strength of you.” So where do you keep your copy of *For the Strength of Youth*?

SISTER DALTON: President Uchtdorf understands that FSY is for all of us. In his very first conference talk as a new member of the Twelve, he chose to address standards. He said always carried his temple recommend with him, and right next to it, the pocket summary of FSY. He says that if you follow the standards in *For the Strength of Youth*, you will be worthy to receive a temple recommend.

SISTER COOK: The booklet really is for all of us, and we need to remember that this is not a program. These are words of the living prophets that we need to study. They are for us, *now*. We need to keep these words in the forefront of our children.

I’ve memorized some of the lines; just ask my grandchildren. When challenges seem insurmountable, I quote from the last page: “The Lord will make much more out of your life than you can by yourself.”

SISTER DALTON: I love what you’re teaching. If it’s in the mother’s heart, it is in the mother’s home.

SISTER DIBB: I love the question found at the end of *For the Strength of Youth*: “Am I living the way the Lord wants me to live?”

SISTER COOK: Sisters, think about the rattlesnakes on your path or the paths of your children. Open this book, read the book, apply the book. We promise that you’ll find answers to your issues and to your children’s issues as you prayerfully study these words—the prophetic words in this book.

SISTER DALTON: And don’t forget the words from general conference. They are the most current of the living prophets for us *now*.

SISTER COOK: It’s a great blessing to have living prophets. President Eyring reminded us last week in a meeting we had with the First Presidency that our living prophet speaks for *now*. We need to look to the prophet to protect us as the world shifts all around us.

REPENTANCE

SISTER DIBB: We’ve talked about identity.

We've talked about the importance of standards, but unfortunately all of us make mistakes.

Because the Lord has declared that, "no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven," there is a need for repentance. In Ezekiel 18:30 we read, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Ezekiel may have given this plea in ancient times, but his plea for people to cease from doing wrong and turn to righteous living is true in our day as well.

Youth must know that when they make a mistake, they can repent, and they will be forgiven. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, Heavenly Father has provided the way where we may become clean once again.

Repentance is a necessary process. Repentance is not easy. It may be difficult for all who have been involved and requires great humility. I find comfort in the truth taught in *True to the Faith*: "Repentance leads to forgiveness and lasting peace." We all need that peace. Youth hunger for that peace.

SISTER DALTON: A line comes to mind from *For the Strength of Youth*: "Satan wants you to think that you cannot repent, but that is absolutely not true" (30). So many young women think that if they make a mistake, they cannot change.

SISTER DIBB: We would hope that youth who need to repent may do so in a timely manner. They cannot afford to be without the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Life's journey is far too dangerous. Too many others are counting on their faithfulness. Heavenly Father, our Savior, parents, and leaders love them and have confidence in their ability to become numbered as His once again.

SISTER COOK: We have confidence in them. We all must exhibit our love to those trying to repent.

Have we taught our children how to repent? Are we modeling for our children our continual repentance? Do they hear us say: "I'm sorry; I made a mistake"? Do they understand that they can repent of their sins each week so that they can partake of the sacrament worthily and renew their baptismal covenants?

SISTER DIBB: As parents, associates, and friends, we must ask ourselves, "Are we willing to forgive others their mistakes even as our Heavenly Father has promised He would forgive them?" In D&C 58:42 we read, "He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."

I was moved by the experience of a young woman who came to her bishop and tearfully asked, "Bishop, are the words in the scriptures true? Is it true that, though my sins may be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow?" (Isaiah 1:18). With compassion and wisdom and with the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, this bishop, who had been given the necessary keys of authority, replied, "Yes, they are absolutely true." He then helped this young woman through her

repentance process. With time and great effort, she received a remission of her sins and once again became “white as snow.”

SISTER DALTON: Repentance is a gift. It is a necessary action for all to keep us progressing on the path and to ensure the companionship of the Holy Ghost in our journey. *For the Strength of Youth* explains the blessings of repentance and the consequences of sin. “Through the Atonement, you can receive forgiveness and be cleansed from your sins when you repent. . . . If you sin . . . you may lose years of blessings and spiritual guidance.”

SISTER COOK: I know that as women, mothers, and leaders, we would love to be at their side, pointing out the warning signs and watching them obey our every word. Unfortunately, the Plan of Salvation doesn’t work that way.

SISTER DIBB: In fact, that was Satan’s plan, and I use to hate it when someone reminded me of that, because I wanted to protect those I love.

REVELATION

SISTER COOK: The great blessing that each of us receives at our confirmation is the Holy Ghost. The Spirit will guide us, protect us, and help us find answers to our questions.

Youth have questions, and they need to find the answers for themselves. The youth are really quite amazing. They like to discover and learn for themselves.

SISTER DIBB: They can go to the Internet or their cell phone for answers, but is that where they should be turning for spiritual answers?

SISTER COOK: Elder Bednar reminds us we must never underestimate their spiritual capacity and their spiritual hunger.

We want to share with you a journey that a group of young women recently took to find answers to a question in their life. They learned the power of personal revelation through the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Last summer, the swimming season was in full tilt. Seeing the variety of swimming suits at the pools, questions arose about what constituted a modest swimsuit. They approached their Young Women leaders to find out the Church’s official policy on swimsuits. They wanted to be obedient. Rather than giving them the answer, the leaders determined that the youth could learn from Joseph Smith’s example; each could ask God to help them find their answer to their question.

SISTER DALTON: These leaders were very wise. They knew the doctrine and led the young women on a journey to discover the process of finding their own answers. They had high expectations, giving the girls assignments to independently search in the scriptures for the doctrines on modesty, the body, and chastity. The girls found conference talks on modesty. They

were encouraged to listen to general conference and the words of the living prophets with their question in mind. They processed together what they were feeling and learning.

SISTER DIBB: The leaders provided a safe environment and had faith in the girls that they'd find the answer. They provided the tools, then "got out of the way," avoiding giving answers and personal opinions. Rather, they gathered them, formally and informally, to discuss what they'd learned from study. They encouraged the girls to pray about their question and their answers. They asked the young women to record their feelings and thoughts in a journal.

SISTER COOK: It was interesting to hear the words of the prophets woven into their conversation. One girl said, "I liked what Elder Oaks said at general conference. I think that thinking in terms of 'good, better, best' can help us make the best choices, not just the ones that aren't too bad." Another said, "Remember what Elder Holland said? He said that modesty is always in style. I like that."

SISTER DIBB: From their study of the scriptures, they identified principles of modesty. The one I really liked that the *girls* came up with was "representation." They were reminded that as members of the Church, they were disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such they had a responsibility to be His representatives.

SISTER COOK: As they shared their thoughts and feelings on things of eternal value, something wonderful happened in their relationships. The meaningful, honest conversations brought them together spirit-to-spirit and stripped away the adolescent competition that can complicate friendships. They listened and learned—to the Spirit and to each other.

SISTER DALTON: They reported their findings to us a few months into their journey. I remember them talking about how they wanted to be perceived by others. They said that the going term at the high school for a cute girl was "hot." They thought that term degrading, so they came up with their own term: "adorable." When they would see each other at school dressed modestly, they would go up to each other and whisper, "You look so adorable." They were united and bonded in a cause. They found there was strength in numbers as they banded together.

SISTER DIBB: And we can band together as mothers to encourage our sons to invite these adorable girls to the prom.

SISTER COOK: Sisters, as we band together and support one other in living these standards, think of the powerful influence we will have upon the world!

SISTER DIBB: The question wasn't answered for the girls. That's because they individually came to their own answer about swimsuits. They were at different places on the path, but *they were on the path!*

SISTER COOK: That's important to remember: it's a journey, and we need to help them wherever they are on it. Remember on our hike, how I got off the path. I couldn't get up a tiny hill because it was too slippery. I needed the help of Sister Dibb to pull me up.

We need to be there to support them, guide them in finding their answers, point out the warnings. We need to help them recognize how the Spirit works in the process. These young women with the swimsuit question experienced the gospel process of finding answers:

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 7:16).

These young women felt good about their work. They were happy. They learned confidence in this gospel process, and in themselves.

SISTER DALTON: Remember, never underestimate the spiritual capacity and spiritual hunger of our youth. They have questions. Heaven has answers. If we as mothers and leaders can facilitate an interaction of those two powerful facts, we will witness miracles.

To get to the top of the mountain, we had to walk step by step. Once we get on the path, we still need to press forward with a perfect brightness of hope. *Press* implies that it might be slippery, steep, rocky, and infested with rattlesnakes. But we can do it!

We invite you to take some very specific steps with us that will guide our personal journey. This is something we will do with you.

The first thing we want to ask you to do is pray every day—100%.

The second thing is to read the Book of Mormon every day for five minutes—100%.

The third thing we want you to do is to smile—100%. Why do I say smile? Because we are women on the Earth at this incredible time. And prophets have said that others will flock to us because we are different from the world in happy ways.

Tell your daughters and other women. Invite them to join us on this journey, this path to the temple. Whenever we see you, you can give us a sign of thumbs-up or simply say “100%” and we’ll know that you’re with us.

SISTER COOK: And remember, if you slip up, you can repent.

SISTER DALTON: Together we’ll unfurl our banner to the world calling for a return to virtue.

SISTER DIBB: In summary: **Identity**. The words of the Young Women theme: “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us, and we love Him.” This is our identity.

SISTER COOK: **Standards**. Know and love them. They are prophetic warnings that will keep us on the path.

SISTER DIBB: **Repentance.** Repentance is possible. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can all repent. Teach repentance—over and over and over again. And do so with love.

SISTER COOK: **Revelation.** Help young women learn the process of receiving personal revelation. As President Monson promised, the Lord loves them and will hear and answer every prayer.

SISTER DALTON: We face increasing challenges and opposition because our standards are not casually negotiable. I can hear in my mind the words of Vivian, a young woman in Ghana, who told me, “Yes, we do have many challenges—but we have the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Prophets will always teach God’s standards for all His children because He loves them. Now is the time to arise. Now is the time to stand firm for virtue and purity and goodness. Now is the time to unfurl our banner to the world. As President Packer has taught:

If a well-worn yellow bandana was good enough to be an ensign to the world, then ordinary men who hold the priesthood and ordinary women and ordinary children in ordinary families, living the gospel as best they can all over the world, can shine forth as a standard, a defense, a refuge against whatever is to be poured out upon the earth (Boyd K. Packer, “A Defense and a Refuge,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 85–88).

As Moroni said, “Awake, and arise . . . 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” (Moroni 10:31).

Yes, Moroni knew it too. It’s all about the temple, about helping young women be worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple.