

Stay on the Path

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On one of the trails in a canyon near my home, there is a sign that says Stay on the Path. As one embarks on that trail, it soon becomes very clear that this is sound advice. There are hills and turns and steep drop-off areas. In some places the ground beyond the path is unstable, and during certain seasons of the year, an occasional rattlesnake appears. My message to each of you tonight is the same as the message on that sign—Stay on the Path.

Several years ago I went on a backpacking trip in the Teton Mountains of Wyoming with a group of young women. It was a difficult hike, and on the second day we arrived at the most dangerous part of the hike. We were going to hike along Hurricane Pass—aptly named because of the strong winds which almost always blow there. We were instructed by a ranger to stay in the center of the path, stay as low as possible on the exposed part of the trail, secure everything in our packs, and move quickly. This was no spot for photographs or for lingering. I was very relieved and happy when each one of the young women had navigated that spot successfully. And do you know—not one of them asked how close to the edge they could get!

Sometimes as we walk life's paths, we want to loiter in dangerous places, thinking that it is fun and thrilling and that we are in control. Sometimes we think we can live on the edge and still maintain our virtue. But that is a risky place to be. As the Prophet Joseph Smith told us, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue" (*History of the Church*, 5:134–35).

The Lord's advice to Emma Smith in Doctrine and Covenants section 25 is His advice to *all* of His precious daughters. There we are given a code of conduct and counseled to "walk in the paths of virtue" (v. 2). Virtue "is a pattern of thought [or] behavior based on high moral standards" (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], 118). So what are the high moral standards that help us to be virtuous?

Virtue encompasses modesty—in thought, language, dress, and demeanor. And modesty is the foundation stone of chastity. Just as one does not hike trails inhabited by rattlesnakes barefoot, similarly in today's world it is essential to our very safety to be modest. When we are modest, we show others that we understand our relationship with our Father in Heaven as His daughters. We demonstrate that we love Him and that we will stand as a witness of Him in all things. Being modest lets others know that we "cherish virtue" ("Dearest Children, God Is Near You," *Hymns*, no. 96). Modesty is not a matter of being "hip." It is a matter of the heart and being holy. It is not about being fashionable. It is about being faithful. It is not about being cool. It is about being

chaste and keeping covenants. It is not about being popular, but about being pure. Modesty has everything to do with keeping our footing securely on the path of chastity and virtue. It is clear that virtue is a requirement for exaltation. Mormon helps us understand that both virtue and chastity are “most dear and precious above all things” (Moroni 9:9). We simply cannot afford to be casual or get too close to the edge. That is dangerous ground for any daughter of God to walk.

We are counseled in Doctrine and Covenants section 25 that we must *cleave* to our covenants (see v. 13). *Cleaving*, to me, means to stick to, to adhere, and to really hold on tight to the promises we make with the Lord. Our covenants will strengthen us to resist temptation. Keeping our covenants will steady us on the path of virtue. As we keep the covenants we have made at baptism, we will remain in the center of the path. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminds us:

“Beginning with our baptism, we make covenants as we follow this path to eternal life, and we stay on the path by keeping them. ...

“... The promptings of the Holy Ghost will always be sufficient for our needs if we keep to the covenant path. Our path is uphill most days, but the help we receive for the climb is literally divine. We have three members of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—helping us because of the covenants we have made.

“To remind us of those covenants, we partake of the sacrament each week. In the prayer offered on the bread, we ‘witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that [we] are willing to take upon [us] the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given [us]; that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]’ [D&C 20:77]” (“What I Wish Every New Member Knew—and Every Longtime Member Remembered,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Oct. 2006, 11–12).

Guided by His Spirit, you will be confident and happy, and virtue will garnish your thoughts unceasingly. The Book of Mormon describes what happened when a whole society kept their covenants and lived clean and virtuous lives: “And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). Guided by the Holy Ghost, you will also be a righteous influence on others.

I have in my office the pictures of the generations of women in my family—my great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and my daughter, Emi. Their lives of commitment and faith in the plan have helped me climb higher and journey further. Looking at that picture now, I can see very clearly the importance of living a virtuous life. Today I not only have one daughter, but five daughters-in-law and five little granddaughters to add to that picture. I feel a deep sense of responsibility to live an exemplary life of virtue and holiness before them. Even if you are the first in the line of generations to come, you too have a responsibility to those that will follow you.

Recently, I embarked on that same hike in the Tetons I spoke of earlier, only this time with my husband and a group of friends our same age. When we started, it was thrilling and easy, but before we arrived at our destination, we were exhausted and I knew I was in trouble. I was not as prepared for the hike physically as I had been when I hiked with the young women years before—and I had packed my equipment carelessly and taken too much. The weight of my pack began to make me weary and ready to give up. The others were also feeling the rigors of the altitude, the steep terrain, and heavy packs. My husband sensed this and hurried ahead. I felt abandoned. However, after about an hour I could see my husband descending the trail on the other side of the valley. He was running toward me. When he reached me, he took my pack, dried my tears, and led me to the

destination—a crystal clear lake surrounded by lofty pine trees. Then he turned around, went back down the trail, and did the same thing four more times for the other hikers. As I watched him, I was sorry I was so unprepared and even more sorry that I had so many extra things in my pack that had added to the weight he had to carry for me. But I was so grateful for his strength, for his unselfishness, for his preparation, and for his love.

As you climb the mountains of life, stay on the path of virtue. There will be others to help you—your parents, family members, bishops, advisers, and righteous friends of all ages. And if you are weary or take a wrong turn, change your direction and get back on the path of virtue. Always remember that the Savior is there for you. He will enable you to repent, strengthen you, lighten your burdens, dry your tears, comfort you, and continue to help you stay on the path.

The Savior is the perfect example of virtue. When Jesus walked the roads of the Holy Land, He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He healed the sick and caused the blind to see and raised the dead. “He taught the truths of eternity, the reality of our premortal existence, the purpose of our life on earth, and [our] potential [as] ... daughters of God in the life to come” (see “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2–3). One of my favorite scriptures says: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6).

I testify that this is true. He has not only marked the way, but He has even led me by the hand at times. “His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come” (“The Living Christ,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 3). I bear you my testimony that He lives! He will hear your prayers and guide your steps. Jesus Christ is our Exemplar and our Guide. Stay on the path! Be modest. Cleave to your covenants, and be worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. The Lord promises: “Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours” (D&C 78:18). Truly, I stand all amazed at “His matchless life and the *infinite virtue* of His great atoning sacrifice” (“The Living Christ,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2; emphasis added). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.