

Why?

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Today I feel somewhat like Jacob who once gave a speech on my chosen topic of morality and said to his audience: "It grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before ... many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God; And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul." (Jacob 2:7–8.)

It is much more enjoyable to be upbeat and speak of warm fuzzies than bring into a heart feelings of guilt. And yet, perhaps this is the reason I have chosen to speak on this subject early in your school year. My desire is that you will remain clean during this year and always. I have written this talk with the tender love of a parent. I have six children close to your ages and my desire is to help them and you keep on the path which leads to warm fuzzies and away from guilt, regrets, and miseries. I hope my approach to the subject is plain without being insensitive, and full of hope without condoning transgression. Most of all, it is my prayer that I can broaden your understanding of why the Lord feels so strongly about virtue.

I have entitled my remarks, Why? From parents, Church leaders, institute instructors, and others, we get, don't do this and don't do that. Lists of do's and don'ts appear in the scriptures and temple recommend books. I've always been one that wants to know why. I admire Adam for his response to the question, "Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?" which was "I know not, save the Lord commanded me" sss (Moses 5:6). However, I am the curious type and I just know if I were Adam and the Lord said, "Offer the firstlings of [your] flocks for an offering unto the Lord," I would have said, "Say what? You want me to kill the best of the flock and let it go to waste! Well, o.k., but I don't get it." I hope I would have been obedient, but I know that every time I did it I would be thinking, "This is strange."

On the wall of our kitchen is a picture of a hen talking to her chicks with the caption, "Because I'm the mommy, that's why." Parents don't always have time to explain why, and often children wouldn't understand if they were given the reason. Certainly this is true of our Heavenly Father's children on some issues. However, we have been given good, logical, and spiritual reasons to the vast majority of things we are asked or commanded to do. I'm going to give a few whys for your consideration. I might add that the Lord did give the reason for

sacrifice to Adam when He knew Adam would understand and appreciate it. We, too, can receive answers to our questions when we are worthy and ready.

I'd like to discuss why you should be living lives of purity now. Not just before your mission, just before your temple marriage, just before the birth of your first child, or just before death.

When I was in Primary, I used to observe missionaries giving their reports in sacrament meeting and I thought, "I can't wait until I have the priesthood so I can have spiritual experiences like that." When I was a deacon, I thought, "I can't wait until I get the Melchizedek Priesthood so I can have spiritual experiences like that." When I was twenty, I couldn't wait to get my mission call so I could have spiritual experiences. After my call, I couldn't wait to get on the train and head for Boston where I would be a missionary and have spiritual experiences. Guess what! I was the same guy who stepped off the train as the one who stepped on. Pay the price now!

Few of us question the necessity of living a pure life prior to dying because we know a judgment day lies ahead. However, life is full of milestones which require a purity of life before desired blessings can accrue to us. You've all heard the scripture regarding procrastination recorded in Alma 34. Let me paraphrase this scripture for the milestones of mission and marriage:

"[For behold, this day is the time for men and women to prepare for missions and temple marriage; behold this day is the day for men and women to perform their labors. Ye cannot say, when ye enter the MTC or kneel at the altar in the sealing room of the temple that I will repent, that I will return to God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for the same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time ye go into the MTC or temple, will have power to possess your body in the mission field or in your marriage.]" (See Alma 34:32, 34–35.)

The strongest counsel I can give a prospective missionary is to stay worthy. The second strongest counsel is to get yourself worthy before you enter the MTC. Make certain you are honest with your local priesthood leaders. I'll tell you what will happen if you aren't. The Spirit is so strong at the MTC that your guilt will be intense. You will go and talk to a branch president and he will send you to a General Authority, if the transgression is grievous. Then you get to go back to your local priesthood leaders and tell them that you weren't honest in your interviews, and then face your family and friends who have just given you a farewell. Please get rid of your bag of rocks before you enter the MTC. More importantly, stay clean. Don't acquire the rocks in the first place.

There is an attitude developing among our youth which is, "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow I go on my mission." You may repent of your mistakes, it is true. However, no one ever has and no one ever will escape the natural consequences of transgression. The Savior's atonement allows us to repent but repentance is painful and it takes time to heal. If you have not felt the pain, you have not fully repented. Please stay clean in order that you can

maximize your impact on those waiting to hear the gospel and minimize your guilt, tears, and regrets.

A few months ago I was asked to interview a young man who was guilty of a serious moral transgression. I asked the stake president how long ago it occurred and he said three weeks. I just about flew out of my chair. I said, "Are you seriously considering sending this young man on a mission?" He said, "Well, [he] has had a horrible childhood and we've worked very hard with him and his family. He has already received his call and the farewell was going to be next week. He feels horrible about the incident and I feel if we can get him into the mission field, the atmosphere will be conducive to his complete repentance and we just might save this boy." I couldn't believe my ears. I was closer to suggesting the stake president be released than I was to clearing the young man for a mission.

A mission is not a place for sinners to repent, but for calling sinners to repentance. Missionaries are not being sent on missions to gain a testimony, but to bear their testimonies. The experiences they encounter will increase their testimony but until they have one and are worthy to have the Spirit with them, their effectiveness is limited.

You prospective missionaries will be able to be so much more productive if your mission time is used bearing your testimony instead of gaining it. You will have special experiences on your mission that will make your testimony soar, but make sure you develop wings here and now.

All blessings are based upon obedience to the law upon which they are predicated. No one wants to go on a mission without a testimony and no one is going to have a continuous outpouring of the Spirit relative to testimony who is not living a pure life. Spiritual communication and impurity are mutually exclusive.

There is a common feeling among the youth that the only real discomfort or penalty for serious transgression is the pain and embarrassment attendant with confessing the transgression to their bishop. This is only the beginning. One cannot immediately have the Holy Ghost as a constant companion by walking into the bishop's office, confessing a sin, and walking out again. None of us believe in deathbed repentance. Why do so many of us accept "mission bed" repentance. It matters little that a prospective missionary learns his or her discussions well and is the best in the class on the commitment pattern, gaining a person's trust, and all the other techniques. They are hollow without the Spirit. You may learn how to be a good used car salesman without the Spirit but without the Spirit, you shall not teach. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said:

"Logic and reason lead truth seekers along the path to a testimony, and they are aids in strengthening the revealed assurances of which a testimony is composed. But the actual sure knowledge which constitutes 'the testimony of Jesus' must come by 'the spirit of prophecy.' This is received when the Holy Spirit speaks to the spirit within men; it comes when the whisperings of the still small voice are heard by the inner man. Receipt of a testimony is accompanied by a feeling of calm, unwavering certainty. Those who have it can use logic and

reason in defending their positions and in bearing their testimonies, but it is the prompting of the Spirit rather than reason alone that is the true foundation upon which the testimony rests." (Mormon Doctrine, pp. 785–786.)

[p. 14] If you are going to kindle a fire of testimony within the breasts of investigators, your own torch must be burning. Impurity douses the fire of your torch just as surely as if it were dunked in a pool of water.

Why keep yourselves clean prior to serving a mission? It is as simple as this, "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." (D&C 130:20–21.)

A bishop, stake president, and General Authority may clear you to go on a mission, but the ultimate peace and reassurance of forgiveness can only come from our Heavenly Father. Priesthood leaders—even General Authorities—can be deceived by prospective missionaries who are not being completely honest (although I wouldn't count on it). However, the Lord and the Spirit of the Holy Ghost cannot be fooled and the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle.

I have been using a mission as an example of why purity is important. However, I assume it goes without saying there is a bigger reason for keeping morally clean than being able to go on a mission. The overriding reason is to make certain you are able to continue your spiritual growth and keep the lines of revelation between you and your Father in Heaven open.

I have spoken very plainly to you and wish to say one more thing in plainness in order that it cannot be misunderstood. I know some of our youth "draw the line" in different places relative to physical relationships, and have the uncanny ability to rationalize and feel comfortable with where they have drawn the line. The phrases "going all the way," "heavy petting," and "light petting" are often used.

Can I give you an analogy of what these statements mean to me? Spiritually speaking, going all the way is like allowing someone to put your feet in cement and dropping you into a pool of water that is over your head. Heavy petting is the same, except that the water comes only to the top of your eyebrows. Light petting is the same except the water comes just below eye level. You're spiritually drowning in all cases. I guess to carry the analogy one step further, necking brings the water level only to your neck but in the event of a passionate storm, a tidal wave may bring about your spiritual demise. You need to learn the early warning signs of a storm and more importantly, heed them. "I just got carried away" or "I guess I got in over my head" are lame excuses.

Whose responsibility is it to "draw the line" well within safe limits? It is the responsibility of both of you. However, young men of the royal priesthood, in my opinion you have the primary obligation. Any young man who "takes a girl as far as she will go" rather than drawing his own safety line is not honoring his priesthood. Any young man who "can't

resist" the advances of a young woman is weak to say the least. To argue that one cannot control a biological impulse is to blame the Creator who gave it to you. No person is tempted beyond his or her endurance. To you young men I repeat the words of President Benson, "Arise, and be men." For those of you who have gotten in over your head, yes, there is a way back, but this talk is not on repentance, it is on steering clear of anything which will result in the need to repent. I think the pendulum has swung too far in our talking repentance rather than prevention. A false notion has arisen among you which is this: "It's easier to repent than to resist." That is a fallacy. Anyone who has truly repented will tell you it was not easy and they would give anything to turn the clock back and resist rather than repent.

A few months ago I interviewed a young man and woman your age who had committed a serious transgression. They knew it was wrong and were going through the process of repentance. I know the young man quite well, or at least I thought I did. He was honest, hard working, and dependable. He doesn't smoke, drink, or cuss. He would never think of stealing. He is the kind of young man parents watch at the sacrament table and dream of him asking their daughter out. Although I don't know the young woman as well, she has a similar demeanor. In the course of the conversation they asked a sincere question. It was not asked with any tone of self-justification, or rationalization. I respected them for asking an honest question. It went something like this: "We've been told what we have done is wrong and we know in our hearts that it is wrong. We have also been taught that it is next to murder in its seriousness. We admit it is wrong, but putting it next to murder, well we don't understand. It just doesn't seem like anything even in the same league, let alone the same ball park."

In the first part of this talk I discussed why it is futile to expect to have the Spirit with us when we are involved in serious transgression. I used a mission as an example. I would like to spend the balance of my time on why immorality is such a serious transgression.

There are two events similar in nature which the Lord desires to have left in His hands, not ours. The two events are birth and death. "Thou shalt not murder" is a commandment given with great penalties to those who break it. No person on earth has the right to take the life of another. To do so sends the victim to his or her eternal home prematurely. In a similar vein, no person on earth has the right to bring spirits to the earth prematurely. God gave man and woman the godly power to procreate, to become partners in creating the greatest of all creations, a human being. However, He has placed limits on the use of these powers. It is a sacred gift to be used only in the confines of marriage—where a spirit can come and live with a mother and father who are physically, emotionally, and spiritually ready to provide that child with a fair chance. To use those powers outside of marriage defies God's law and could result in bringing a spirit to earth prematurely. Thus, we see heavy penalties applied to anyone who sends a spirit home prematurely through murder and also anyone who tampers with those sacred creative powers and risks the possibility of bringing a spirit into the world prematurely. Single parents are on the increase, either through illegitimacy or divorce. We are now and we will in the future reap the whirlwind.

This is one reason immorality is a sin next to murder. However, it is only a reason and not the only reason. There is another more subtle reason which to me is more profound. It has to

do with the eternal progress of the two partners involved irrespective of the procreative power.

I trust you are all looking forward to a temple marriage. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read: "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it." (D&C 131:1-3.)

Why can't he obtain it? It's not just because he didn't obey a celestial commandment. It's because he didn't become a celestial being. There is a limit to our spiritual development as long as we are single. There is a spiritual development which can only be obtained when a man and a woman join their incomplete selves into a complete couple through celestial marriage. Men and women can accomplish marvelous things alone. However, they are incomplete until united physically, emotionally, psychologically, and most importantly, spiritually. Also when men and women are joined together by anything short of the temple sealing, there is a limit to their progress no matter how compatible they are. Complete exaltation can only be obtained together. Just as conception requires the union of male and female produced cells, perfection requires the union of male and female spiritual matter.

We are too quick to place, as the overriding reason for male and female eternal relationships, the ability to bear children. Remember the Father did not say, "It is not good for man not to be able to have children." The Father said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). I believe the Father's statement,

"It is not good that man should be alone" had much deeper meaning than the obvious biological implications. It also went further than providing Adam with "company." The physical relationship within the bounds of marriage is one of several relationships in marriage which brings a couple together and helps to make them one.

The fact is that it is not just physical. The world has tried to separate the physical from other aspects of a relationship between male and female. The world has gone crazy with "making love" and seems to have forgotten how to "express love." We cannot separate emotional, physical, and spiritual love. All are necessary in building a celestial relationship.

One of the traps soon-to-be engaged or engaged couples fall into is this: "Well, after all, we are going to be married anyway so it's not so serious as if we were just dating." First, the side of the roads are cluttered with fallen men and women who lost their virtue to someone they thought they would be marrying anyway. Secondly, until marriage, certain things are forbidden. They are forbidden until after the marriage vows.

Another dangerous, if not lethal, line is drawn by some married persons. They rationalize emotional relationships with individuals other than their spouse by saying, "We didn't engage in anything physical." How ridiculous to think the Spirit will celestialize a marriage relationship and the individuals within that relationship when they have committed emotional adultery.

I would like to go back to the importance of living virtuous lives now—not just before mission, marriage, or death. I sit on the Missionary Executive Council and, consequently, review the names of elders and sisters who are sent home early due to immoral behavior. It is noteworthy that the majority of those who get into trouble on their missions had problems prior to their missions. I believe we would find a similar correlation with husbands and wives who are untrue to each other in marriage. My opinion is there would be a high correlation with those who fall in marriage to those who fall prior to marriage. Why increase your odds? Build a spiritual immunity now.

Ask yourself this question: When I get married, am I going to be faithful to my husband/wife? It seems incomprehensible to you that you would cheat on your spouse, right? Now ask yourself another question: Should I be faithful to my future husband or wife even before I know who he or she is? I'm sure each one of you hopes your future spouse is being true to you now, and is saving those things reserved for marriage for you.

In order to reach the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, a person must do more than have a temple marriage—they must develop a celestial relationship. As a man and woman grow spiritually, the Holy Ghost celestializes not only their individual spirits, but the spiritual relationship of the couple until they become a god and goddess.

There is a certain degree of personal glory one cannot obtain without the spiritual association of male and female in marriage. Infidelity in marriage and prior to marriage can delay, if not cancel, godhood. This is why morality is such an important commandment. Can anything impede spiritual growth more to a single person or be more damaging to a celestial relationship after marriage? Inappropriate relationships violate more than a physical law. Immorality violates an emotional and spiritual relationship with a spouse whether committed prior or subsequent to marriage. It also violates a relationship with God, thereby clogging the channel of revelation. Immorality sets up a barrier which cannot be penetrated by the Holy Ghost.

The most sacred relationship in life—husband and wife, priest and priestess, god and goddess—should be built on a solid foundation. This is why purity and fidelity before and during marriage is so important.

If Satan can keep husbands and wives from developing celestial relationships, that alone can keep them from godhood. No wonder he works so hard on that one issue of morality. More lives have been ruined by immorality than all the wars ever fought or murders committed. The [effects] of dysfunctional families are handed down from generation to generation.

Don't deprive yourself, your spouse, and your children the heritage they deserve—that of a celestial relationship between husband and wife, and parents and children right here on earth. You are building or tearing down a celestial relationship by your actions now.