

Episode 10

Stories from General Young Women Meetings

VIRTUE

NARRATOR: The young women program of the church includes a set of eight values used to help focus on living good lives. These values are: faith, divine nature, individual worth, knowledge, choice and accountability, good works, integrity and virtue. This is stories from General Young Women Meetings. In this episode, we'll be sharing stories about some of these values. Sister Janette Hales Beckham gives an appropriate introduction taken from the 1997 meeting General Young Women Meeting.

(President Janette Hales Beckham, April 1997 General Young Women Meeting)

Many years ago when I was attending a Young Women camp, I met with the young women and their leaders early one morning in a wooded area they called their sacred grove. As I looked into their faces, I realized I had been given a wonderful blessing that has remained with me. I can see divine nature. I look into your faces and see what Heavenly Father sees--your divine potential. Be an example of the believers. Stand as a witness of God as you move forward in faith.

NARRATOR: In the 2007 General Young Women Meeting, Susan W. Tanner tells us how she was reminded of her divine nature.

(Susan W. Tanner, April 2007, General Young Women Meeting)

When I was called to serve you, the young women of this Church, I knew I had to behave appropriately. One day one of my daughters got a ticket for parking her car on the street with an expired registration sticker. I took matters into my own hands and went marching into the city government building to explain that the registration papers were currently on their way to us through the mail. As I walked resolutely through the door, someone said to me, "I know who you are." That stopped me and reminded me that I also needed to remember who I am—not just the Young Women general president, but most especially a daughter of God.

NARRATOR: When we are reminded that we are children of our Heavenly Father, it may change the way we react to a situation! In the 1999 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Carol B. Thomas provides an example.

(Carol B. Thomas, April 1999 General Young Women Meeting)

A Laurel from Arizona writes: "It was October and our high school homecoming was fast approaching, but I was only 15 and a half when a guy asked me to the dance. I thought about saying yes and meeting him at the dance. My parents wouldn't know. But then I realized it didn't matter that my parents didn't know--Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ always know, and they are the ones who really count. I didn't go to the dance. Instead I had my girlfriends over. I felt so happy and free and full of life" (letter in possession of Young Women office).

NARRATOR:

A church publication, *For Strength of Youth* explains many gospel principles and outlines behavioral standards for young men and young women. In the 1997 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Janette Hales Beckham tells about a young man who set an example which in turn, affected his sister.

(President Janette Hales Beckham, April 1997 General Young Women Meeting)

One young woman said, "My brother decided to follow the counsel of the prophet [when he began dating] to date . . . no one exclusively." He recognized that many youth live in an atmosphere where it seems that almost everyone is pairing off and dating. She added, "He was extremely creative and careful to maintain high standards and keep good company. This may seem a small thing, but it impressed me and helped me to do the same thing as I began dating. When you are promoting righteousness, you're being a hero in someone else's life."

NARRATOR:

Modesty is a result of all the young women values. Sister Carol B. Thomas spoke on the importance of modesty in her 1999 General Young Women Meeting address.

(Carol B. Thomas, April 1999 General Young Women Meeting)

One of the hardest things for many of you is modesty. How can we apply the spiritual power of our baptism to the principle of modesty? We hope one of the things that makes you different from the world is the way you dress. Marcie Matthews, a Laurel from Chicago, Illinois, shares her story:

"1998 was a year that I was able to see the results of many Young Women lessons, talks, and advice come into play. I am an average Mormon girl. Being able to keep my life this steady and strong has not been easy. I make goals all the time to help strengthen my testimony and my standards.

"Recently we had a Mutual activity on the importance of modesty. Every lesson before I felt like I was a modest dresser, but I knew there was still something I could change--my shorts and the length of my skirts. It was the one weakness that I knew I had but had placed far behind in my head. Everyone wore short shorts, Daisy Dukes, and miniskirts, and I had bought mine with my own money. Then I heard the lesson on modesty. I went home wanting to go straight to my closet and throw away everything that was not modest so it wouldn't be there to tempt me. After, I told my parents. I guess I was looking for them to tell me that there was no problem in the way I dressed and then let me go.

"Later that night my dad told me he was proud of me and that he would like to buy me a couple of knee-length dresses for church. The next step was to go through all my clothes and give away everything. It was hard for me to part with my favorite skirts and the shorts that I loved so much, but I did. *You will never see me in short shorts or short skirts again.*

"I have never felt better about myself. I love being able to walk into the temple and church and feel like I am a child of God and am representing Him . . . by the clothes that I wear.

"I challenge every young woman to take this step. It will help you find out who you are and what you stand for. When we have to give up something that is a part of us, the blessings will pour in more than you can imagine" (letter in possession of Young Women office).

Marcie's great example epitomizes our Young Women theme. You know, the part that says, "We stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things"--and in all *prom dresses*.

NARRATOR:

How we dress says something about who we are and what we stand for. In the 2002 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Margaret D. Nadauld explains a young man's perspective on a modest prom dress.

(Margaret D. Nadauld, April 2002 General Young Women Meeting)

You may know that I am the mother of seven sons. I know boys. It has been an exciting life at our house! I've learned a lot from them and from their friends, both boys and girls, and I could tell you a few of their secrets. Maybe I could just share one and hope that I won't get in trouble. This is it: boys hate to be embarrassed. I remember the time a young man I know had a date for the prom. He brought her to our house before the dance so we could take pictures. When they got there he came into the kitchen, where I was looking for the camera, and said: "Wait until you see my date's dress. She looks so beautiful!" This boy had never said anything like that before so I could hardly wait to see what he meant.

When I saw her I understood; she was lovely. The dress she was wearing was beautiful; I learned that she and her mother had searched everywhere for it. When they finally found this dress, they knew it would be perfect with some added fabric and finishing touches to meet their high standards.

All their efforts were rewarded because she was absolutely radiant this night, but it was more than the dress that made her shine. It was her quiet confidence. As I looked at her, I was reminded of the scripture, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong." Where did this confidence that she had come from? I noticed that this young woman could focus on others because she was not worried about how she looked. She had taken care of that detail weeks before. The young man she was with felt comfortable and safe and happy when he was with her because her dress was not revealing. It was modest in every way, and this made her confident and happy. And that's appealing. He wasn't embarrassed by her; he was proud of her.

NARRATOR:

In the 2009 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Mary N. Cook tells about a young woman in Nigeria who had her own method of keeping high standards.

(Mary N. Cook, April 2009, General Young Women Meeting)

Let me tell you about one shining example named Hillary, a Beehive living in Lagos, Nigeria. Some of her classmates were mocking her standards, particularly her modest clothing. She made the decision to always carry two small copies of *For the Strength of Youth* with her. When someone gives her a bad time, she hands them one of the copies to

keep and explains the standards and why she follows them. The other copy she keeps as her personal reminder to be obedient to the standards.

We must unite and help one another fill our lives with those things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report” (Articles of Faith 1:13).

NARRATOR:

In the same talk, Sister Cook relates a tender experience about a letter received from her own mother.

(Mary N. Cook, April 2009, General Young Women Meeting)

When I was away from home attending the university, I received a letter on Mother’s Day from my own mother recounting this tender experience:

“This Mother’s Day is extra special because I am thinking now that I have been ‘Mother’ to you for 21 years, and what a privilege it has been. We felt you were special to us. We named you Mary. We wanted you to remain pure and kind, as the name implies.

“Your aunt with the same name loved you very, very much and made you a beautiful, tiny dress to be blessed in, [sewn] mostly by hand, so that you could have a name in the very first sacrament meeting after you were brought home—still so very tiny.”

As I read this letter, I realized my mother’s greatest hope was that I remain pure and virtuous. Virtue “is a pattern of thought and behavior based on high moral standards” (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], 118). My mother knew that life would be difficult, and that to remain virtuous would be a lifelong challenge. She wanted me to have the blessings of the gospel to guide me and help me meet that challenge. You, my dear young women, have already made many good choices. Now you must establish patterns of virtue that will keep you on this path throughout your life. Seek out “example[s] of the believers” (1 Timothy 4:12) who can be at your side to support and help you live a life of virtue.

NARRATOR:

In the 2008 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Elaine S. Dalton tells us about a young man who stood up for his standards in an awkward situation.

(Elaine S. Dalton, April 2008, General Young Women Meeting)

A young man I know well was elected to be the student body president at a large university. The university sent him to a leadership seminar where student leaders from across the United States gathered in Chicago, Illinois, to be trained and educated. They participated in an initial game outdoors on the college campus so that they could become acquainted with each other. The students were presented with current issues facing today’s youth and were asked to take a position. In response to the issue presented, they were directed to run to several trees in the grassy area marked “strongly agree,” “partially agree,” “strongly disagree,” or “mildly disagree.”

Toward the end of this exercise, the leader asked, “Do you believe in premarital sex?” Without hesitation, this young man ran to the tree marked “strongly disagree.” To his amazement, he was the only one there! All the other student leaders were laughing and pointing at him and saying, “Oh, Jess, you are so funny. We all know you’re not really

serious.” At that moment Jess said he knew exactly what he must do and so he loudly declared, “I’m not funny. I’m serious!” There was a stunned silence, and then the group dispersed, leaving Jess standing alone by the tree. He felt out of place and yes, weird. But he wasn’t weird. He was right. And he was not alone. During the week, many of the student leaders came to him privately and said that they wished they had known years earlier what he knew. Jess later said, “It was easy because I knew that I represented not only the university but my family, the Church, and the Savior.”

A testimony that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer made Jess firm and quick to respond. You can gain that same confidence as you pray daily, search for answers in your scriptures, and obey the commandments. As you sincerely seek to gain a testimony, the knowledge that will come through the Holy Ghost will assist you with your challenges, with questions, and with living the standards. And it will be easy for you also to commit to be steadfast and immovable at all times and in all things and in all places.

NARRATOR:

In an address given in the 2003 General Young Women Meeting, President James E. Faust gave advice on avoiding extremes to show what we really stand for.

(President James E. Faust, April 2003 General Young Women Meeting)

It is well to avoid extremes in dress, hairstyles, makeup, conduct, speech, and music. Extremes may attract the attention of some, but they are more likely to turn off those you really want to impress.

When I was a young man, my friends and I went to an amusement park, where we rode the flying saucer. It was shaped something like an upside-down plate that went round and round. Most of us tried to get to the middle so we wouldn't be thrown off by the centrifugal force as the saucer picked up speed. Sometimes those on the edge would grab a friend who was closer to the middle, but that would pull them both completely off the saucer. I soon recognized that the centrifugal force was far less powerful in the middle. I was quite safe in the center even though the saucer was still spinning. But it was risky when someone on the fringe latched on to me. I learned that safety comes from staying close to the center.

NARRATOR:

Living high standards may not always be a *popular* choice, but it's always the *right* choice. Sister Sharon G. Larsen shared an example in a talk given at the 2002 General Young Women Meeting.

(Sharon G. Larsen, April 2002 General Young Women Meeting)

Heather told us about a time she had been invited to a party with the "popular" people of the school. As she walked in the door, the music that was blasting through the house hit her spirit. She felt sick inside. Then friends started disappearing into darkened rooms. Heather said: "At the party I soon realized I had to make a choice: either these people or my standards. I couldn't have both. I knew I did not want the words I was hearing or the movie scenes to contaminate my thoughts, no matter how popular these people were. I knew I did not belong there. As I was waiting for my mother to come and get me, I looked out the window in the darkened night, and there shining on the hill like a beacon

was the temple. It was like the Lord was reassuring me that I was doing the right thing" (used by permission; name has been changed).

NARRATOR:

Always making the right choice is sometimes called integrity. We can expect blessings from making the right choice. In the 2000 General Young Women Meeting, Sister Carol B. Thomas expressed her feelings about integrity.

(Carol B. Thomas, April 2000 General Young Women Meeting)

One summer when I was 16, I remember sitting down and writing in my journal all the qualities I wanted in a future husband--testimony, good looks, sense of humor, money, education. I thought these were all good qualities. But when my oldest daughter, Becky, was 16, she came to me and asked, "What is the most important quality to look for in a husband?" By then I had been married for many years. I knew the answer to that question. I believe the most important quality we can possess is integrity. How I love the value of integrity!

What is this most important principle? Integrity means to *do* what you say you will do; you keep promises to yourself. The Young Women program defines integrity as: "I will have the moral courage to make my actions consistent with my knowledge of right and wrong."

NARRATOR:

In the same meeting sister. Thomas shares several examples of young women who demonstrated the value of integrity.

(Carol B. Thomas, April 2000 General Young Women Meeting)

Let's look at a few examples of young women who are learning to love integrity. They have chosen to do what is right regardless of the circumstances. A young woman named Brooke writes:

"This past summer I had the opportunity of attending a leadership conference. It only took a couple of hours to find out that the LDS kids were in the minority there. I ended up [rooming] with two girls who were very nice but definitely didn't have the same standards. At night when I read my scriptures they stared at me like I was some kind of weirdo. While they were talking about their drinking parties, I was talking about [parties] with punch and cookies. They laughed but were always curious.

"Although I was scared sometimes, I never failed to stand up for what I believe in. At the end of the conference, one of my roommates [said], 'I guess Mormons can be cool,' and that she would think about our religion and maybe even learn about it. I [learned] that I could make a difference by simply standing up for what I believe."

Cari shares this experience:

"I have always known what was right, but I thought I could choose my own path. After being on that path, I started to feel lost and confused. Finally I prayed with a humble heart and asked Heavenly Father what I should do. The first step was to change friends. That wasn't easy, being in the 'popular' group. But I took the challenge and did just that.

"We liked to hang out on the weekend and watch R-rated movies. I had made up my mind never to watch R movies again. It was the beginning of a new school year, and a guy asked me to watch a movie. I told him that I didn't watch rated R movies. He said, 'That's cool, we can watch a different one.' This has happened more than once. I have left parties, sat home on weekends, and turned down [dates] because I don't watch R-rated movies. This has been the greatest blessing in my life. Now it's easier for me to stand up for what I believe in many other ways."

Kristen, a Laurel, writes:

"I try to stand as a witness of God every day. It's the little things--being nice to everyone I talk with, not laughing at a crude joke, not gossiping about someone, being patient. Sometimes it's these small things that are the hardest to do, . . . but I constantly strive to do better. Scripture study and prayer have given me power--the courage to stand and share with the Savior my testimony of Him. The scriptures give me the power to change for the better."

Now listen to Salina's letter:

"Last year in seminary we were taught about Joseph Smith. Towards the end of the year, we had a spiritual lesson that has impacted the rest of my life. Through all of his experiences, he never once failed to stand as a witness.

"As I sat listening, I asked myself over and over if I could be that strong. My testimony was strengthened that day as the Spirit manifested to me that the Church was true and Joseph Smith was a true prophet. If I was faced with trials as he was, with the Lord's help I could be just as strong. So I made a commitment that day that I would always stand as a witness. If Joseph Smith could do it, so can I!"

These young women are learning the value of integrity. There is a common thread which runs through all of these stories. Do you recognize it? You've heard it a thousand times before. Reading your scriptures and saying your prayers invites the Spirit to be with you.

NARRATOR:

This collection concludes with another example of honesty and integrity given by President James E. Faust during the 2003 General Young Women Meeting.

(President James E. Faust, April 2003 General Young Women Meeting)

A young woman on a university volleyball team tells of the time when she and her friend Muki were playing together in a championship match:

" I remember it being a close game. . . . Gracie [on our opponents' team] rounded her approach, jumped, and smacked the ball as hard as she could. . . . The line judges signaled out, and the head official raised his finger to show a point for [our team]. We began giving our usual high fives when we noticed that Muki was hand-motioning to the official that she touched the ball on her block. Muki was calling her own touch. The line judges . . . were . . . signaling out, [indicating] that there was no touch.

" The quiet, withdrawn Muki had showed an act of integrity and honesty like I had never seen before. Gracie Shute was so impressed that she talked with Muki after the match. . . . Muki later gave Gracie a Book of Mormon. I don't know if Gracie has read the book . . . , but I do know that Gracie was touched by Muki's example, as we all were."³

You cannot be honest with others unless you are honest with yourself.

NARRATOR:

The young women of the church memorize and frequently repeat what is known as the young women theme. It concludes: "we believe as we come to accept and act upon these values, we will be prepared to strengthen home and family, make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the temple, and enjoy the blessings of exaltation." For Latter-day Saint youth, *this* is what it's all about! Thanks for listening to this episode of stories from the General Young Women Meetings on the Mormon Channel. Visit radio.lds.org for more information. Tell your friends about us!