In the Book of Mormon, Korihor taught the people of Zarahemla that there were no absolute moral standards, only “foolish traditions … which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so” (Alma 30:14, 16). In his devilish line of reasoning, people might pursue any earthly gratification without fear of punishment or guilt.

The Korihors of today use similar rhetoric in trying to convince us that we may live however we choose and that there will be no serious consequences. This is one of the perennial lies that Satan uses to deceive the children of God.

There should be no doubt in the minds of Latter-day Saints, however, about the moral cleanliness our Heavenly Father expects of us. President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded us: “In this dispensation the Lord reiterated the commandment given at Sinai when He said, ‘Thou shalt not … commit adultery, … nor do anything like unto it’ (D&C 59:6; emphasis added). From the beginning of time, the Lord has set a clear and unmistakable standard of sexual purity. … That standard is the law of chastity. It is the same for all … for men and women … old and young … rich and poor.”

Unfortunately, our society not only tolerates immorality but commonly celebrates it! We can undoubtedly expect the swamp of sin we now see—in which there are no moral absolutes—to continue growing and swallowing up those who insist on loitering near its edges or who momentarily forget their eternal worth. While Korihor and his ilk entice people ever nearer to the swamp, there are several important reasons to stay morally clean.

1. **Moral purity will help you have the Spirit of the Lord constantly.**

   Jesus counseled his disciples: “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you” (JST, Luke 14:28). Being settled on staying morally clean brings us peace in today’s world. But when we are not settled on being obedient, we can easily become the prey of evil.

   The personal and spiritual devastation that follows succumbing to immorality has been illustrated throughout the scriptures (see, for example, 2 Sam. 13:1–22; Alma 39, Alma 41, Alma 42). The eternal consequences of moral sin are tragic. Anyone choosing to embrace immoral thoughts and deeds instead of hearkening to the Savior’s commandments is to be barred from his kingdom (see Gal. 5:16–21, 1 Ne. 15:33–34). For this reason, parents are admonished to teach their children, both by precept and example, how to make correct moral choices. The standards that Latter-day Saints are
to live and to teach have been plainly stated by the First Presidency:

“Because sexual intimacy is so sacred, the Lord requires self-control and purity before marriage as well as full fidelity after marriage. Never treat your date [or spouse] as an object to be used for your own lustful desires or ego. …

“The Lord specifically forbids certain behaviors, including all sexual relations before marriage, petting, sex perversion (such as homosexuality, rape, and incest), masturbation, or preoccupation with sex in thought, speech, or action.” 2

Our character is shaped by what our mind is centered on, what our heart truly desires. A noble character comes through right choices as we do what the Lord (not the Korihors of our day) directs. He promises his Spirit to the obedient: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. …

“The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion” (D&C 121:45–46).

2. Purity before marriage creates trust.

In marriage, infidelity often dooms a relationship and leads to the spiritual destruction of the one who has been unfaithful. Unchastity before marriage naturally undermines the confidence of a potential partner, raising unsettling emotional and physical concerns—such as the possibility of dangerous diseases—along with the basic question of trustworthiness.

Marital fidelity begins not with the making of the vows on the day of the wedding, but in our hearts long before we reach the altar.

One woman recalled that she and her husband-to-be had deceived themselves into believing that living together before marriage would strengthen their love. “What friends told us would be a trust-building experience actually devastated our relationship,” she said. After their marriage, doubts began to surface. Knowing that they each had been willing to live with someone before marriage, how could they trust each other fully?

Doubt often leads to mistrust, mistrust to contention, and contention to separation and divorce, as in this case. By contrast, moral cleanliness inspires trust, confidence, and peace.

3. Moral cleanliness keeps society from destruction.

“Whatever we decide to do between ourselves is nobody else’s business. What we do in the privacy of our own lives doesn’t affect others.”

This common justification for immorality is one of the adversary’s most blatant lies. It is like saying, “We’ll pollute the air with any dangerous substance we want. If you don’t like it, don’t breathe.” However, an individual’s actions always affect others with the disappointment and hurt that come to family, friends, and God. And private behavior does affect public morality. Each individual represents a single thread in the fabric of society. If the majority of the strands are weak and rotting away,
how can we expect the cloth of civilization to remain whole, strong, durable?

President Spencer W. Kimball warned, “The earth cannot justify nor continue its life without marriage and the family. Sex without marriage, for all people, young or older, is an abomination to the Lord, and it is most unfortunate that many people have blinded their eyes to these great truths.” 3

Even the smallest decisions to do the right thing have, potentially, a large positive impact on other individuals, members of the extended family, classmates, society, and even future posterity (see Deut. 11:27). Our Heavenly Father gave us agency so that by making correct choices we could rise to a fulness of freedom from sin, sorrow, and heartache—and to a fulness of life (see Moro. 7:15; 2 Ne. 2:11; D&C 29:39).

One young engaged couple learned a lasting lesson about how listening to the Spirit could help them make correct choices. Before their marriage, they sometimes needed time alone to talk, away from her roommates or the relatives with whom he lived. One night the couple found an attractive spot half a mile or so off a main highway, next to a lightly traveled road that ran by the edge of a lake. There was nothing but talk on their minds. Only a few seconds after he turned off the engine of his car, however, they both felt a strong witness of the Spirit that they should not stay there. He started the car and they drove back to a more public area. “We’ve never learned the reason why we were supposed to leave that place,” he says, “but we’ve always been glad that we obeyed the prompting. Whatever else it may have meant, it helped us learn to recognize the voice of the Spirit as we’ve sought direction in our marriage and our individual lives.”

4. Moral weakness can be conquered only with the Lord’s help.

The bishop was puzzled. A young man tempted by homosexuality was following his counsel about prayer, fasting, scripture study, Church involvement, and self-mastery but had found a group therapy session disturbing. No guidance had been offered, the young man said, and the detailed, drawn-out discussion of the problem was like “adding fuel to the fire I’ve been trying to put out.” In the past, other ward members had been strengthened by therapy sessions. What was the difference?

Pondering the problem during the week, the bishop was led to these words by Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve: “The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior.” 4 He also read this statement by President Benson: “The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. … Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.” 5

Feeling the direction of the Spirit, the bishop typed up every statement about rising above homosexuality that he could find in general conference talks over the past thirty years, then asked the young man to read these as part of his gospel study. A week later, the young man told him, “Bishop, the strength and power of those words gave me the will to go forward and a desire to do better. A witness has come to me this week that I can do it.”

The bishop learned from this experience that there is no substitute for the power of the Savior in helping people turn from sin, and that to change lives, counseling must focus on applying principles
of the gospel rather than dwelling on the sin.

The Savior commands us to be holy, not worldly. Through his mortal mission and atoning sacrifice, he completely understands every trial, every temptation, every infirmity and sin that challenge us (see Alma 7:11–13). We are not alone in our trials. Those wrestling with temptation have the assurance that they can endure to the end with integrity intact because of the strength and grace with which the Savior can empower and lift us. He is our advocate and eternal friend, “who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1).

5. Staying morally clean is the celestial standard.

Sometimes we limit our own progress by thinking of minimum expectations as maximum goals. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” is the minimum expectation the Lord has of our conduct towards each other. The higher, celestial law is: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.

“And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out” (D&C 42:22–23; D&C 63:16).

A story from the apocryphal writings of the Jewish people that were not included in the Hebrew Bible is of particular value here. It is the “History of Susanna,” in which we are also introduced to the young prophet Daniel. Susanna was a chaste, God-fearing woman of great beauty. Two elderly judges of Israel who desired her in their wicked hearts surprised Susanna alone and offered her a painful choice: submit to them or defend herself against their concocted story of a fictitious lover and an adulterous tryst. She knew that the penalty for the latter would be death and that the two men might overpower her if she did not submit. But, she said, “I prefer to fall innocent into your power than to sin in the eyes of the Lord.” Then she cried out for help.

When help came, the two men told their ugly story, and Susanna was eventually condemned to death. But God heard this righteous woman’s prayer and inspired Daniel to expose the two conspirators. The death sentence that had been pronounced upon Susanna was inflicted upon them instead.

Just as in the case of the two corrupt leaders, the judgments of the Lord will in the end fall on those who victimize others, then try to cover their own moral sins.

6. Moral purity may not be easy, but it is always worth it.

The Lord has told us, “Ye must practise virtue and holiness before me continually” (D&C 46:33). Whether we are single or married, practicing virtue requires us to be careful about emotional influences, physical surroundings, and activities in our lives. Most young Latter-day Saints have been taught certain cautions on dating: avoid going into an unoccupied home or apartment together, avoid unwholesome movies and activities, and so forth. Likewise, most married people will know—if they listen, the Spirit will certainly confirm this—that it is wise to avoid being alone with or seeking a sympathetic ear (especially about marital problems) from members of the opposite sex to whom they are not married. There is safety in maintaining boundaries like these.
As one bishop counseled the youth in his ward: “Do not think that you are the exception to these guidelines. I have never yet interviewed a morally transgressing young person who did not ignore several of these guidelines. Rules and commandments free you from the heartache and weight of sin.”

The scriptures teach: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). In obeying this counsel, we fulfill the will of our Father. President Benson testified that “the Lord delights in the chastity of His children (see Jacob 2:28). Do you hear that, my brothers and sisters? The Lord is not just pleased when we are chaste. He delights in chastity.”

Satan, on the other hand, seeks the misery of each soul, and he knows that immorality is a quick way to achieve it. But each of us has the power to decide what to do when temptations come. Those Latter-day Saints who desire above all else to keep the commandments of God, who repent of the things they do which are wrong and with faith redirect their lives in righteousness, eventually will find themselves in the celestial kingdom, by the grace of God.

“And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41).

*W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery,” Ensign, July 1994, 43*

**Notes**


2. “Sexual Purity,” For the Strength of Youth (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990), pp. 14–15. Additional helps in teaching young people about intimacy in all of its aspects can be found in A Parent’s Guide (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985).


