

Your Life Belongs to

YOU

— Not Your Followers

Social media doesn't have to be a source of regret. We just need to have boundaries.

By Chakell Wardleigh Herbert

Church Magazines

"How embarrassing . . ."

"Why did anybody even need to know that?!"

"Thank heavens nobody remembers this . . ."

I don't know about you, but when I'm scrolling through my past social media posts, I often cringe at the amount of sharing I once did. And the thoughts above usually follow. (Thanks, Facebook Memories, for the uncalled-for reminders.)

Thankfully, I've learned a little something about boundaries since I was a social media guinea pig.

Boundaries are limits we set for ourselves, and they are necessary to keep us mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy. Unfortunately, they are crossed frequently on social media. And often, we are the ones crossing our *own* lines and suffering from

the repercussions (sometimes without even realizing right away).

Regardless, we can protect our present and future selves and learn to share appropriately on social media by first identifying our potentially unhealthy social media habits.

Know the Difference between Vulnerability and Oversharing

Vulnerability can be a way for us "to bear one another's burdens" (Mosiah 18:8).

But here's the thing: there's a difference between vulnerability and oversharing. Social science researcher Brené Brown explains that "vulnerability is based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust. It's not oversharing, it's not purging, it's not indiscriminate disclosure, and it's not celebrity-style social media information dumps. Vulnerability



is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. . . .

“Vulnerability without boundaries leads to disconnection, distrust, and disengagement.”¹

So, before you post on social media, try asking yourself these questions to determine your motives:

- Why am I sharing this? Am I wanting to help others with my insight and experiences? Or am I actually looking for pity, attention, or somewhere to vent?
- Do *all* of my followers need to know about this intimate detail of my life?
- What am I feeling right now? Am I feeling peaceful? Or frustrated and angry?
- How does posting things like this usually make me feel afterward? Have I ever regretted sharing something like this before?
- What unmet needs could I be trying to meet by sharing this? Can I meet those needs by reaching out to a friend in person?

When you’re honest with yourself, you are less at risk of sharing something you might regret later. And choosing to connect face-to-face with someone you love usually invites greater connection than sharing with followers you hardly talk to.

Beware of Victim Mentality

It’s becoming easier to be sucked into the victim tornado that thrives on the toxicity of social media.

Knowing your worth brings confidence in yourself that can’t be gained anywhere else, especially on social media.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explains this victim mentality well in his general conference address about three sisters, saying, “The first sister saw herself as a victim—as someone who was acted upon. It seemed like one thing after another kept happening to her that made her miserable. With this approach to life, she was giving others control over how she felt and behaved. When we do this, we are driven about by every wind of opinion—and in this day of ever-present social media, those winds blow at hurricane intensity.”²

The victim mindset is one of Satan’s greatest weapons. It can be so easy to get caught up in this way of thinking, especially when we’ve gone through difficult challenges or have been hurt by others. Believe me, I know.

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with a chronic illness. And I was devastated. I followed many social media accounts that only talked about this illness and the unfairness of it all. For months, I scoured the internet for more info, and this disease consumed my life. Although it’s normal and healthy to mourn difficult circumstances, it becomes detrimental when we’re unable to look outside ourselves and move forward.

And that’s what happened to me.

I was trapped until one day it hit me: this disease wasn’t going to go away. I could either choose to live in resistance or I could choose to accept this challenge and find fulfillment in my life anyway (see 2 Nephi 2:27). So I chose the route that would bring me the most peace—I finally let it be.

I’ve noticed similar scenarios on social media. It’s fine to share our opinions or circumstances, but if we aren’t careful, we can lose ourselves in our constant posting about our particular labels, struggles, views, or comparisons (see Proverbs 23:7). And when those become the sole focus of our lives, we can trap ourselves within a box full of limitations.

But when we let go and move forward with faith, hope, and a broader perspective of our circumstances, we can shift our focus to drawing closer to the Savior and becoming more like Him. We can escape the box and find our limitless potential. And when the Savior is our focus, everything else is less daunting.³

Seek Validation That Really Matters

Have you ever been in a venting session and the person you are talking to says those sweet words “I totally get it”? I have. This kind of validation gives me as much happiness as a box of gourmet cookies. The need for validation is at the heart of most social media posts. But that kind of validation, just like the box of cookies, is fleeting.

There have been times when I have posted something on social media, only to become glued to my smartphone, constantly checking to see how many people have liked my clever thoughts. And seeing the number of those itty-bitty thumbs-up and heart icons climb makes me happier than I care to admit. But after the algorithms have let my post come and go, I usually feel something different.

Emptiness.

We post selfies, opinions, relationships, and vacation pics often to seek others’ validation. But no matter how many likes or followers we get, they won’t be enough to fill that need.

But I know something that *does* permanently fill that longing we have for acceptance.

We can learn from Nephi’s words: “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh” (2 Nephi 4:34). In other words, instead of seeking acceptance from others, we should seek the only validation that really matters—Heavenly Father’s. And what is His



opinion of you? Well, He loves you. He knows you. He believes you were worth creating and that the world has need of you.

When you truly realize your identity as a child of heavenly parents, what more validation do you need? Knowing your worth brings confidence in yourself that can’t be gained anywhere else, especially on social media. There is everlasting happiness that comes from trusting God’s view above anyone else’s.

Remember That Your Life Belongs to You

Ultimately, your life belongs to you. But when you share every piece of it, who then does it belong to?

Instead of “shouting out” to a friend on social media, try telling them how you feel in person. Instead of taking staged photographs for your followers, take photos for yourself to cherish. Your life is a gift from Heavenly Father for *you*, and many parts of it lose meaning when shared with the world.

Just like everything else in life, we can use social media wisely when we give ourselves boundaries. Let’s be honest with ourselves and mindful about what we share. And if feelings of emptiness sneak up on us, we can make changes. The more we prioritize what really matters, share appropriately, and treasure the intimate parts of our lives, the less we will have to worry about others’ opinions, potential regrets, and what our Facebook Memories will remind us of in the future. And that will bring us more joy than any number of likes or followers ever will. ■

NOTES

1. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (2012), 45, 46.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Three Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 17.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.