

ARE YOU AFRAID of "Missing Out"?



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By Natalie Cherie Campbell

Do you know young adults who feel frustration or even severe anxiety when trying to decide between attending a spur-of-the-moment social event and staying home to finish an important assignment or responsibility? Do they usually choose social activities ahead of everything else? Does it seem to become easier and easier for them to turn a blind eye to the consequences of disregarding responsibilities? Perhaps you have even had these same feelings yourself.

I have had friends like that and have wondered how it seemed to become easier for them to deny impending consequences as time went on. When I talked with my

friends about it, they admitted having an overwhelming “fear of missing out” that they felt they couldn’t control. It seemed like the more they gave in to their anxiety and did what they wanted to do, the less they felt any accountability for the consequences of missed responsibilities. This seems to be a growing phenomenon among some young adults.

We are all trying to learn to balance our pursuits. But when fear and anxiety control our choices, the results can be damaging. For my friends, it was as if they had sometimes stopped consciously making responsible decisions and were in turn surprised when the consequences came. They made excuses that the decision was out of their control, and thus they undermined their own agency by disregarding the things that matter most (see Matthew 23:23). These outcomes seem to be typical of the fear of missing out. But there is hope.

Using Our Gift of Agency

We know that exercising our agency—the gift that allows us to make choices—is one of the important reasons we are here on earth (see Abraham 3:24–25). It is by making choices and learning from experience

that we can progress and gain eternal life. President David O. McKay (1873–1970) testified that “next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God’s greatest gift to man.”¹

We also know that we have a responsibility to make wise choices. Sometimes it seems overwhelming to have to decide certain things, like which job to accept or whom to marry. Often it feels easier to say, “I won’t decide—whatever happens will happen,” or “I’m too afraid of missing out,” or even “Why won’t the Lord just tell me what to do?”

But the Lord rarely just tells us what to do. Instead He allows us to prayerfully work out our decisions. Sometimes He confirms them (see D&C 9:7–9), and sometimes He lets us make our choices and learn from them (see D&C 122:7). He would never take away our agency, instead counseling us and teaching us how to best use our agency, because He wants us “to act for [our]selves and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26). Similarly, we should not allow our agency to be controlled by outside influences such as natural occurrences or a fear of missing out, recognizing that in the end, we will always make some kind of choice, whether or not we make it consciously.

Sometimes we’re so worried we’ll miss out on this or that activity, we ignore the things of greatest importance.

Finally, we can't expect that making bad choices or not making any choices will yield the consequences we want. It may be that such courses of action or inaction will make us feel less pressure in the moment, but the results—whether good or bad—will come. So when choices arise, we should actively decide with the end in mind.

Choosing Balance

During the general priesthood session of the April 2009 general conference, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, noted: "I imagine that any priesthood holder listening to my voice today, if asked to prepare a talk on the subject 'what matters most,' could and would do an excellent job. Our weakness is in failing to align our actions with our conscience."² It can be difficult to ignore what may seem paramount in the moment, even though it will be insignificant in the long run.

For example, college students may know they are at school for the sake of gaining an education, but aligning their actions with this knowledge becomes increasingly difficult if concern about missing out on a party outweighs their commitment to getting good grades. Similarly, we may



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know that "this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God" (Alma 34:32), but it is still hard to choose to make time for scripture reading when we're compulsively looking at social media before bed or feeling too tired to wake up to our alarm because we stayed out too late.

Thus, we would do well to ask ourselves this question: "Is my fear of missing out preventing me from choosing to have a balanced life?" If

we do not ask ourselves where our real priorities lie, then we may find ourselves attending to every triviality and to nothing of eternal importance. Of course, sometimes finding a balanced life may mean putting relationships ahead of homework.

Actively Making Choices

Whether or not a fear of missing out on social events is governing our choices, we all have to confront the



THE DOCTRINE OF AGENCY

“Think of it: in our premortal state we chose to follow the Savior Jesus Christ! And because we did, we were allowed to come to earth. I testify that by making the same choice to follow the Savior now, while we are here on earth, we will obtain an even greater blessing in the eternities. But let it be known: we must continue to choose to follow the Savior. Eternity is at stake, and our wise use of agency and our actions are essential that we might have eternal life. . . .

“ . . . Whenever we choose to come unto Christ, take His name upon us, and follow His servants, we progress along the path to eternal life.

“In our mortal journey, it is helpful to remember that the opposite is also true: when we don’t keep the commandments or follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, our opportunities are reduced; our abilities to act and progress are diminished.”

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Agency: Essential to the Plan of Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 25.

consequences of the choices we make (see 2 Nephi 2:27–30). This can feel stressful, especially when what we want isn’t always where we should be devoting our time. But we must remember that our agency is a gift that we should never relinquish and that choosing what matters most will be the most rewarding in the long run.

Actively making wise choices will require us to act according to determined priorities. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because

they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families.”³ As we do this, we will begin to view our agency as a blessing and not a source of anxiety.

No matter what we choose, it is inevitable that we will miss out on something. We just need to be sure that what we fear missing out on is what matters most eternally. ■

The author lives in Massachusetts, USA.

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (2003), 208.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 59.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 107.



WHAT MATTERS MOST

“Pause for a moment and check where your own heart and thoughts are. Are you focused on the things that matter most? How you spend your quiet time may provide a valuable clue. Where do your thoughts go when the pressure of deadlines is gone? Are your thoughts and heart focused on those short-lived fleeting things that matter only in the moment or on

things that matter most? . . .

“Our Heavenly Father seeks those who refuse to allow the trivial to hinder them in their pursuit of the eternal. He seeks those who will not allow the attraction of ease or the traps of the adversary to distract them from the work He has given them to perform. He seeks those whose actions conform to their words.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 60, 62.