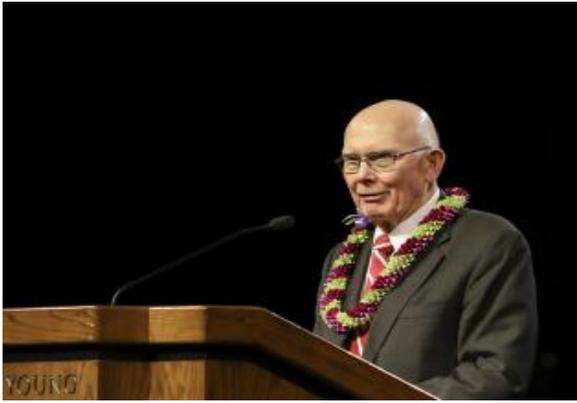


Anxiety in Stressful Times



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Devotional

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It is a great pleasure for Kristen and me to be with you here at BYU-Hawaii. It is a special privilege to be with Elder Kim Clark and his wife, Susan, and with the others joined here. As the Commissioner of the Church Education System for many years, he has given wise and inspired leadership to our three BYUs, to LDSBC, to the Seminary and Institute program, and now to the new Pathway Worldwide. I have loved listening to their messages.

Sister Clark's touching story about love and the power of love, I am sure is influential to all of us. Elder Clark's message of continuing learning of the whole soul reminds me of an experience I had when I was serving in a stake presidency at the same time I was a professor and I gave a lot of lectures. And whenever I gave a lecture I was conscious that I was singing a solo, but whenever I testified of the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ and of our savior I was always part of a duet because the Holy Ghost was there to testify to those in audience of the truth of the things I was saying. He also raised the question, "What if I stopped learning?" and a story that I have often thought about is a person who has worked for 20 years in certain employment and then asks for a letter of recommendation for a new job that they were moving to. Which letter of recommendation do you want sent in your behalf? He has 20 years of experience or he has one year of experience repeated 20 times. That illustrates the same point about continuing to learn.

Kristen has taught true principles. I always love hearing her speak and she has spoken the truth and it is important. Now I have felt impressed to speak to you about anxiety and living in stressful times.

I.

During the past few years we have heard many concerns and read much publicity about youth anxiety. There are alarming increases in the amount of anxiety diagnoses among young Americans. Nationwide, there are large increases in the number of college students seeking counseling services. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Penn State University reports that over 160,000 college students sought mental health services in a recent year, and over 70% of these listed anxiety as a concern.

We have experienced these same increases in our Church Education System. Last year about 10,000 of the students attending BYU-Hawaii, BYU-Provo, and BYU-Idaho sought mental health services. The most frequent concerns listed by these students were anxiety, depression, and relationship problems. This is not a one-year increase. The number of students seeking counseling services at these BYU institutions has increased by 70% over the past eight years.

A writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* said it is no exaggeration to say that your generation is “on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades.” And she says it’s largely because of smartphones.[\[1\]](#)

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, wants His leaders to be helpful in preventing and treating these problems.

There is no consensus among researchers about what has caused these great increases in the need for counseling in your age bracket. One suggested cause is your generation’s increased use of technology. A Pew Research Center study reported that 45% of teens said they were online “almost constantly.” Some of this is motivated or caused by what has come to be called FOMO, which means “the fear of missing out” on something.

A related possible cause is the way technology allows teens and other young people to constantly compare themselves and their lives with those of their peers. Such constant comparison enhances anxiety by depressing self-esteem. How? What your peers post on the internet are only their significant achievements and their emotional highs. This allows viewers who concentrate on such postings to compare the highs of their peers as if they were constant, compared with their own ups and downs, which suffer by comparison. Such comparisons are contrary to the scriptural teaching that we are not required to run faster than we have strength (see Mosiah 4:27). Our loving Savior will judge us individually, not according to the performance of our peers.

II.

Whatever the uncertainties about the causes of anxiety, we who have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ understand that the most reliable prevention of anxiety in eternal terms is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We begin with personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer. He has called us His friends, and He has promised to give us strength to overcome the inevitable challenges of mortality. We rely on the hope and assurance that comes from His gospel. Our faith causes us to trust in its Author. His strength is sufficient to sustain us, and His promises are sure. We go forward in faith “faith in every footstep” to use the words of a great song. You are marvelous examples of that faith. And you are sons and daughters of a Heavenly Father who loves you, who shares your concerns, who listens to your prayers, and who honors your service.

The restored Gospel gives us the perspective to understand the purpose of life and the role of opposition. It teaches us and gives us direction to grow toward the eternal destiny established by a loving Father in Heaven.

As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Without an understanding of the plan of salvation, including our premortal existence and the judgment and the resurrection, trying to make sense of this life by itself would be like seeing only the second act of a three-act play.”[\[2\]](#) We must understand the first act (premortals life) in order to know how to make the best choices in the second act (mortal life), which will determine what happens to us in the third act (post-mortals life).

There is great power in the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Our unshakeable faith in that doctrine guides our steps. It enlightens our minds and empowers our actions. This guidance and enlightenment and power are among the greatest gifts we have received from our Heavenly Father. By understanding and conforming our lives to that doctrine and through the principle of repentance we keep ourselves on the path toward our eternal destiny—reunion and exaltation with our loving Heavenly Parents.

We were placed here on earth to progress toward our destiny of eternal life. The doctrine of the restored Church of Jesus Christ gives us a unique perspective and different values to guide our mortal decisions. It sets us apart from those who lack that eternal perspective. It allows us to be steadfast and immovable against the winds of untruths and the earthquakes of mortal adversities.

III.[\[3\]](#)

We live in stressful times. For some young people the stresses are financial: loss of employment or home or financial security. For others, the stresses are associated with painful separations from those we love, such as caused by divorce of parents or other threats to personal security. We also have the challenge of living in a godless and increasingly amoral generation. More and more publicized voices deny or doubt the existence of God. More and more support the idea that all authority and all rules of behavior are man-made and can be accepted or rejected as one chooses, each person being free to decide for himself or herself what is right and wrong.

Along with these challenges—and caused by them—we are confronted by a culture of evil and personal wickedness in the world. This includes:

ÿ Dishonesty

ÿ Pornography

ÿ Perversions

ÿ The diminishing of marriage and childbearing

ÿ The increasing frequency and power of the culture and phenomenon of lesbian, gay, and transgender lifestyles and values

ÿ Finally, you live in a culture that focuses on individual rights and desires rather than the responsibilities and cooperative efforts that have built our societies.

A major cause of these cultural deteriorations is the loss of belief in absolutes. A century ago, private and public morality—the sense of moderation and restraint necessary to the survival of a free society—were universally understood to rest on the reality of absolute right and wrong, decreed by God and ultimately enforced in a final judgment. Then, as this faith was undercut, public morality sagged into the safety net of ethics, a set of rules based on philosophy, pragmatism, or legalities, which rely on enforcement by individual self-interest or imperfect bureaucracies.[\[4\]](#)

Removed from their foundation of an absolute right and wrong, ethics and legalities have been unable to hold back the tide of immoral conduct that now threatens to engulf us. People have cast off conventional morality and old-fashioned restraints. Our society is now in peril from increasing dishonesty, frightening increases in personal violence and other crimes, and shocking increases in public dependency attributable to deterioration in the solidarity of the family.^[5]

That is why we encourage you to look forward to marriage and not be afraid of it. Fear is a substantial deterrent among the increasing proportion of youth being raised in broken homes, who have observed the pain broken marriages can bring. Those kinds of fears are understandable, but they can be overcome by our faith in God and His plan, and the atonement of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. That is my message to you. Don't lose your perspective of eternal life and the priority it assigns to marriage and child-rearing.^[6]

In these days—as in many stressful times of the past—young people should go forward with optimism and prepare for a long and productive life. Marry. Have children. Get an education. Have faith. Elder Richard G. Scott gave inspired teaching on this subject:

“You have a choice. You can wring your hands and be consumed with concern for the future, or you can choose to use the counsel the Lord has given to live with peace and happiness in a world awash with evil. If you choose to concentrate on the dark side, that is what you will see....

“Now look at the brighter side. Despite pockets of evil, the world overall is majestically beautiful, filled with many good and sincere people. God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures spread throughout it.”^[7]

On this same subject, I quote another inspired apostle, Elder M. Russell Ballard:

“The faith that motivated the pioneers of 1847 as well as pioneers in other lands was a simple faith centered in the basic doctrines of the restored gospel, which they knew to be true. That's all that mattered to them, and I believe that is all that should matter to us.

“Although our journeys today are less demanding physically than the trek of our pioneers 150 years ago, they are no less challenging. Certainly, it was hard to walk across a continent to establish a new home in a dry western desert. But who can say if that was any more difficult than is the task of living faithful, righteous lives in today's confusingly sinful world, where the trail is constantly shifting and where divine markers of right and wrong are being replaced by political expediency and diminishing morality. The road we travel today is treacherous, and the scriptures tell us it will continue to be so until the very end. But our reward will be the same as that which awaits worthy pioneers of all ages who live faithfully the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, make right choices, and give their all to build the kingdom of God on earth.”^[8]

We cannot change the evil influences that inevitably press upon us and our families, but we can increase our power to deal with them. We must try to carve out our own islands of confidence and serenity. We must strengthen our barriers against the forces that besiege. In short, we should push back against the world. This idea only suggests that within the limits of our own resources of time and influence we should take a position, make it known, and attempt to persuade others of its merit, at least for us.

IV.

My dear young brothers and sisters in this BYU–Hawaii audience, we are surrounded with evil influences, but we do have Divine assurances that all will be well if we get on and stay on the covenant path. I hope you know why your Church leaders and university leaders and teachers give you the teachings and counsel we give. We love you, and our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, love you. Their plan for us is the “great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). That plan and Their commandments and ordinances and covenants lead us to the greatest happiness and joy in this life and in the life to come. As servants of the Father and the Son, we teach and counsel as They have directed us by the Holy Ghost. We have no desire other than to speak what is true and to encourage you to do what They have outlined as the pathway to eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

We go forward by making choices, and our teachings are intended to help you with those choices. Many choices are between good or evil, but more frequently they are choices between two goods. We make many choices between two good, often involving how we will spend our time. For example, there is nothing inherently bad about playing video games or texting or watching TV or talking on a cell phone. But each of these choices involves what is called “opportunity cost,” meaning that if we spend time doing one thing, we lose the opportunity to do another. I am sure you can see that we need to measure thoughtfully what we are losing by the time we spend on one activity, even if it is perfectly good in itself.

Over 10 years ago I gave a talk titled “Good, Better, Best.” In that talk I said that “just because something is *good* is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives... We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best.”^[9]

My dear brother and sisters, I love you. I want nothing more than for you to make the choices that get you on and keep you on the covenant path. That is path that our Heavenly Father desires for all of his children at the end of that path is eternal life the greatest of all the gifts of god. I testify to you that we have a Savior who servants we are, who has assured us of immortality, and who suffered for our sins and has experienced all the stress of mortal life that he will know how to succor or how to help us. I testify and invite his blessings upon you as you seek to return to our Heavenly Father to our Heavenly Parents to live the life that they live. I invoke his blessings upon you and testify of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[1] Audie Cornish, “How Smartphones Are Making Kids Unhappy,” <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/08/07/542016165/how-smartphones-are-making-kids-unhappy>.

[2] *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell [1997], 252.

[3] A portion of the next few paragraphs is adapted from “Choose Ye This Day to Serve the Lord,” BYU Women’s Conference, April 30, 2010.

[4] “Values,” BYU Management Society, December 17, 1998.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Salt Lake Bonneville YSA Stake Fireside, February 8, 2015.

[7] Richard G. Scott, *Finding Peace, Happiness, and Joy*, [2007], 172-73.

[8] Elder M. Russell Ballard, “You Have Nothing to Fear from the Journey,” *Ensign*, May 1997.

[9] Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 104, 107.