

Choosing Well

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"Abstain from all appearance of evil"
(1 Thessalonians 5:22).

We can learn how to make wise cultural choices.

Cultural Choices Affect Our Spiritual Development

The things we read, the art we choose, the motion pictures we attend, the television programs we watch, the music we enjoy—all of our cultural choices—either support or work against our spiritual development. Since many cultural offerings promote worldly values that are not in harmony with the gospel, we must use gospel standards in making choices. We cannot simply choose those things that are done skillfully or are popular or have received critical acclaim.

As Latter-day Saint women, we are fortunate in having direction not generally known to the world. We recognize that with the right to choose, which is the essence of free agency, comes the obligation to choose well. Father Lehi impressed this upon his son Jacob: all choices are finally between good and evil, between "liberty and eternal life" or "captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27–29). While most of us know that choices involving the Ten Commandments or the Word of Wisdom are choices between good and evil, we do not always see our cultural choices also as moral choices.

How many unthinkingly attend inappropriate movies, watch suggestive television programs, or choose literature that they would not recommend to their bishops, for instance? Perhaps we make so many cultural selections indirectly that we are barely aware of how clearly they indicate a choice between good and evil. How many turn on the radio and listen to music with lyrics that are morally unacceptable? When we make such choices, we affect ourselves and friends and family. When we judge our cultural life by the same standards that govern our moral conduct, *all* of our activities build our spiritual strength and give guidance to others.

We must accept personal responsibility for our choices. We cannot blame others or excuse our actions by saying we did not understand what we chose. Choosing to let others make our decisions is in itself a decision. And going along with others to help improve their choices only lowers our own morality.

We Should Use Gospel Standards to Judge

In order to judge our choices against the standards of the gospel, we need to listen carefully to the promptings of the Spirit. We must sharpen our ability to discern those things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (see Articles of Faith 1:13) to avoid becoming unduly influenced by worldly standards. Do we always listen to the promptings we receive?

Consider the following comments. Were the women who made them overlooking the promptings of the Spirit?

A long line had formed outside a highly acclaimed movie. A young woman was overhead to say to her companion, “I’ll be glad when we get inside. I don’t want anyone to see that we’re going to this.” “You’ll love the music; the lyrics are bad, but the music is great.”

“It was a *real* exciting book, but I threw it away—and not at home! I wouldn’t want my kids to read it!”

“We always send the kids to bed early on Saturday. I wouldn’t miss my favorite TV shows! But they’re too sexy and suggestive for kids.”

We must use gospel standards in choosing what we will read, see, hear, or participate in. We cannot avoid judging, for judgment is implicit in every choice. To help us, we can use Moroni 7:16 as a critical guide: “Every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.”

Being sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit requires that we be worthy. The Holy Ghost will testify to us of the “truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5) if we are receptive. We can become receptive through keeping the commandments.

Critical Questions

We must become individual critics in order to choose good cultural activities. The following questions provide some criteria we can use to help us make choices:

Does what we read, see, or hear support or attack fundamental gospel principles? It is possible for a positive point to be made by showing the consequences of sin. But one must decide at what point detailed description of evil becomes contaminating in itself. Evil is often used in a sensational way to sell things.

Does what we might choose contain profanity? Objectionable language is found in almost every medium today. Children especially need to be taught to avoid situations and choices that involve profanity and objectionable language. Too often people accept materials saying, “Well, you can’t avoid it. It’s just part of today’s world.”

We *can* learn to know what is good or bad, and we *can* refuse to listen to, read, or watch things that have language that doesn't meet gospel standards. If we do not learn to discern, our spirits will become dulled to the ability to recognize greater evils.

Does our possible choice have objectionable subject matter? We all need to recognize bad things in order to be able to avoid them.

Unfortunately, today's world often depicts sin of all types as being correct, pleasurable, and acceptable. The bad guy is applauded for his misdeeds. He is envied for his adventures, and often such an unreal portrait is drawn that people lose their sense of reality, of morality, and of eternal truths.

Are nudity and sex depicted? Some of the most popular television programs flaunt sex and suggestive clothing. Sexual perversion is depicted as acceptable instead of as the serious sin it is. Morals are made the subject of jokes, and immorality reigns. No one needs to watch or accept such Satan-inspired materials. We must avoid, and we must teach children to avoid, such things.

Is extreme violence depicted? There is little or no justification for the depiction of extreme violence. So-called horror movies showing sadistic and vicious torture and retaliation are loudly cheered and applauded by ever increasing numbers of children and adults. Many people do not realize that they are warping their view of life. Only with the very warped and truly diseased could we ever see situations even closely resembling some shown and written about today. Violence is so far removed from the message of love and peace taught by the Savior that it should be clear that we should avoid it.

Conclusion

Elder M. Russell Ballard said: "Members of the Church need to influence more than we are influenced. We should work to stem the tide of sin and evil instead of passively being swept along by it. We each need to help solve the problem rather than avoid or ignore it. I like this simple little poem:

All the water in the world
No matter how it tried
Could never sink the smallest ship
Unless it got inside.
All the evil of the world
And every kind of sin
Could never damn a human soul
Unless we let it in. . . .

"The prophet Mormon said that each of us is given the Spirit of Christ to know good from evil; everything that invites us to do good is of God. On the other hand, anything that persuades us to

do evil is of the devil, for he and those who follow him persuade no one to do good. (See Moroni 7:16–18.) This simple test will guide us in judging television and other media programs. . . .

“I leave you my testimony that we have only one sure way to secure our homes and our families, and that is through learning and living the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, pp. 101–2; or *Ensign*, May 1989, pp. 80–81).

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Ask: How do our cultural choices affect our present and future lives? How can our cultural choices affect our spiritual development? Point out that even such choices as the types of television programs we view or the music we listen to have an effect upon our spiritual development.
2. Read Joshua 24:15. Discuss how the choices of parents can affect the choices of children.
3. Stress the need for parents to make their homes places where children are taught to choose well. Discuss the critical questions given in the lesson. Ask the sisters how we can teach correct principles concerning them in our homes.