

### The holder of the bow

Brothers and sisters, our children take their flight into the future with our thrust and with our aim. And even as we anxiously watch that arrow in flight and know all the evils that can deflect its course after it has left our hand, nevertheless we take courage in remembering that the most important mortal factor in determining that arrow's destination will be the stability, strength, and unwavering certainty of the holder of the bow.<sup>13</sup>

Carl Sandburg once said, "A baby is God's opinion that life should go on."<sup>14</sup> For that baby's future as well as your own, be strong. Be believing. Keep loving and keep testifying. Keep praying. Those prayers will be heard and answered in the most unexpected hour. God will send aid to no one more readily than He will send it to a child—and to the parent of a child.

"And [Jesus] said unto them: Behold your little ones.

"And . . . they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending . . . as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them."<sup>15</sup>

May it always be so, I earnestly pray—for the children—in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 17:11, 14–16, 18, 21–23.
2. See John 14:6.
3. 2 Nephi 28:30.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:13.
6. Isaiah 33:23.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1964, 135–36; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1964, 1102; italics added.
8. Marshall McLuhan, quoted in John Leo, "The Proper Place for Commercials," *U.S. News and World Report*, 30 Oct. 1989, 71.
9. See Isaiah 54:2; 3 Nephi 22:2.
10. See Luke 15:17.
11. See Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 37 for a defining statement on the parental power of human testimony.
12. 2 Nephi 25:23, 26, 28; italics added.
13. I am indebted to Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* for the suggestion of this metaphor.
14. In *The Columbia World of Quotations* (1996), no. 48047.
15. 3 Nephi 17:23–24.

## Elder Spencer V. Jones

### Encounter with a skunk

Every decision we make, good or bad, carries an accompanying consequence.

I grew up in what some of you might call a boring farming community: Virden, New Mexico, population 135. One summer night when I was a boy, my cousins, some friends, and I were looking for ways to create some excitement. Someone suggested we play a harmless prank on a neighbor. My conscience whispered it was

wrong, but I didn't have the courage to resist the enthusiastic response of the group.

After performing our mischievous act, we sprinted down the dark country road to make our escape, laughing and congratulating ourselves as we ran. Suddenly, one of the group stumbled, crying out, "Oh no, I kicked a cat!" Almost instantly we felt a very fine mist settle over us. It carried a horrible odor. What my friend thought was a cat was actually a skunk. It had sprayed us in self-defense.

Very few odors are as nauseating as skunk spray, and we smelled terrible.

Dejectedly we went home in search of a little parental comfort for our pitiful plight. As we stepped inside the kitchen door, Mom took one sniff and shooed us out into the yard. We were cast out of our home. Then she launched the cleansing process. She burned our clothes. Then, it seemed that every home remedy or concoction in the community was volunteered in our behalf. Among them, we endured a variety of baths: first tomato juice, then cow's milk, and even harsh homemade lye soap. But the stench remained. Even my dad's powerful aftershave lotion could not overpower the stench. For days we were condemned to eat outside under a tree, sleep outdoors in a tent, and ride in the back of the pickup truck.

After a while, naively thinking the smell was gone, we tried to approach some normal-smelling girls. They would not allow us within yards, shattering our fragile teenage egos!

### **Consequences of sin cannot be hidden**

Now, I must admit that being sprayed by a skunk is not a common consequence of sin. Most consequences are not as immediate or dramatic. But sooner or later, for all sin, a consequence will be paid.

At times, consequences of sin may appear to be very subtle to the sinner. We may even convince ourselves, as we did before approaching the girls, that no one will be able to detect our sins and that they are well concealed. But always to our Heavenly Father and often to spiritually sensitive leaders, parents, and friends, our sins are glaringly apparent.

While attending a youth fireside with Elder Richard G. Scott, I noticed five youths scattered among the congregation whose countenances or body language almost screamed that something was spiritually amiss in their lives. After the meeting, when I mentioned the five youths to El-

der Scott, he simply replied, "There were eight."

Isaiah prophesied, "Their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it" (2 Nephi 13:9; see also Isaiah 3:9).

God has declared, "He that sinneth and repenteth not shall be cast out" (D&C 42:28). Just as my cousins and I were "cast out" of our earthly home as a consequence of our prank, we will be cast out of our Heavenly Father's home if we do not repent.

"When we undertake to cover our sins," as I tried to do with my dad's aftershave lotion, "the heavens withdraw themselves; [and] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved" (D&C 121:37). We lose our spiritual gifts. The Lord has declared, "He that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received" (D&C 1:33).

### **Being cleansed from the stench of sin**

Each one of us has the Light of Christ, or a conscience. It constantly prompts us to choose good. Good choices yield good consequences. On the other hand, delaying repentance and continuing to commit sin is like continuing to kick the skunk. The stench will become stronger with each sin, alienating us further and further from God and those we love. Soon we could become like Laman and Lemuel, who, after continually making bad choices, became "past feeling" and could no longer feel the "still small voice" (1 Nephi 17:45).

If I had responded to my conscience when it first whispered that the prank was wrong, I would have avoided the whole stinking ordeal.

Through Nephi, the Savior taught that "no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever" (1 Nephi 10:21).

But our loving Heavenly Father, with a foreknowledge of our frailties, and know-

ing that you and I would all sin and become unclean, provided a cleansing process from sin that—unlike tomato juice, milk, and lye soap—actually does work.

He sent a Savior, His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins (see Alma 22:14).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, as the Savior demonstrated perfect obedience, His anguish caused Him, “even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18). Then He allowed Himself to be “lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:33).

“He suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. . . . And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!” (D&C 18:11, 13).

The Savior has indicated how to know “if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43). Then comes the miraculous promise: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

If the Spirit is pricking your heart to correct something in your life, know this: your soul is precious. Heavenly Father wants you to be part of His eternal family.

I lovingly plead, “Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance” (Alma 34:33). Start the process now. Remove the stench of sin with the remedy of repentance. Then, through the Atonement, the Savior can wash you clean. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Faust

The choir and congregation will now sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder D. Rex Gerratt and Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy will address us. We will then be pleased to hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

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## Elder D. Rex Gerratt

### Follow the instructions

Some years ago while I was serving as a ward clerk, the ward supplies for the new year arrived on my doorstep. Among the numerous boxes, one box addressed to the ward clerk caught my attention. Taped to the box was a tag with bold type: “If all else fails—Please! Follow instructions.”

I did not consider this generic, and I was sure that someone at Church headquarters knew me personally.

Although humorous at the time, the image of this little tag has permanently attached its message to my mind: “If all else fails—Please! Follow instructions.”

Every person experiences many challenges in this mortal life. Each has per-

sonal agency to make choices that affect his or her progress. Good choices bring promised blessings, and bad choices always bring undesired consequences.

Life is uncertain. Our time is short. It is precious. This is the time “to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). There is not time to waste in personal experimentation or involvement with those things that have been proven harmful to our bodies and our souls.

None of us are perfect, and we all need help. But we are not left alone if we are teachable, with hearts to feel and ears to hear.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.