

Why Not Just a Little?

Brad Wilcox

As I thought about speaking to you tonight, I remembered what my little daughter Whitney said to me one time when she said, “Who do I take after, you or Mom?” And I said, “What do you think?” And she said, “I think I take after both of you. I take after Mom because I’m nice, and I take after you because I talk a lot.”

So, I appreciate you being willing to come and to listen to me talk one more time. Tonight I want to talk to you about a question; a simple question, but a dangerous question. It is a question that was first posed to me after I spoke to a group of young people about protecting themselves from sin. And as we were finishing up, one young man in the back of the room raised his hand and he said, “Brother Wilcox, why not just a little? Why not just a *little*? I’m not talking about, like, leaving the Church and going a completely different direction. I just want to know, why not just a little? Why not just one sip of beer, just to know what it is like. Why not just one puff on a cigarette just so my friends will quit bugging me? Why not, like, one sexual experience so that I can stop being curious? Why not just a little?”

Well, I was getting myself all ready to answer his question, and I was formulating a wonderful sermon on the dangers of AIDS, and I was ready to talk to him about cancer and alcoholism, and right as I was ready to start my response, he said, “And don’t tell me about cancer.” And he says “Don’t tell me how alcohol kills your brain cells.” He says, “Don’t tell me about venereal diseases and teenage pregnancies and becoming an unwed parent. Don’t tell me I’m not going to be able to go on a mission. Don’t tell me I won’t be able to get married in the temple, ‘cause I know guys who’ve done everything, *everything* there is to do! And yet they repent, and they go on a mission. They go to the temple! So he says, “Why not just a little?”

Well, I knew I had to answer his question, because about now some of the other young people in the room were going, “Yeah, I’ve always wondered that! Why *not* just a little?” So I said, “David, think of it like this: Isn’t the Holy Ghost a member of the God Head? And we’re told very clearly in the scriptures that no unclean thing can dwell with God (1 Ne 10:21, Moses 6:57). Perhaps that’s why we need to be baptized, completely cleansed, before we can receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost cannot dwell with unclean things. The Scriptures say that the Spirit will not always strive with men (2 Ne 26:11, Ether 2:15, D&C 1:33, Moses 8:17).

“So, while one cigarette may not be enough to give you cancer, it is enough to drive the Spirit away. One drink of alcohol may not be enough to leave you in a gutter somewhere and ruin your life, but it is enough to drive the Spirit away. One unauthorized sexual experience may not be enough to make you an unwed parent, but it *is* enough to drive the Spirit away. The Spirit will not always strive with men, and the immediate consequence of any sin is withdrawal of the Spirit.”

Now, David asked another question. He said, “So what? Big deal. So the Spirit leaves.” I said, “David, what you don’t understand, is that when the Spirit leaves, then we also lose the gifts of the Spirit. We also lose all the benefits of having the Spirit with us. When we sin, even just a little, the Spirit departs and we automatically lose some other things as well.”

Tonight I want you to just consider the fact that we lose safety; the fact that we lose companionship, perspective, strength, peace, joy and time. And I want to talk about each one of those.

First of all, we lose safety. President David O. McKay spoke in General Conference, and he compared our walk through life to a walk of a small child with his father through a busy and frightening city. As long as the child holds his father’s hand, he is safe. The minute the child allows himself to become confused by the bustle of the crowd, and breaks away from his father’s grasp, he is in danger. When the Holy Ghost leaves us, we are left spiritually unattended. We are left without the light, without the guide of the Holy Ghost.

I have a good friend named Randall Wright, and he talks about when he was a young boy of 13, and his family visited the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. He and his cousin went underground – 829 ft--down to explore the caverns. They stayed close to the ranger at first because he had the light, and the ranger was continually pointing out several dangerous spots as they explored the caverns. But after a while he got tired of his guide, and how he repeatedly told him to stay on the paths, and how he warned them of the dangers if they failed to do so.

He and his cousin paid little attention to him, and they were kind of drifting away from the rest of the crowd, and looking around, until he remembered hearing these words, “We would like to demonstrate what it is like in the cavern without lights.” And they turned off the lights. Randall says, “The experience I had was eerie, and when I felt that darkness it frightened me!” He says, “I was never more relieved to see a

light as I was when it came back on.” He says, “During the remainder of the tour, needless to say, my cousin and I stayed very close to the ranger, and very close to his light.”

I think when we feel the Spirit depart, the first thing that we start feeling is a loss of safety. Listen to what Robert Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie write about this. They write, “When one is void of Holiness, he opens himself to the influence of the unholy.”

Along with losing safety, we also lose companionship. The prophet Mormon described the emptiness and loneliness that engulfed his people when they no longer were worthy of the Spirit. He wrote, “We were left to ourselves.” One young woman said it like this to me; “When I lose the Spirit, I feel completely alone; even when I’m surrounded by people on every side, I feel alone.”

Why not just a little? In Alma, we read about when Alma was speaking to his son Helaman, and he said, “If ye transgress the commandments of God, behold these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan, that he may sift you as chaff before the wind. (Alma 37:15)”

You shall lose access to the Spirit of the Lord, and shall be left alone to deal with Satan and his minions. You shall be in Lucifer’s power. We lose companionship as we lose the Spirit.

We also can lose perspective. President George Albert Smith’s grandfather taught him an important lesson. “There is a line of demarcation well defined between the Lord’s territory and the Devil’s. If you will stay on the Lord’s side of the line, you will be under His influence and will have no desire to do wrong. But if you cross to the devil’s side of the line by even one inch, you are in the tempter’s power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the spirit of the Lord.”

When young people tell me, “I’ve blown it now, so there is no use in trying anymore.”, or when they say, “God can’t love me now that I’ve sinned.”, or when they say, “I’m not worthy to pray.”; when they say, “I’ve already gone so far, there is just no hope anymore.”, it is pretty obvious to me that perspective has been lost. When we stay on the Lord’s side of the line, then we have the Spirit with us, and we think with a clear perspective. When we step across that line even one inch, we can lose that good perspective.

Isn’t it interesting that as Alma talked to Corihor, he told Corihor, “I *know* that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you. (Alma 30:42)” And because the Spirit had left, then Corihor was under Satan’s influence, and he was able to lose the clear perspective that comes by staying on God’s side of the line.

Another example of this comes from President Hinckley’s book “Standing for Something”. In that book he talks a little bit about when he worked for the train stations during the war time. And he talks about how a switchman had mistakenly moved an piece of steel just three inches, and that piece of steel was a switch point, and it sent a baggage car that should have been in Newark to New Orleans, 1400 miles away! So one little three inch change ended up making a huge difference in the end.

Those who say, “Oh, what I’m doing is so small, it is so insignificant; it won’t really matter in the end.”, are already showing that they are losing the perspective that comes with as we stay close to the Spirit. And the Spirit tells us, that even those small three-inch decisions can have huge repercussions down the road.

Along with losing perspective, as we distance ourselves from the Spirit, we also lose strength. Mormon said of his people, “The Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us, therefore, we had become weak.” One young man spoke at his Youth Conference and said, “I find that when I sin, my strength to resist temptation goes way down. I just can’t seem to say ‘no’ to myself for anything, and spiritually I feel like the little weakling in the ‘before’ picture in the magazines.”

Brother Stephen R. Covey has talked a little about this, and he says, “Whenever we sin against the light we’ve been given, we become estranged from God and His Spirit. Further we become split within ourselves, and we lose wholeness and unity; we lose our integrity, and we begin to feel insecure.”

We feel insecure, we feel weak when the Spirit has departed because we are losing our strength. Along with strength we can also lose peace. When I was growing up my Mom always quoted Abraham Lincoln who said, “When I do good, I feel good. When I do not do good, I do not feel good.” In the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet it says, “You cannot do wrong and feel right. It is impossible.” [I can’t find this exact quote in there, but the principle is still true] It is interesting how often those little phrases come to my mind as I try to maintain the inner peace of having the Spirit with me.

One time I went to speak in a Know Your Religion in California, and I went to the motel, and I threw my bag up on the bed and I looked over and there was a dirty magazine, just sitting there in the room.

Now, they always have the pay-for-slime TV stuff, y'know, they always have the channels you can order, but here was a magazine, just sitting right there in the room, and I thought to myself, "HMMMMMM, I've always wondered what is in those magazines, and the mature adult just ought to know!" OK? Not out of lust or anything, just out of curiosity and general knowledge, and "y'know, maybe this is Heavenly Father's way of broadening my horizons."

So I tried; I tried to convince myself that it was alright, it was OK. Anybody would do the same thing, it wasn't that big a deal, and I even tried to convince myself that I needed to look at that magazine because I owed it to the youth. Y'know? I mean, I speak to the youth, and I have to warn them about the evils of pornography. How do you warn them about the evils of pornography if you don't know what they are? So I owe it to them, y'know, I owe it to you to look at that. And I tried! I tried to convince myself that it was OK. I tried to justify that, I tried to rationalize that.

But finally I just said, NO! No, no, no, no! No, Brad Wilcox, no! If it is wrong on Sunday, it is wrong on Tuesday! If it is wrong in the light of day, it is wrong in the dark of night; if it is wrong when there are people looking at you, it is wrong when you're alone! Now you find the courage to live the way you claim you believe! And I did.

And the reason I share that story with you is because nobody's life was changed. Nobody came running up to me the next day saying, Excuse me, aren't you Brad Wilcox? Why, my Priest's quorum was peeking through the keyhole at your motel room, and they ... y'know? Nobody was there! Nobody was watching! Just me, just the dirty magazine, just God, and just the peace of conscience that is promised to us in Mosiah 4. And that peace of conscience was so real, that it could have been tangible.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminds us that in Latin the term 'peace' is 'pax', which literally means 'an agreement'. Elder Holland says, "Agreement with Him who has made agreement for us." An agreement! Peace is an agreement as we make our public lives agree with our private lives; as we make our behaviors agree with our beliefs, as we decide that we are not going to live one way with our friends, and another way with our parents, and another way in the Bishop's office. It just doesn't work. We can't live that way and feel peace. We can't live that way and feel the agreement. Peace; that's something that we lose when we lose the Spirit.

We also lose joy. Now, those who sin claim to be having a lot of what they call 'fun', or 'pleasure', but they don't have real happiness; they don't have 'joy'. The scriptures do not say that wickedness never was pleasurable, and the scriptures don't say that wickedness never was fun. But the scriptures do say that wickedness never was happiness (Alma 41:10).

I love it in Romans where we read, "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Rom 14:17)" And when the Holy Ghost departs, then we lose that joy, we lose that feeling.

Listen to what Robert Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie write. "A fullness of joy is found only among resurrected exalted beings. Indeed, exaltation consists in gaining a fullness joy. It is to enter into the Joy of the Lord. In mortality, men experience joy only in righteousness; that is, in obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel - the Gospel, being the glad tidings of great joy. Joy is characteristic of the presence of the Holy Ghost from whom it comes."

Now listen to that! Joy is characteristic of the presence of the Holy Ghost from whom it comes. It is experienced only when the Spirit is present. And that most acutely in the manifestation that our sins have been remitted and the knowledge that our path is pleasing to and approved by God. So no wonder we miss joy when the Spirit has departed from us. When we allow the Spirit to leave, then we lose joy in our lives.

I think another thing that we lose is time. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said, "It takes time to prepare for eternity, and sin wastes vital time."

President Rex E. Lee spoke at graduation at BYU and said, "Each finite splice of your life, each month, each year, is unique and irreplaceable. If you decide to let December through March go, you have simply lost a finite portion of your life that can never be duplicated. To be sure, you can make some amends later—as you certainly should—if you make that initial mistake. But the opportunities of that earlier time are gone forever, and can never be recovered."

My brother always tells his seminary classes, "Each of us is given a pocket full of time to use however we may. We spend what we will, we waste what we will, but we can never get back a day."

Recently I received a letter from a young man who was serving a mission. He was almost not allowed to represent the Church as a missionary because of severe problems he got himself into as a teenager. He wrote, "Looking back, my biggest regret is not even the sins I committed, as bad as they were.

Even more, I regret the time I wasted. I feel so far behind! I know that through the atonement I have been forgiven from my sins, but there is one thing that even Jesus can't give me back, and that is the time I lost."

Satan is cunning, he is deceitful; he has convinced many people in this world that there is no heaven. He has convinced many others in the world that there is no hell. We, brothers and sisters, are no better than they, if we foolishly allow him to convince us that there is no hurry. Yes, we lose safety, we lose companionship. We lose perspective, strength, peace, joy - but we also lose time.

Why not just a little? Well, why not just a little touch on a hot stove? Just a little bit, just one little touch on a hot stove. Anybody who would ask that question is obviously overlooking the pain associated with that kind of choice. See, we speak about sin as if it were some sort of Ferris wheel ride, and we think, "OK, I'm just going to go ride a little bit, have some fun, and then I'll repent and go on a mission. Oh, let me just go ride for a little bit, and then I promise I'll come back and get married in the temple. And we forget that that is not a fair analogy.

A better analogy is to think of sin as a touch on a hot stove. I mean, why not just a *little* bit, and then, I'll get better! I'll get better. Yes; can you recover from that burn? Of course, but not without a lot of pain in the process. I mean, how foolish would we be to say, "Alright, let's go outside! Let's go get a sunburn! Let's go lay out in the sun, let's fry ourselves like bacon! Let's just, let's just *sizzle* out there, and then ... oh, oh, oh! Let's get better. Oh!"

I mean anybody who would come to you and say that you would obviously say, "No! You're not thinking right!" And that is exactly how I feel when young people premeditate repentance. And they think, "Oh I'll just go do this, and then I'll repent." Aw! You're not seeing it right! You're looking at it as some sort of carnival ride, and not realizing that that is not a fair analogy, not a fair analogy at all.

I remember being with some full-time missionaries once, and they were speaking to the youth. And one of the missionaries stood up and he took a whole bottle of aspirin, and he said could I have a volunteer? And a girl volunteered, and he said, "Come on up, here's what we're going to do. You take the whole bottle of aspirin. You take it right here in front of all of us, I'll get you some water. You down the whole bottle! The minute you do, my companion will call 911. And then the ambulance will come, they'll take you to the hospital, they'll pump your stomach, and you'll be fine! Let's do it! Let's do it! Come on! Everybody, let's get her on, come on, let's do it!

She's up there feeling very uncomfortable. She's like, "Uh, I really don't think I want to play this game." Y'know? And he's going "Come on, it won't even phase you! Take the whole bottle, and then hurry, real fast, my companion's gonna dial 911, the ambulance will be here real fast—you'll even get a ride in an ambulance and listen to the siren—and then you'll get your stomach pumped, and you'll be fine! You'll be absolutely fine, so, let's do it!"

Now, when you start putting it in those kind of terms, suddenly we start seeing sin a little more realistically. And suddenly we start saying maybe this is something I can bow out of ... maybe this is something I can do without.

Young people, I know! I know that it seems there's a lot of rules. I know that as you live your life in the Church you feel like you're surrounded with rules. Rules, all kinds! I love the little letter to God that says, "Dear God, How come you only have 10 rules? Our school has millions!" And I know that sometimes you feel that way in the Church. You feel like, "Good grief! The Restoration of the gospel was the restoration of one thing, and one thing only, and that was rules! Tons and tons and tons of rules." And sometimes you feel a little overwhelmed.

Would you just believe me, when I also tell you that with the restoration came the reasons, the reasons for the rules. And tonight I hope that you've been able to listen as I've explained some of the *reasons* for avoiding sin. Because we need safety in our lives, we need companionship in our lives! We need these things! We need perspective, we need strength, we need peace, we need joy, we need time. So even if salvation and exaltation and the second coming seem very distant, focus in on some of the reasons we've discussed tonight, and realize that those who choose sin—even just a little—choose to be without the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, and they will suffer consequences.

I leave you with my testimony that the gospel is true. I leave you with my witness, that along with the rules, there are also reasons—valid reasons—to consider as you think about the choices that you are making in your lives. I think it is so wonderful to know, that even as we lose the Spirit, it is perhaps not so much a punishment from God as a sign of His love. For when we do go without the Spirit, we begin to hunger and thirst after those feelings and those blessings again.

So if you have felt like the Spirit has left you, I hope that that in and of itself will be a sign of God's love, and a chance for you to hear Him calling you back, and reminding you of what can be yours in

your life as you live close to the Spirit, as you protect yourself from sin. Not just because you're following a rule, but because you understand the reasons. Remember, it is not a Ferris wheel ride, it is a touch on a hot stove. And yes, it is a choice you can make, but it is one that will come with consequences! I leave you with my testimony, I leave you with my love. God bless you! I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.