

DON'T CHANCE IT

BY RYAN JENKINS

Like most bad habits, gambling can seem harmless at first, but there are no real winners.

How bad could pitching quarters be? I remember people who lost several days' lunch money in a matter of a minute. Five or six bad tosses and you were one broke eighth grader.

Growing up in Las Vegas, Nevada, exposed me to the alluring gimmicks of gambling. It infiltrated the halls of our junior high and high school in various forms that many thought were harmless. Some youth created their own games of chance, while many imitated the casino games. Like most habits, gambling invites you to experiment in small doses before indulging in alarming measure.

In junior high school, pitching quarters was the game that dominated the perimeter of the schoolyard, always out of view of adults. However, our fetish with this game eventually found its way into the classroom. As soon as the teacher turned his or her back, our quarters would fly toward the wall, and the person with the quarter closest to the wall won, taking everyone else's quarter. This game became very detrimental not only to our studies but also to our relationships. Friends were pitted against friends, and fights occasionally broke out. I remember people who lost several days' lunch money in a matter of a minute. Five or six bad tosses and you were one broke eighth grader.

In high school, quarters became merely small change. Our attention was drawn to larger sums of money with bigger wagers, usually around big-ticket sporting events. Every week there seemed to be a big game, and betting circles were frequently established. Obviously, the more people there were contributing to a pot, the greater a winner's takings would be. I remember one student who kept a notebook with the particular bets, the odds, and the individuals involved. Between and sometimes during classes he would approach you, asking if you would like to bet.

Unfortunately, the gambling scene pervaded other high school activities and went beyond school boundaries. While traveling with my baseball team, both on the bus and in the hotel rooms, card games took over much of our spare time. I recall watching a card game where two teammates had \$120 on the line, with the luck of a particular card deciding the fate of the game. Someone won that day, but I don't remember who. What I do remember is the chaos, the screaming and vulgar language, the laughing at someone else's expense. Most





“One of our young men recently said, ‘Pay five bucks to see a movie; pay five bucks to play poker—it is the same idea.’

“It is not the same idea. In one case you get something for which you pay; in the other case, only one picks up the winnings and the others are left empty-handed. . . .

“ . . . The Church has been and is now opposed to [gambling]. If you have never been involved in poker games or other forms of gambling, don’t start. If you are involved, then quit now while you can do so.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley, “Gambling,” Ensign, May 2005, 59–60, 61.

importantly, I remember feeling void of the Spirit. It’s a dirty, ugly feeling.

Near my home was a hotel we often went to that had an arcade, a bowling alley, and a good restaurant. I spent many fun times bowling with my brothers and our friends. To get to the bowling alley, we had to go through the hotel’s casino. There is a distinct image in my mind to this day of the smell of cigarette and cigar smoke and the dropping of coins into the metal basins from the slot machines. The image of countless people sitting in the same place for hours playing cards or pulling levers on slot machines seems to be a constant reminder to me of the shallow habit of gambling.

One day a friend of mine, while leaving the bowling alley, tried his luck at a game of chance they called “Megabucks.” The winnings were well over a million dollars. You had to play several dollars at a time to have a chance at winning. Of course, he lost, and he kept on losing. Within five minutes he lost \$60, and the only thing he had to show for it was his contribution to the grand total that would eventually go to someone else. My friend lost \$60, yet I gained a greater distaste for the gambling habit and a greater resolve to keep the Lord’s commandments. Like other occasions in my life, this became a defining moment that strengthened my resolve to put my occasional past blemishes behind me and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Through a loving Heavenly Father and the guidance of exemplary parents who avoided the practice of gambling, I was able to put my lapses

with games of chance behind me. Far too many friends and acquaintances didn’t stop at pitching quarters or playing cards. Gambling and the other bad habits it leads to are overtaking far too many of Heavenly Father’s children. With an unresolved determination to avoid it, you can become a victim very quickly. Gratefully, two years before I became “legal” in the eyes of the state of Nevada, I was “about my Father’s business” preaching the gospel in the Washington D.C. South Mission.

You may need courageous fortitude as the world thrusts the acquisition of riches and the madness of materialism upon you before you’ve even graduated from school. Understanding true doctrine and living by the principles taught in the scriptures and by living prophets will strengthen you. With this strength, you can refuse and conquer any behavior offensive to the Spirit. **NE**

