

WHAT'S NOT ON THE WARNING LABEL

BY BRAD WILCOX

For the most harmful effects of smoking and drinking, read this list.

The world teaches that smoking and drinking will make you more confident and popular. The truth is that these habits will deprive you of your self-worth and disqualify you for many blessings.

Warning: What you are about to drink or smoke can kill you!

Labels with essentially that message appear on cans of beer and packages of cigarettes everywhere, and yet these products are still being picked up and used by teenagers. Apparently it's not enough to know that alcohol and tobacco are linked to dozens of life-threatening diseases.

Warnings labels inform readers of the physical consequences of using tobacco and alcohol, but there are other consequences as well—serious emotional, social, and spiritual consequences that never show up on any of the warning labels. Still, they are as real and frightening as cancer or heart disease. When seen in an eternal perspective, these consequences can be even more devastating.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes distance you from the Spirit.

The immediate consequence of any sin is loss of the Spirit. The scriptures make it clear that the Spirit will not always strive with men (see Genesis 6:3; Ether 15:19; D&C 1:33) and that no unclean thing can dwell with God (see 1 Nephi 10:21; Mosiah 2:36–38).

Isn't the Holy Ghost a member of the Godhead? Perhaps that's why we must be baptized—completely cleaned—before we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 68:25; 84:64). One cigarette may not be enough to give you emphysema, but it is enough to alienate you from the Spirit. One sip of beer may not make you an alcoholic and leave you penniless and homeless, but it is enough to leave you without the Spirit.

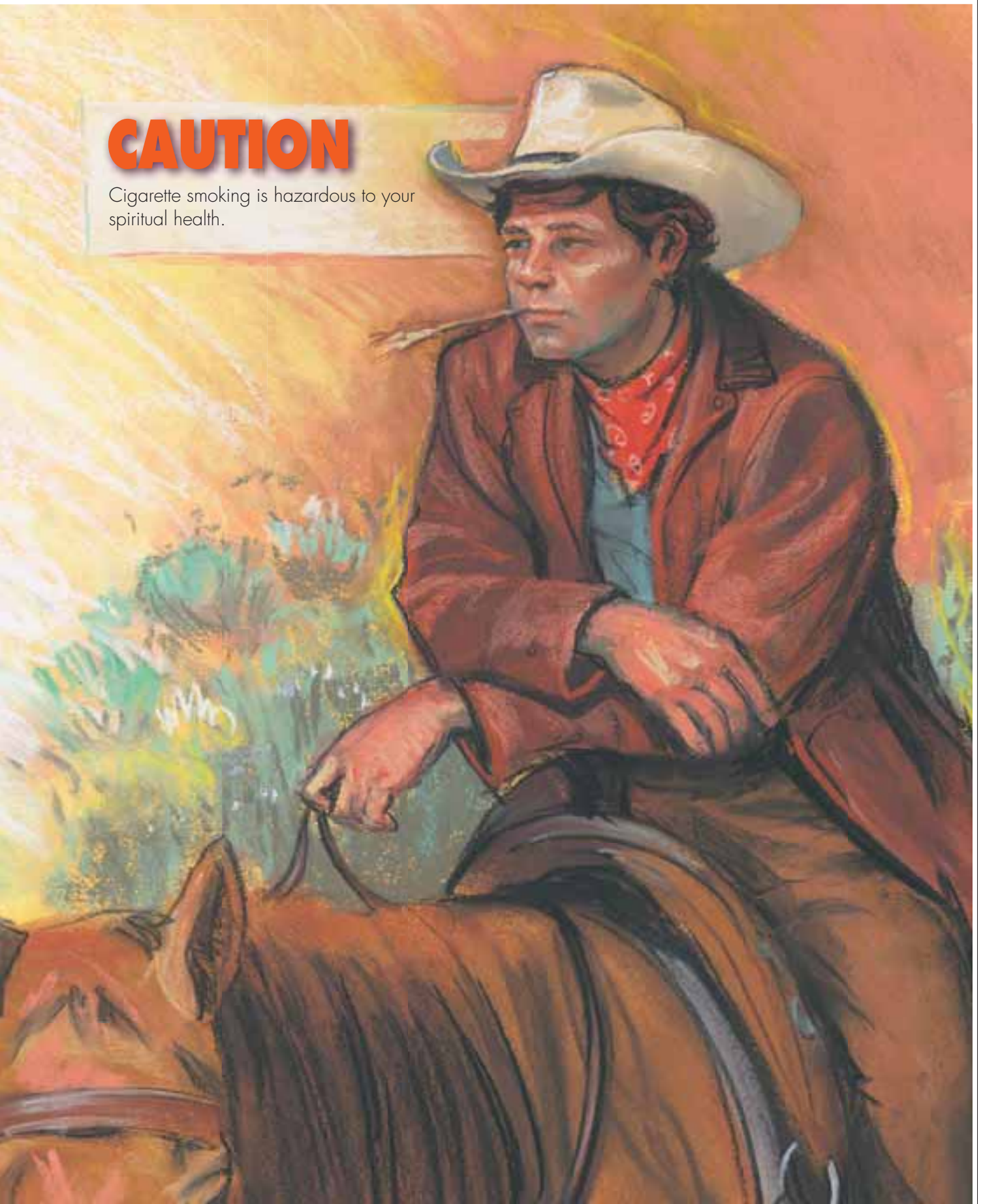
“So the Spirit leaves,” someone may say, “so what?” Anyone who would ask such a question is overlooking the fact that when we lose the Spirit, we automatically lose safety, companionship, perspective, strength, peace, and joy.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes deprive you of agency.

This precious right to choose for ourselves is inhibited when we become involved in substances that are habit forming. When I taught sixth grade, one of my students, Carter Chow, drew a poster that won a statewide contest. Carter had simply drawn a hand in chains, with the links of the chain made of cigarettes. The caption said, “Smoking makes you a slave.”

CAUTION

Cigarette smoking is hazardous to your spiritual health.



When you smoke and drink, you aren't just affecting yourself. Your decision to break the Word of Wisdom also hurts your parents and others who love you.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes lower self-esteem.

The smiles we see in the ads (usually on the faces of models and/or athletes) certainly don't indicate low self-esteem. However, most LDS young people who break the Word of Wisdom are really just searching for a way to camouflage their low self-worth and find acceptance and approval. Those who don't feel cool, strong, and popular often seek desperately for ways to appear cool, strong, and popular. Sadly, once the cigarettes and drinks are finished, feelings of self-worth have gone up in smoke, and young people feel as empty as the crumpled, discarded beer cans. Confidence doesn't come from a can. It comes from knowing I can. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Feeling good about yourself doesn't come from lighting up. It comes from being true to the light inside of you (see D&C 84:46).

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes diminish ambition.

When someone becomes so focused on how and where to get the next supply, when the next party is happening, and how to avoid the police, there is little time and energy left for pursuing positive goals. Grades plummet. Extracurricular activities evaporate. Good job opportunities disappear. And future dreams are severely limited.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes lead to other problems.

Even if some young people are lucky enough to postpone health problems for a few years, their lives are still endangered by the way smoking and drinking impairs their ability to operate vehicles, erodes their good judgment, and gives a false sense of bravado that leads to conflicts and fights. We rarely hear of someone breaking the Word of Wisdom without also hearing other problems

mentioned in the same breath. It may be immorality, shoplifting, lying, pornography, inappropriate music and dress, depression, and in some cases even suicide.

A bishop once told me, "Mormons don't keep smokers and drinkers out of the Church. Smokers and drinkers usually keep themselves out." When LDS young people smoke and drink, they often feel so guilty and self-conscious that it impairs their desire to go to church, attend seminary, and participate in wholesome family activities.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes limit your friendships.

Every sip of beer means fewer LDS young people for you to date and associate with. Every puff on a cigarette means fewer bright, intelligent, and health-minded individuals you can call friends. Soon those who break the Word of Wisdom are bound—not only by bad physical habits but by the impression that their circle of friends can grow no larger than those who share their same habits.

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes keep you from the temple.

Of course, those who use such substances are welcome at an open house. But drinking and smoking do not open the House of the Lord's blessings in one's life. Section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants promises that in addition to physical well-being, those who keep the Word of Wisdom will find "wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures" (v. 19). Those who fail to qualify for temple recommends by failing to live the Word of Wisdom certainly are kept from the wisdom and personal revelation available to worthy Church members in the temple. Those who choose smoking and drinking over carrying a temple recommend are choosing to live without the great treasures of knowledge available in the temple—knowledge that is indeed "hidden" from the

eyes and ears of those who refuse to prepare themselves to receive it.

When people disqualify themselves from temple privileges, they also disqualify themselves from serving full-time missions and being sealed to a spouse and children for eternity. No wonder President Ezra Taft Benson said: "The condition of the physical body can affect the spirit. That is why the Lord gave us the Word of Wisdom. . . . The human body is the tabernacle of the spirit and God expects that it be kept clean and unimpaired" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1998], 475–477).

WARNING: Beer and cigarettes break your parents' hearts.

"It's my life, and it's my body," said one young woman, "so who cares what I do?" Can she really be so insensitive to the feelings of the parents who gave her life and were instruments in the creation of her physical body? When a child makes poor choices, the disappointment, frustration, and failure felt by parents is overpowering. Everyone has heard the old saying that you can count the seeds in an apple, but you can't count the apples in a seed. In the same way, I believe that you can count the drops of beer in a can or bottle, but you can't count the tears LDS parents will shed if their children choose to drink. You can weigh the amount of tobacco rolled in a cigarette, but you can't weigh the private grief felt by LDS parents whose children choose to smoke.

Warning labels on beer and cigarettes clearly state the physical dangers of drinking and smoking. I have tried to warn of the emotional, social, and spiritual dangers connected with breaking the Word of Wisdom. Those who live the Word of

Wisdom will experience wonderful benefits in their lives. Along with improved health, they will be able to feel the Spirit, safeguard agency, improve feelings of self-worth, pursue positive goals, broaden friendships with other worthy young people, strengthen family ties, avoid additional problems, go to the temple, and bring happiness to others. **NE**



WARNING
Drinking beer
may break your
mother's heart.