

# Of Cookies and Judgments

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Welcome to winter semester 2022. We hope that you were able to have a wonderful holiday and that you are ready for another semester here at BYU!

[A few years ago,] *a woman was waiting at an airport for her . . . long flight. Since her flight was delayed, she had several hours on her hand[s]. So, she went to [the] airport shops and bought a book and [a] bag of cookies. She took a seat next to a man and started to read the book she had bought. While she was engrossed in her book, she happened to see that the man sitting beside her boldly grabbed a cookie from the cookie bag [and began to eat it. The woman was shocked at this brazen act, but she chose to ignore] the incident to avoid a scene.*

[However, to ward off any additional misbehavior, she grabbed one of the cookies from the bag and began munching on it as she went back to her book. Much to her horror, she noticed that the man] *took some more cookies from the bag and started munching [them].*

. . . [In response, she grabbed another cookie and dramatically put it into her mouth. The man then took another cookie and put it into his mouth. She responded in kind, as did he.] *Every time she took a cookie from the bag, he took one. When the last cookie was left, the man nervously took that cookie and broke it in half. He offered the other half to the lady and smiled. [Irritated, and definitely not smiling,] the lady snatched the other half of the cookie from him, [popped it into her mouth,] and thought, "This guy has some nerve that even after eating a half bag of my cookies, he didn't [even say thank you]."*

*She had been so galled by the man [that she] was relieved when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate. She boarded the plane and sat in her seat [to read] her book. She reached her hand [into her bag and] was surprised to find a bag full of cookies. . . .*

[Suddenly her countenance changed from anger to wonder to embarrassment.] *"If my cookies are here," she [realized,] the other [bag from which she*

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*Peggy S. Worthen, wife of BYU president Kevin J. Worthen, delivered this devotional address on January 4, 2022.*

had been eating must have belonged to the man. He was not stealing her cookies. He was] *sharing his*. . . . *She was filled with [a] feeling of guilt and regret [for her mistaken judgment. She felt even more chagrined because it was now] too late to apologize.*<sup>1</sup>

Can you relate to this story? Have you ever had an experience in which you harshly judged someone and then learned that you were seriously mistaken—and that it was too late to apologize for the error you had made? I have, and I suspect many of you have as well. After all, our mortal existence is designed to help us experience and overcome all kinds of feelings. They may not arise over a bag of cookies, but they can be overwhelming nonetheless.

Let me suggest three things that we can do to avoid or respond to such situations.

**First**, we should be slow to ascribe to others bad intent. It is easy to rush to incorrect judgments. Sometimes we may find ourselves creating our own narratives because of a lack of full information. That means we can decide what narrative to use. When we face that choice, we should assume good faith. If we learn to look at situations from a perspective of charity or good faith, we can avoid experiencing the feelings of guilt and regret that arise when we are too quick or too harsh in forming our opinions.

Elder Dale G. Renlund reminded us:

*When we cultivate the love of God in our hearts . . . , our love of God and our discipleship of Jesus Christ generate genuine concern for others. . . .*

*. . . We approach disagreements [and, I add, misunderstandings] with meekness, patience, and kindness. We worry less about our own sensitivities and more about our neighbor's. . . . We assume that those with whom we disagree are doing the best they can with the life experiences they have.*<sup>2</sup>

**Second**, when we do misjudge, as we inevitably will, it's important to remember that we are not perfect. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings happen. Sometimes we spend too much time focusing exclusively on the things that we did wrong. Because we are all trying to do the best we

can, there are often positive actions that we can latch onto even when we make our mistakes.

For example, the woman in the story didn't create a scene. She didn't say anything unkind—although she may have wanted to. She continued to allow the man to eat the cookies and didn't grab the bag of cookies and go sit somewhere else. And she ultimately recognized that she was in the wrong and would have apologized if she could have done so. These are things that she did do right. And she could use those actions to increase her hope that next time she could do even better.

Just as we should assume good faith in the actions of others, we should also interpret our own actions in a charitable manner, giving ourselves credit for the things we do well even in the midst of our imperfections.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated:

*Around the Church I hear many who struggle with this issue: "I am just not good enough." "I fall so far short." "I will never measure up." . . .*

*. . . I know we are [God's] spiritual sons and daughters with divine potential to become as He is. I also know that, as children of God, we should not demean or vilify ourselves, as if beating up on ourselves is somehow going to make us the person God wants us to become. No! With a willingness to repent and a desire for increased righteousness always in our hearts, I would hope we could pursue personal improvement in a way that doesn't include . . . feeling depressed or demolishing our self-esteem.*<sup>3</sup>

Yes, we can do better. But by focusing only on the things we do wrong, we may prevent ourselves from realizing our divine potential. So do not be afraid to give yourself credit for the things you did do right—and use that as a springboard to do even better the next time.

**Third**, and most important, as we strive to avoid misunderstandings and incorrect misjudgments, we need to diligently keep our focus on the Savior. He can help us avoid misjudgments, and He can help us improve and overcome all our mistakes and weaknesses. By focusing on Jesus Christ, we invite His Spirit into our lives.

Through that Spirit, Christ changes us. Through that Spirit, He expands our perspective and helps us see things as they really are, which helps us judge both others and ourselves in a more charitable and accurate light. He will also give us the hope that both we and those around us are not stuck with our imperfections but can continue to grow and become more like Him. It is no surprise then that as we focus more on Christ, our lives improve.

President Russell M. Nelson emphasized this in the last general conference when he stated, “I plead with you to make time for the Lord! Make your own spiritual foundation firm . . . by doing those things that allow the Holy Ghost to be with you *always*.”<sup>4</sup> President Nelson reminded us:

*Never underestimate the profound truth that “the Spirit speaketh . . . of things as they **really** are, and of things as they **really** will be.” “It will show unto you all things what ye should do.”*

*Nothing invites the Spirit more than fixing your focus on Jesus Christ.*<sup>5</sup>

May we heed this prophetic plea to invite the Savior into our daily lives by setting aside time each day for Him. As we do so, He will help us make correct judgments and guide us through the difficulties and challenges that we face with more patience, compassion, and forgiveness to ourselves and others. I so promise, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. There are various versions of this story. This version is adapted from “The Cookie Thief,” All Time Short Stories, [alltimeshortstories.com/the-cookie-thief](http://alltimeshortstories.com/the-cookie-thief).

2. Dale G. Renlund, “The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect—Eventually,” *Ensign*, November 2017.

4. Russell M. Nelson, “Make Time for the Lord,” *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.

5. Nelson, “Make Time”; emphasis in original. Quoting Jacob 4:13; emphasis added; also 2 Nephi 32:5.