



← Choosing Sides →

BY KIMBERLY WEBB
(Based on a true story)

Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

Sarah sat on her bed, waiting to hear Mom's tap on the door. She tried to gulp away the sobs, but tears kept trickling down her face.

Earlier that day, she and her friend Megan were pretending that they had discovered a buried treasure. They placed Sarah's allowance, some foreign coins from Dad's mission, and Megan's plastic jewelry in a shoe box. When Megan saw the old,



worn poetry book on the living room shelf, it seemed like the perfect antique to finish off their treasure. “Grab that old book,” she said. “Let’s pretend it’s a diary.”

Sarah knew that she wasn’t supposed to play with it—it had belonged to her great-great-grandmother, and its yellowing pages almost crumbled when touched. Mom cherished it as one of her family heirlooms. But Sarah was sure that nothing bad would happen to it if she borrowed it for only a little while.

She and Megan sneaked out the back door to “bury” the shoe box under some bushes.

A sick feeling welled up in her stomach even before her brother Spencer told Mom.

Mom knocked on the bedroom door and slipped in. “Have you been thinking?” she asked. Sarah nodded. “And how do you feel?”

“Awful.” Sarah sniffled. “I took your book when I knew I wasn’t supposed to.”

Mom smoothed Sarah’s hair and kissed her forehead. “Heavenly Father doesn’t want you to feel awful. He wants you to feel sorry.”

“No problem!” Sarah thought. It seemed that she had been feeling sorry a lot lately.

“I forgive you,” Mom said, “but you need to pray for forgiveness, too. Since you were baptized last month, you are now accountable for your sins.”

“That’s just it!”

“What do you mean?” Mom looked surprised.

Sarah blinked at the floor, hating how puffy her eyes felt. “When I got confirmed, I was given the gift of the Holy Ghost, right?”

“That’s right. As long as you’re worthy, the Spirit will be with you.”

“Then why is it still hard?” Sarah wiped her eyes, angry that the tears wouldn’t stop falling. “I thought that the Holy Ghost would make it easy to be good. But it seems that ever since I’ve been baptized, I’ve made as many mistakes as I did before.”

Mom hugged her. “That’s why there’s repentance.

Even when the Holy Ghost helps you *know* what the right thing is, what you *do* is still your choice.

Sometimes it’s hard to do what you know is right.”

Sarah nodded. She was confused, though. Even before her baptism, she’d had enough sense to know that taking Mom’s book would be wrong, but she’d never been tempted to do it. What had happened today?

Sarah sighed. She’d just have to try harder. When Mom left the room, she got down on her knees to pray.

In school on Monday, Marcus slid his math assignment next to hers.

“Let me check my paper,” he said. “I want to make sure I have the same answers you do.”

Sarah handed him her paper, as she always did, but this time she saw Marcus scribbling out his answers and writing hers down. He wasn’t checking—he was cheating! Sarah knew it was wrong to let Marcus cheat, but she didn’t want to make him feel bad. Wasn’t being nice more important than being honest about one little math assignment? After all, she wasn’t cheating—*he* was.

A familiar, uneasy feeling crept into the pit of her stomach. Remembering how bad she had felt a few days ago, she yanked her paper away.

“What are you doing?” Marcus cried.

“I can’t let you cheat,” Sarah said. Even though Marcus gave her a dirty look, she didn’t give in to the temptation to let him copy her answers. She realized that she had made a right choice because she felt calm and happy inside. “That’s what the Holy Ghost feels like,” Sarah thought. Her quick decision hadn’t been easy, but she had done what was right.

After school, Mom drove Sarah to Megan’s soccer game. On the way there, Sarah told her about the experience she’d had.

“I’m proud of you, Sarah!” Mom said. “See? You’re learning from your mistakes.”

“I guess so,” Sarah agreed. “Now I know what the Holy Ghost feels like, but I’m still confused about

something else.”

“What’s that?”

“I wonder why I think about disobeying lately. I never wanted to touch your book until Megan told me to, and I never wanted to let anyone cheat until today. I almost let Marcus copy my paper, even though I knew I shouldn’t.” Mom was quiet, so Sarah continued. “That isn’t all. Sometimes I’m mean to Spencer. Sometimes swear words pop into my head, and I want to say them. I want to be good, but I keep being tempted!”

“That’s what happens when you join a team,” Mom said. “The opposing team gets mad.”

“What?”

“Think of watching soccer,” Mom said. “It’s obvious that you’re loyal to Megan’s team, because you cheer for them. The other team might not like it, but you’re on the sidelines. You can’t help them to win or lose as much as if you jogged onto the field and started playing.”

“What do you mean, Mom?”

“When you were baptized, you chose sides,” Mom said. “You know that baptism shows Heavenly Father your love and commitment to obey. Don’t forget that it proves to Satan whose side you’re on, too. He’ll tempt you to change your mind.”

“I went to church every week before I was baptized,” Sarah protested. “Didn’t my going to Primary upset Satan just as much then?”

Mom pulled into the parking lot and turned off the engine. “You were on the Lord’s side, but you were cheering from the sidelines. Now you’re in the game.

Being righteous will take more effort than it has before. And it



will take more courage, and it will definitely take more repentance.”

Sarah thought about that. “I guess watching a game *is* much easier than playing it.” No wonder the gift of the Holy Ghost hadn’t taken away all of her problems. The Spirit could help her see when Satan was tempting her, but the temptations wouldn’t just disappear. “Is that what ‘opposition in all things’ (2 Nephi 2:11) means?” she wondered. She had read in the Book of Mormon that without agency to choose between good and evil, no one could become more like Heavenly Father.

“Even if it’s harder, it’s more worth it to play than to just watch,” Sarah decided aloud.

“Especially when you win,” Mom added with a smile.

Sarah got out of the car and walked toward the field. She silently promised herself that she would really, really try to follow the Holy Ghost, no matter how much she was tempted. She had chosen the Lord’s side. As long as she did her best to be worthy, the Spirit would bless her with the courage to keep choosing the right. ●



Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
(“‘Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,’” *Ensign*, Mar. 2000, 8.)

“We cannot sign on for a battle of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence without knowing it will be a fight—a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless. . . .

“Sure it is tough—before you join the Church, while you are trying to join, and after you have joined. That is the way it has always been, . . . but don’t draw back. Don’t panic and retreat. Don’t lose your confidence.”