

How could
Emma be nice
when Violet was
so mean?

Helping

By Charlotte Mae Sheppard
(Based on a true story)

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Mark 12:31).

Emma tightened her grip on her backpack as she walked into her new classroom. It was the first day of school. She had her favorite dress on, and Mom had packed a special treat with lunch—animal crackers.

Today is going to be great, Emma thought to herself. *As long as—*

Emma stopped and stared across the classroom. There she was. *Violet*.

Last year Violet had hogged the monkey bars every recess. She had called Emma names. She had even stolen Emma's best friend!

Violet saw Emma and stuck out her tongue. Emma glared back, gripping her backpack even harder. Violet had been mean all last year, and it seemed this year wouldn't be any different.

"Welcome to a new year, class!" Miss Caldwell said from the front of the room. "Let's assign seats."

The desks were lined up in twos across the classroom. Miss Caldwell ran her finger down the roll, then she pointed at a pair of desks in the back. "Emma. You will sit back there."

Emma sat down in one of the back desks. She hoped Liselle would sit next to her. Or Jaime. Or—

"Violet."

Emma's head jerked up. Did she hear that right?

Yes. Miss Caldwell was still pointing at the desk beside hers. "You will be Emma's neighbor, Violet," she said.

Violet trudged toward Emma with a frown. Emma put her head on her desk and stared at the wall. It was going to be a long year.

At math time Miss Caldwell wrote some problems on the board for the class to solve. "You may work alone or

with your neighbor," she said.

Emma quickly hunched over her paper, pretending like she was busy. The problems were pretty easy. She was just trying to avoid Violet. She hadn't looked at her once all morning.

Something poked her shoulder. It felt like a pencil. Emma ignored it.

Another poke. Violet was poking her! Emma kept working stubbornly.

Violet's third poke was hard enough to hurt. Emma could feel herself boiling up inside. Was the whole year going to be like this? She thought about raising her hand to tell Miss Caldwell. Or maybe she'd just give Violet another glare.

Then Emma heard a sniffle. Was someone crying?

The pencil poked her again. She looked over and saw Violet staring at her. Her pencil was in her hand, and there were tears in



Violet



her eyes. Her paper was covered in eraser smudges.

Violet twisted the pencil in her hands. “Can you help me?” she asked quietly.

Emma looked at her for a minute, shocked. Violet wanted her to help? After how mean she had always been? Emma turned back to her own paper. Violet could work alone. She didn’t deserve Emma’s help, even if she was her neighbor!

Emma silently faced forward. She could hear Violet crying softly next to her. The scriptures always said to love her neighbor—but Violet was different! Emma was only sitting next to her in class!

Emma went back to her own work. Then she stopped. Maybe Violet wasn’t different. Maybe when the scriptures said to love your neighbor, they meant everyone. Even the mean ones. Even if it was hard.

Emma sighed and slowly put her pencil down. She turned to Violet and tried her best to smile. “Can I help?” she asked.

Violet nodded, wiping her tears away with her hand.

Emma leaned over Violet’s paper and started helping with the first problem. She already had a warm feeling inside her. She wondered if Violet liked animal crackers. ◆



FOLLOWING JESUS

Jesus wants us to love everyone. In the scriptures, He teaches us to love our family and friends and treat them kindly. Jesus also taught, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (Matthew 5:44). This means that even when someone is not nice to you, you can follow Jesus by being kind and trying to be a friend.