



By Stephen W. Owen

Young Men General President

When I was 14, I made a decision that changed everything. I was walking down the street with some friends on a Friday night, and we were having a good time, just as we usually did. But tonight there was a problem, and I knew I had to do something about it. I just wasn't sure I could.

For the past couple of years, my friends had started experimenting with cigarettes and alcohol. It was slow at first, just a once or twice sort of thing, but by the time this Friday came, they regularly smoked and drank when we were out alone. I thought that as long as I just kept myself clean, I could still have a good time with my friends. Of course, my parents could tell something wasn't right with my friends. And my

friends could tell that my parents didn't approve of them. That left me in the uncomfortable middle: I found myself repeatedly defending my friends to my parents and defending my parents to my friends.

So there we were that Friday night, walking down the street. My friends started drinking and smoking, and I finally realized how uncomfortable I was with their behavior. So I made a choice. I walked to the other side of the road.

My friends laughed at me. They called me a "goody-goody." And they said that if I stayed over there, I wouldn't be their friend anymore. Well, we got to the end of the road. My friends turned left, and I turned right. I was two miles (3 km) from home, and they were the longest

At a CROSSROADS



with My FRIENDS

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two miles I'd ever walked. You might think I would feel good about making such a courageous choice, but in that moment, I felt awful. I woke up the next morning with the terrifying realization that I had lost my friends and that I was now alone. For a 14-year-old, that was devastating.

A New Friend

Not too many days later, I got a phone call from a member of the Church I knew named Dave. He asked if I wanted to come to his house on Saturday night. He also invited me to join his family for dinner the next day. It sounded like a lot more fun than I was currently having with no friends, so I agreed. Dave and I had a good time together—and, of course, there were no cigarettes or alcohol. As I listened to Dave's dad say the prayer at dinner, I felt so good. I began to think that maybe—just maybe—things were getting better.

Dave and I became best friends. We played football together, went to school together,

helped each other go on missions. When we got back, we were college roommates. We helped each other find the right women to marry and kept each other on the strait and narrow path all the way to the temple and after. All these years later, we're still good friends. And it all started with a simple phone call, right when I needed it.

A Mother's Influence

At least, that's how I thought it had all started. Imagine my surprise when, years later, I found out that it was my mom, working behind the scenes, who had orchestrated our friendship! Soon after I lost my old friends, she noticed something was wrong with me, so she



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called Dave's mom to see if they could figure out a way to help. Dave's mom then coaxed Dave into contacting me and inviting me over. Sometimes promptings to help someone in need come from the Holy Ghost; sometimes they come from an angel—such as a mother—who “speak[s] by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 32:3).

I've often wondered how life might have been different—for me and for Dave—if my mom hadn't perceived my struggle and taken action. Doesn't that remind you of the way Heavenly Father blesses us? He knows about our every need, and He sends “blessings from above thru words and deeds of those who love” (“Each Life That Touches Ours for Good,” *Hymns*, no. 293).

We Walk Together

Ultimately, we are all responsible for our own choices. As President Thomas S. Monson has said repeatedly, “The choices we make determine our destiny,”¹ and many of those

choices must be made personally, individually. Often our decisions make us feel isolated, even lonely. But our Heavenly Father did not send us here alone. The decisions I made at key moments blessed and guided my entire life. But those decisions were inspired and empowered by my mother's prayerful efforts and by Dave's support and friendship.

The test that we call earth life is different from the tests we often take in school—where you have to keep your eyes on your own test and you aren't allowed to help your neighbor. No, in this test, we can and must help each other; in fact, that's part of the test. So while your choices may at times take you to the lonely side of the road, please know that all along that road are others who have made their own difficult decision to be on the Lord's side. They will walk with you, and they need you to walk with them. ■

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Choices,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2016, 86.

