



# IT'S JUST a COPY! Right?

BY JANESEA CLOWARD

*What's wrong with "free" downloads?  
The cost is too high.*

Imagine walking into a store and seeing the new CD from your favorite band. You've wanted to buy this for weeks, but when you look at the price tag, you know you can't afford it right now.

Now imagine you're back at home, surfing the Internet, and you come across a file-sharing program. This software would let you download millions of songs for free—including the ones on that new CD you want. What do you do?

For honest Latter-day Saint youth, walking off with that CD without paying for it isn't even an option. But in a world with millions of free songs only a mouse-click away, the line between legal and illegal sometimes seems blurry, and some of the same youth think file sharing is different from everyday stealing.

But think about it for a minute. No matter what you call it—file sharing, pirating, free downloads, peer-to-peer networks—taking something you should have paid for is stealing, and stealing is wrong.

## **A Dangerous Web**

So how do some of the youth of the Church get tangled up in music pirating? After all, file sharing software is not inherently evil. It allows people to share their own creations with other users around the world. For instance, if you are in a band and want to test your music, you could upload songs to a peer-to-peer network. Or if you just love music, you could listen to unpublished songs posted by artists from across the globe.

But peer-to-peer networks cross legal boundaries when copyrighted material is involved. When a musician releases a song or album as a commercial product, it is copyrighted, so no one can legally use it without paying for it first. If you download a commercially released song from a file-sharing Web site, you are stealing it from the musician just as much as you would be if you shoplifted a CD.

These days, with digital music players gradually replacing CD players, fewer people buy CDs. Instead, they download their music from online music stores. Many of these stores offer music downloads for a small fee—usually about a dollar or less per song. But many

people still bypass these sites in favor of file-sharing networks, where they can get the same songs for free.

### My Story

I discovered file-sharing software as a college freshman, and, however innocently, I quickly got caught up in the world of free downloads. I thought that since it was so easy, and seemingly without penalties, it was harmless. Before long, my hard drive was jammed with almost 1,000 of my favorite songs.

Then I started to wonder about the collection of songs on my computer. Every time I listened to them, I felt guilty for enjoying something I hadn't paid for. As much as I loved my music, I just couldn't feel right about keeping it. I finally deleted the software.

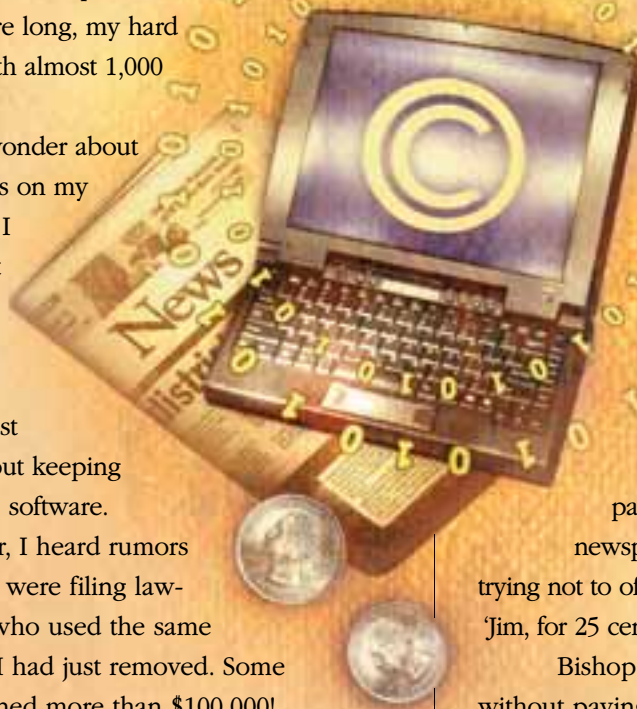
A few months later, I heard rumors that the record labels were filing lawsuits against people who used the same file-sharing software I had just removed. Some people were being fined more than \$100,000! I couldn't believe it.

After the shock wore off, I realized just how serious music pirating is. Fortunately, I had removed all my files before the legal battles began, so I didn't have to worry about paying monetary damages. But I realized that I hadn't gotten away without damaging my spirit. I had known stealing was wrong since I was a child, and yet I had convinced myself that somehow this was different.

### How Much Is Your Integrity Worth?

Like me, a lot of people think downloading a song or two for free is no big deal. Would a dollar even make a difference to the millionaire musicians who recorded those

**I**t doesn't matter if everyone else is doing it; stealing is always wrong, whether it's downloading copyrighted songs or taking a newspaper from a vending machine without paying.



songs? Probably not, but a better question is, “Is my integrity worth so little that I would give it up for a dollar a song?” The answer, of course, is no.

Bishop Richard G. Edgley, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, told of an experience where his integrity was similarly tested:

“Some 30 years ago, while working in the corporate world, some business associates and I were passing through O’Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. One of these men had just sold his company for tens of millions of dollars—in other words, he was not poor.

“As we were passing a newspaper vending machine, this individual put a quarter into the machine, opened the door to the stack of papers inside the machine, and began dispensing unpaid-for newspapers to each of us. When he handed me a newspaper, I put a quarter in the machine and, trying not to offend but to make a point, jokingly said, ‘Jim, for 25 cents I can maintain my integrity.’”<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Edgley could have easily walked away without paying for that newspaper. After all, 25 cents would have hardly made a difference to the publishers. But he knew it would make a difference to his integrity.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, “How rare a gem, how precious a jewel is the man or woman in whom there is neither guile nor deception nor falsehood!”<sup>2</sup> We can all be that kind of man or woman by being honest in everything we say and do. When we come across a tempting situation—like illegally downloading music—we can remember how much our integrity is worth, and that for just a dollar we can maintain it. **NE**

### NOTES

1. “Three Towels and a 25-Cent Newspaper,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 73.
2. “An Honest Man—God’s Noblest Work,” *New Era*, Oct. 1976, 49.