



SELLING NIGHT CRAWLERS

I learned valuable lessons the night my brother and I sold worms.

By Marcy Goodfleisch

I was thrilled when I passed the driving test and at long last was permitted to drive the family station wagon. My parents gave me a set of keys, which I proudly attached to my keychain, vowing to honor their trust in me. But one evening, while my parents were away, a heavy rainfall and a weak moment tested my good intentions.

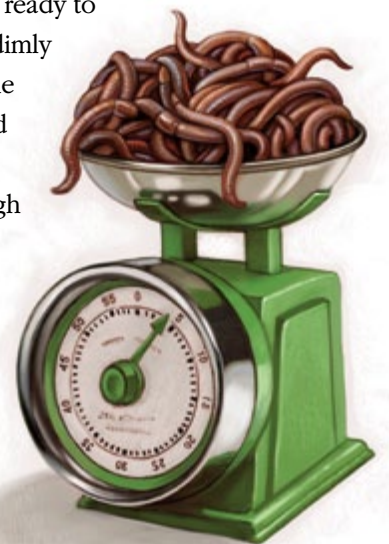
My parents left my brothers and me for a few hours while they ran some errands. It started raining, and soon we saw large puddles outside of the house. We lived in an area surrounded by rich farmland, and whenever the ground was soaked by a good rain, fat earthworms (we called them *night crawlers*) would pop to the surface, almost like magic. When the rain cleared, we could see hundreds of plump night crawlers slithering along the slick mud around our garden and along the walkways.

My brother Bobby wasn't old enough to drive yet, but he approached me with an idea for earning some money from the worms. He'd heard about a place across town that purchased night crawlers for fishing bait. He figured we could collect hundreds of night crawlers from the wet ground, drive to the bait store, sell them, and then be back before our parents returned. I didn't know much about fishing or selling bait, but I knew I shouldn't drive the car without permission. I rationalized that I knew how to drive safely and we wouldn't be gone very long. But first, of course, we had to collect the worms.

It was still damp outside when we gathered flashlights and a few empty cans and began digging through the soft mud in search of the slithery creatures. The plan didn't quite hold the attraction for me that it did for my brother, but I got past my squeamishness and grabbed my share of squirmy night crawlers. We spent some time picking worms from the mud and then realized that we needed to hurry across town to the bait shop. I didn't know where it was, but my brother assured me he knew how to get there.

I followed his directions, and soon we found ourselves driving through dark and unfamiliar streets. We were miles from our home and safety. My brother was determined to sell the worms, but all I wanted was to get back home as fast as possible. Just as I was ready to turn the car around, we saw a dimly lit shed ahead of us, with people standing in line holding jars and buckets. I reluctantly agreed to stop at the shed just long enough to sell the night crawlers.

However, the line moved very slowly, and more time passed before my brother finally made it to the counter where they weighed the worms and paid us for them. We knew we had been gone far longer than we planned.





When we pulled into the driveway, our parents were already home. My heart sank; I knew I would be in a lot of trouble for taking the car without permission. My stomach was tight as I remembered the numerous opportunities I'd had that evening to make better choices. We held our heads low as we entered by the back door, hoping to avoid attention. No such luck. But we were unprepared for the reaction.

Our parents sat at the kitchen table, their faces stricken with fear and grief. Tears poured down our mother's face;

our father's eyes were red, and he was clearly distraught. Rather than greeting us with anger, they both cried out in relief that we were alive and safe. Then they asked where we had been.

WE HAVE THE TOOLS

"Each of us has come to this earth with all the tools necessary to make correct choices."

President Thomas S. Monson,
"The Three Rs of Choice," *Ensign*,
Nov. 2010, 67.

I felt very foolish and childish as I offered my stammering answer: "Um . . . we were out selling night crawlers." Their grief and emotion cut me to the soul. I would never knowingly or intentionally have caused my parents such hurt, but I knew I had done exactly that. I was acutely aware that I had not lived up to the trust and responsibility they'd placed in me, nor had I lived up to my own goals.

The lessons I learned that night were far reaching. I had given my parents my word, and I didn't keep it. When we make a covenant with Heavenly Father, we have a responsibility to keep it. Just as my parents were thankful to see us come home, Heavenly Father welcomes us with love when we return to Him.

Eventually the trip my brother and I made to the bait store became part of our family folklore. For years it served as a gentle reminder that we always need to be on the right path. Otherwise, one of our parents was sure to ask, "Were you out selling night crawlers?" **NE**