



WHERE WILL MY CHOICES LEAD?

By Adam C. Olson
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Could Karina change her direction by changing her decisions?

Karina's smile faded. She began to sweat—and not because it was unusually hot that week. She looked around for help. But in spite of the crowd at the open house, no one seemed to notice her alone with the reporter and all her questions.

Until that moment, 17-year-old Karina had enjoyed volunteering at the Kyiv Ukraine Temple open house. Now, with the newspaper reporter waiting expectantly, her tongue seemed stuck.

Karina was afraid that because of past mistakes she was trying to overcome, God wouldn't help her.

Where Following the Crowd Leads

Growing up in the Church, Karina had dreamed of a temple marriage. But like many teens, she craved acceptance.

She wanted to be beautiful and popular like her older sister. She dreamed of standing out and being admired, but she was afraid of sticking out and being ridiculed. Wanting to follow in her father's footsteps at the police academy only increased the pressure. Out of 2,000 students, there were only 70 women. She both enjoyed the attention and dreaded it.

In her desire to fit in, she made some poor choices. "The pull of the world was strong," Karina says. "People around me drank and smoked. They pushed and I gave in. I enjoyed being part of a group that felt so carefree."

She knew what she was doing was wrong, but she wasn't thinking about where her choices would lead as she followed the crowd away from God (see Matthew 7:13–14).

Choosing to Change Means Changing Your Choices

One day a young man she liked said he respected her church's beliefs.

Ashamed that she wasn't living those beliefs better, Karina finally stopped to consider the path she was on (see Haggai 1:5–7). She realized that her decisions were leading her away from God, the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and her dream of an eternal family.

The only way to change her direction was to change the decisions she was making each day.¹ But she wondered if she was already too far down the wrong path. Was it too late to change?

Karina decided to begin changing by praying and reading the scriptures daily. She started writing in her journal,



CHOOSE TO REPENT

"If the adversary should take you prisoner due to misconduct, I remind you that you hold the key that will unlock the prison door from the inside. You can be washed clean through the atoning sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ.

"You may in time of trouble think that you are not worth saving because you have made mistakes, big or little, and you think you are now lost. That is *never* true! . . . Repentance *can* heal what hurts, no matter what it is."

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Counsel to Youth," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 18.

which helped her recognize Heavenly Father's help each day. She changed the topic if conversations turned bad.

Her most difficult decision was to choose no friends for a time rather than choosing friends with a negative influence. She began looking for friends with higher standards.

The Importance of Hope

Over the months that followed, the adversary threw doubt and fear in her face at every decision. Sometimes she wondered if the effort to follow the Savior was worth it. Who she wanted to be seemed out of reach.

But as she watched how her parents and others with strong testimonies lived, she learned that there is something more powerful than doubt and fear—she learned that because of repentance, there is hope.

"I saw it was possible to live the right way," she says. "We aren't condemned by our mistakes. Heavenly Father has given us the chance to repent and change direction."

Turning away from her old choices and trying to follow the Savior each day have taught her that Heavenly Father is patient. "He has given me one chance after another to change and become a better person," she says. "He has helped me through difficult times."

Help Is There If We Choose to Follow

Karina squared her shoulders and turned back to the reporter. Her smile brightened. Heavenly Father had done so much for her already that she knew He would help her now.

After the reporter finished asking questions, Karina smiled and waved. The reporter smiled back and walked away. Karina couldn't remember much of what she said, but she would remember for a long time how she felt, knowing Heavenly Father is always within reach of those who choose to follow Him. ■

NOTE

1. See Thomas S. Monson, "Pathways to Perfection," *Liahona*, July 2002, 111–14; *Ensign*, May 2002, 99–101.