



THE CHALLENGE

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When I was a child, my parents took me to church only occasionally. I was baptized and ordained a deacon, but attending church was not a big part of our lives. By the time I was 14, I wasn't attending church at all. I was in the middle of yet another custody battle between my parents. When I moved in with my mom, I had no motivation to study, because I saw no purpose in my life. A lot of people stayed away from me in my new school because I wore black clothing and combat boots. My grades were terrible. That was the year I entered ninth grade.

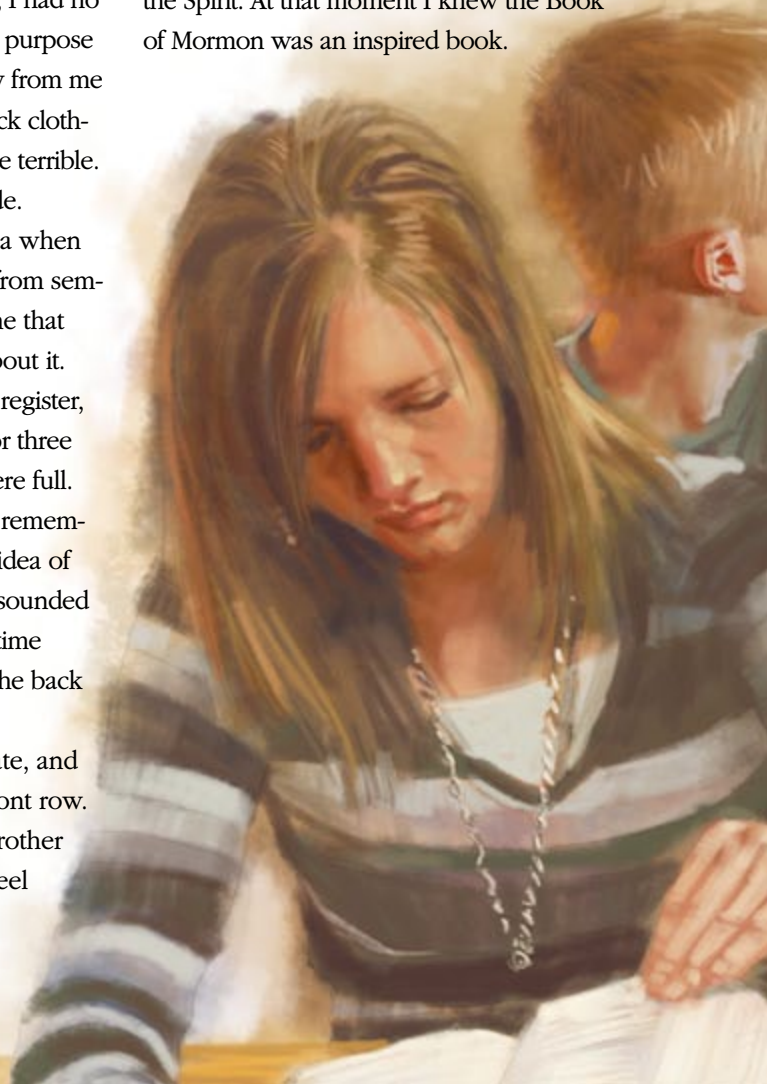
One day I was visiting my grandma when she told me that if I would graduate from seminary, she would give me \$100. For me that was a lot of money. I said I'd think about it.

When I went to my new school to register, the school counselor signed me up for three shop classes because other classes were full. I didn't want to take shop, and then I remembered Grandma's offer. Suddenly the idea of getting out of shop *and* getting \$100 sounded pretty good. I signed up for released-time seminary. I went to class, but I sat in the back and participated as little as possible.

One day I got to seminary class late, and the only seat available was on the front row. I sat down and heard our teacher, Brother Peck, say, "I don't know why, but I feel like we need to watch this today."

We watched *How Rare a Possession*, a movie about how the Book of Mormon affected the lives of different people. As the movie ended and we got up to leave, something unexpected happened: I realized that I felt peaceful. It was such a foreign feeling that I wondered what it could mean. An impression came: I was feeling the Spirit. At that moment I knew the Book of Mormon was an inspired book.

I didn't start out going to seminary for the right reasons, but I ended up in the right place.



I started going to church with some friends in our neighborhood. But then we moved and I stopped going.

In my new school I signed up for seminary. I began reading the scriptures daily. One night it hit me just how much my life needed changing. I had been learning about the gospel, but I hadn't been living it. I was still hanging out with people who made it difficult to live righteously. I knew I had to get serious about changing my life. The next day I went and talked to Brother Porter, my seminary teacher. He told me when and where my ward met.

The next Sunday I went to church but sat down in the back of the chapel. It took a while to make friends because of my reputation, but I kept going





The testimony I had gained through seminary was worth far more than any amount of money.

each week because I knew that was where I was supposed to be. For my 15th birthday, my other grandma gave me a gift certificate for a haircut and some new clothes. A few days later I was ordained a teacher.

When general conference came, Brother Porter gave us an assignment to watch at least one session. I put off the assignment until Sunday morning. When the session started, I rolled over in my bed and turned on the TV. As I watched President Thomas S. Monson, then the Second Counselor in the First Presidency, talk about the history of the Church in the German Democratic Republic, I felt that same feeling of peace. I recognized it as the Spirit testifying that I was listening to prophets. That afternoon my mom and brothers went grocery shopping. I stayed home to watch another session.

By that point I had made two very important decisions: I would live the gospel, and I wanted to get married in the temple. But I wasn't going to spend two years on a mission. Then our seminary teacher gave some lessons on missionary work. By the end of the week, I knew that going on a mission was the right thing to do.

I went to the bishop to get a recommend for my patriarchal blessing. Through that experience, I learned that God had a plan for my life. That knowledge helped me form my own plans for the future. My grades improved, and I started getting involved in clubs and activities at school. I was assigned to be a home teacher with a neighbor, who taught me about service and how a priesthood holder should live.

Despite the changes I made, my life wasn't easy. In some ways it became more difficult. Going to church meant more conflicts with my family over the kinds of activities we engaged in on Sunday and the kinds of movies we watched. Most of the time I went to church by myself. I missed out on dinners, movies, and visits to amusement parks. But that was more than made up for by the Spirit I felt. The Holy Ghost comforted me in difficult times and taught me as I read the scriptures.

When I graduated from high school and seminary, my grandma gave me the promised check for \$100. I thanked her and told her I didn't want it, but she insisted. The testimony I had gained of a loving Heavenly Father, the Savior, the Holy Ghost, the restored Church, and prophets who lead us today was worth far more than any amount of money. **NE**

