

For Will, choosing not to play football on Sundays could mean choosing not to play on one of the best teams.





FOOTBALL, SUNDAYS, AND SPIRITUAL BELLY FLOPS

By Charlotte Larcabal
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When I was a kid, my friends and I played a game called “Jump or Dive.” Basically, all you need is a deep pool or lake and something to jump off of, like a diving board. To play, you launch yourself off the diving board. Right as you do, someone yells, “jump,” which means you need to enter the water feet first, or “dive,” which means you need to enter the water hands first, in a dive.

When you try to react in midair, you usually end up resembling a flapping pretzel or doing a very painful belly flop.

Life doesn’t have to be a game of “Jump or Dive.” You can make a lot of decisions much earlier and avoid a lot of spiritual belly flops. The Old Testament prophet Joshua didn’t say, “Choose just before it’s too late.” He said, “Choose you *this day* whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15; emphasis added).

Will W., 14, from San Francisco, California, USA, probably doesn’t do many spiritual belly flops because he believes in making choices before the last minute.

“If you make the choice to do or not to do something before it even comes up, it makes things a lot easier,” he says. “Say you went to a party and someone offered you a drink. If you had to choose right then to take it or not, you might be tempted to take it. But if you had decided a long time ago to say no if anyone ever offered you a drink, you’d feel a lot surer of yourself. You wouldn’t even have time to be tempted. You’d say no because you had already decided to a long time ago.”



The 2018 Mutual theme says, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me” (D&C 19:23). For Will, peace means feeling confident as he chooses the right and not worrying about negative comments from others. That peace comes to Will from making the decision to listen to—and obey—Jesus Christ’s words in advance.

“Sometimes kids give me a hard time for what I do or don’t do, but it doesn’t really bother me because I decided a long time ago that that is how I would live,” he says.

One thing Will and his family decided a long time ago was to keep the Sabbath day holy. That got a little tricky when Will made an elite soccer team. But, like Nephi, his family believes that “the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7).

To Will, football is just about everything. As his mom says, “He eats, drinks, sleeps, and just loves, loves football. It’s his passion and he’s very good.”

So when Will made one of the highest-ranking teams in the area, he was thrilled. The only problem: the team played many of its games on Sundays. Most teams wouldn’t accept a player who would miss every Sunday game. Choosing not to play on Sundays could mean losing his spot on the team.

But Will had made that decision a long time ago. He would keep the Sabbath day holy.

Will and his family prayed together and told Heavenly

Father of their desire to keep His commandments and asked for His help. Then Will and his mother talked to the coaches of the team about their beliefs. To their surprise, the coaches wanted Will on the team even if he didn’t play on Sundays!

“I know that when I honor the Sabbath, I am blessed,” Will says. “I may not get to play as many games as the others, but I’ve seen blessings, like Sunday games suddenly getting changed to another day. I also think I play better because I have a day of rest.”

It gets better. Will soon found out that one of his teammates was also member of the Church. After a few months of playing together, the other boy followed Will’s example and stopped playing on Sunday too.

If you feel like you are not receiving the blessings of obedience, that might be because you can’t see all that Heavenly Father has in store for you. Deciding to listen to Christ’s words and to serve the Lord is always the right decision, so make it now!

“I plead with you to make a determination right here, right now, not to deviate from the path which will lead to our goal: eternal life with our Father in Heaven,” said President Thomas S. Monson (“The Three Rs of Choice,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 68).

Don’t make your life a game of “Jump or Dive.” Don’t risk spiritual or any other kinds of belly flops. Decide right now to follow Jesus Christ and enjoy the peace He brings into your life. ■

