

Sometimes truth really is...

STRANGER THAN FICTION



Stranger Than Fiction

Inspired by a true story

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and
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The New School

Nichole still felt the sting of the word. One little word, but it hurt like a paper cut. It rang in her ears like a siren or a school bell echoing through an empty hallway, pressing so heavily upon her that she felt helpless beneath the weight of it. She couldn't believe it as it fell off of her father's lips.

"We're what?"

"Moving." Her father tried to put his arm over her shoulder, but Nichole pulled away with a sigh. She had been born and raised a loyal subject of Canada. It had taken her sixteen years to establish her group of friends, her school, her lifestyle, and now all that was about to change just as she was preparing to enter her senior year of high school. She felt so helpless.

It was only six weeks from the day the announcement came that the old familiar furnishings had been sold, and Nichole found herself standing at the front door, looking inside one last time. The walls looked so bare. The floors so desolate. The house so empty. So lonely. The old farmhouse that had held so many dear and precious memories now stood, a skeleton, a shell, like an old used notebook, worn down and rough around the edges, but packed with pages of memories.

"Nikki?" Her father's hand touched her shoulder. "It's time to go, honey."

And so it was. As the car drove off, a tear escaped. The dust from the gravel road veiled the scene as Nichole watched the little country house shrink and fade into the distance. Its memory lingered like a sweet

perfume as she boarded the plane and throughout the duration of the trip. Upon arrival, she looked at the walls of the new house, held up with nails and wood and drywall. It was a far cry from her old home. Those old country walls were far more solid, held up by laughter and pain, sweat and tears. Memories.

The sun set quietly on the quaint little New England neighborhood on the outskirts of Boston, nestling the community under a blanket of darkness. As the rooftops glowed softly under the moonlight, Nichole lay in bed with her head on her pillow, unable to sleep. Her mind buzzed nervously with thoughts of the new school and everything that was to confront her with the dawning of the new day. She wished she could just fade away into the darkness somehow, but morning came abruptly, bringing with it a whole new mountain of anxieties that Nichole seemed to hide so well under her plastic smile.

The hallway buzzed anxiously with students stirring about, gathering at lockers to exchange books and the latest gossip, texting, and passing notes. Nichole stood nervously. Awkwardly.

“Hey, you’re in my algebra class.” A girl with braces stood before Nichole and smiled.

“Excuse me?” Nichole questioned curiously.

“My name is Jenny, and this is Liz. We’re your neighbors,” she said, eyeing the lockers.

She smiled, looking at the girls. “I’m Nichole.”

“You’re new here, aren’t you?” Jenny asked.

“Yeah, it’s my first day,” Nichole confessed.

“I thought so. It’s not bad. Most of the kids here are pretty cool.”

“Sure,” Nichole replied.

Looking across the hall, Jenny started pointing out people. “Like, there’s Becca. She’s a friend of mine. She’s real cool, except she has this thing about pink that drives me crazy. Not just pink. Like, hot pink. Look at her shoes!” The brightness drew her eyes down to the shoes. Nichole smiled.

“You don’t have a thing about pink, do you?”

Nichole shook her head.

“Good. Anyway, she’s alright.” Without hesitating to take a breath, Jenny continued. “And that guy over there is Justin. He’s a little wild. He’ll try to hit on you, but stay away from him, if you know what I mean.”

Pointing across the hall, she continued, “Over there is Susan. She’s nice. A little brainy, but nice. Not like, geeky brainy. She’s just smart, but she’s cool.”

Just then, Nichole noticed a quiet-looking girl in a flowered dress. Her demeanor appeared very cultured. Her disposition, humble. Polite. Confident. She seemed to glide down the hallway untouched by anything, as if words and glances just fell right off of her as carelessly as feathers drifting to the floor. “Who’s that?”

Jenny’s face turned a touch sour as she noticed the girl in the flowered dress.

“Oh, that’s Allie Perkins. You want to stay away from her. She’s a few fries short of a happy meal.”

“What?”

“A few cards short of a deck.”

Nichole looked at her curiously before Liz finally stepped in. “She’s strange.”

“Like how? She looks okay.”

“Well, for one, she’s a good girl. Squeaky clean, you know. Doesn’t drink. Doesn’t smoke. Doesn’t go to parties.”

“I see.”

“And for two, she goes to church on Saturday,” said Liz.

“So? Lots of churches today offer Saturday and Sunday services.”

“No, I mean she goes to church on Saturday... ‘as a matter of personal conviction,’ she says, whatever that means.”

“You mean, like she has to?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Really?”

“Really. I told you, she’s strange,” Jenny said.

“Well, I admit, that is a bit strange. Here we are in the 21’st century, and this poor girl still thinks she should go to church on Saturday?”

“Right.”

Nichole continued to look across the hallway at the girl in the flowered dress. Poised. Dignified. “She looks smart enough. Are you sure about her?”

Jenny just looked across the hall. “There’s one in every school. I guess she’s ours.”

“Have you ever talked to her about it?”

“No, religion is not something most people talk about here.”

Nichole brushed a curl of hair out of her eyes and said distantly, “Well, I think Ms. Allie Perkins and I are going to have a little talk. She needs someone to clear things up for her. She’s just too nice looking a girl to be

deceived by some religion her parents probably tried to push on her.”

“Well, you’re braver than I am, but if you can get her to change, you’ll make everyone in school happy,” Jenny said with a look of doubt, then glancing at her watch, she said abruptly, “Oh, I’ve got to get to class. Hey, we’ll talk later.” At that, the three dispersed and were lost in the crowd of students rushing off to class.

A New Friend

The little neighborhood looked much nicer in the light of day. Autumn had arrived on the New England coastal plain, and the leaves were exploding into rainbows of color, splashing variations of reds, yellow, oranges, and greens all through the neighborhood. As Nichole made her way home from school, meandering down the quiet sidewalk, she spotted the girl with the flowered dress on the other side of the street. Running to catch up with her, she was suddenly struck with a case of nerves. In spite of this, she pushed forward and called out, “Hey, wait up!”

The girl turned, just as quaint and pristine as she appeared in the hallway, and smiled. “I’m new in the area. My name is Nichole.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Nichole. My name is Allie. Allie Perkins.” Just then, the sound of children’s laughter echoed from a nearby yard, and though they weren’t laughing at her, Allie turned to look instinctively, then slowly turned back to eye her new friend. Nichole just smiled pleasantly with the reply, “It’s nice to meet you too.”

“So you’re new in the area? Where are you from?”

“Canada,” said Nichole.

“Wow. That’s a long way away.”

Nichole smiled.

Allie looked at her with those serious, compelling dark eyes before adding, “I saw you in the hallway today. I’m sorry I didn’t get around to introducing myself. I hope you’ll forgive my lack of courtesy.”

“It’s okay.”

“So, how do you like it here?”

“Seems nice, but it’s only my second day,” said Nichole.

“Do you live nearby?”

“Yeah, we moved into the blue house just around the corner, on Mulberry Street.”

“Right, the one that was for sale. I know which one it is. Used to belong to a sweet old lady. Mrs. Franklin, I believe. She couldn’t get around too well, so she finally had to move in with her daughter.”

“What about you? Where do you live?” Nichole inquired.

“I’m over on Cherry Blossom.” The name of the street seemed to fit this girl perfectly. Nichole imagined bluebirds singing out her window in the morning, with people smiling and waving as she walked by.

“That’s just two streets down. We’re practically neighbors. Hey, why don’t you come on over to my place for a glass of lemon aid.”

Nichole almost smirked at her innocent demeanor. Lemon aide? “Sure.”

“Great.”

At Allie's House

When they got to the house, it was just as Nichole might have guessed. Inside was pleasant. Clean. Well kept. The incoming sunlight glowed upon the white lace drapes. A handful of books lined a glass shelf, adorned with ceramic Precious Moments figures of little girls and boys with big droopy eyes. There was a piano in the living room and no television, which at once struck Nichole as being rather odd. As she eyed the place, she noticed a Bible sitting on a counter.

A pleasant-looking and well-dressed lady stepped around the corner with a light smile. "Mom, this is Nichole. She's new at our school."

"It's very nice to meet you, Nichole." The woman dried her hand on a hand towel and extended it. Her hand was soft to the touch. Delicate. Brittle with age, but firm.

The two went into the kitchen for the lemonade, then Allie said to her mother, "We're going to my room." Mrs. Perkins just smiled at the girls as they marched off.

When the door closed, Nichole's eyes explored the little room, decorated simply. A white desk rested in the corner with a laptop. A mirror hung on the wall, and off to the side, a picture of Jesus holding a lamb. Finally, Nichole asked, "So who's your favorite band?"

"Band?"

"Yeah, you do like music don't you?"

"Sure. I only listen to Christian music."

"Oh." Nichole hesitated, then, looking again at the picture of Jesus on the wall, inquired, "So I was

talking to one of the girls at school, and she said you go to church on Saturday.” She never was one to beat around the bush for long.

Slightly surprised by her abruptness, Allie smiled and said, “Well, I don’t suppose it’s a secret around there.”

“Do you ever go to church on Sunday?” asked Nichole.

“No. Just Saturday.”

“And you’re a Christian?”

“Yep.”

“I’ve just never heard of a Christian church that only worships on Saturday.”

“Yeah, it’s not a really big church. Kind of a smaller denomination.”

“So, why *do* you?”

“Why do I what?” Allie looked at her curiously.

“Go to church on Saturday, I mean. Why don’t you go on Sunday like everyone else?” asked Nichole.

“I keep the seventh day as the Sabbath, according to the commandment of God.”

“Well, that’s really sweet, but surely you know that Jesus changed the day that we worship on when He rose from the dead and that He commanded us to keep the first day holy.”

“Why, no. I didn’t know that.” Allie looked at her curiously.

“Sure. It’s true. Honest. That’s why everyone goes to church on Sunday today, except for Jews, who don’t believe in Jesus. You don’t have to keep the old seventh-day Sabbath anymore.”

Allie's smile slowly faded, replaced by a more serious, more sober version of her, as she said calmly yet cheerfully, "You probably know by now that everyone at school thinks I'm a little strange because I go to church on Saturday."

Nichole was silent and glanced down at her feet then out the window momentarily.

"I know the other kids talk about me. I know they all think I'm crazy, or at least a little strange. I see them whispering and pointing. I hear their jokes. It hurts. I don't like being different, but I feel like I have to obey God, and God said to keep the seventh day holy. In keeping the seventh day holy, I'm just following the instruction that I find in the word of God."

Turning from the window to look at Allie, she noticed how deep and dark her eyes were. Elegant but mysterious, perhaps in some respects like Allie herself. "But what I'm telling you about Sunday being the new Sabbath *is* in the Bible! I mean, you do believe in the New Testament, right?"

"Sure. I believe in the New Testament as much as the Old, but I've never read anything about Jesus changing the Sabbath. Or at least, if I have, I must have forgotten it or something," said Allie.

"Trust me. It's in there. Do you have a minute for me to show you where it is?"

"Sure." Allie reached over to her desk and grabbed her Bible. It was ragged and rough, looking as if it had been through a war or two. As Nichole looked at the worn edges, her eyebrows leapt. "Wow, looks like you've really read this thing a lot." She paused. Then her nose crinkled, and her eyebrows furrowed as

she looked up at Allie. “And you never read the part about the Sabbath being changed?”

Allie just smiled politely.

Taking the book, Nichole began to flip through it. Soon she stopped. “Here we go. Here’s one. ‘Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb’” (Matt. 28:1). Her voice started off strong at first but soon trailed off to almost a whisper, and she finally muttered, “No... No, I guess that wasn’t the one I was thinking of.”

She continued to flip through the pages, but as the minutes passed, her fingers began to spin with more intensity, nervously.

Allie, noticing her frustration, calmly replied, “Hey, that’s okay. Don’t worry about it right now. You can find it later. Anyway, it’s hard to find something in someone else’s Bible.”

“But I don’t get it. I’m just sure it’s in there.”

“Sure. Listen, you can find it later. I’ll tell you what, when you go home and have more time, you can look up the verses with your own Bible. Then when you find them, you can just bring them to me, and I’ll look at them. I really want to see them. Anyway, let’s just forget about it for now.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Nichole remained a bit bewildered for the remainder of the visit as the two continued to talk over school programs and boys and sports. Over the next hour and a half, they covered everything from the weather to what kind of shoes the girls were wearing in school these days, but through it all, Nichole couldn’t seem to get her mind off of the allusive verse.

The Mysterious Text

Nichole was quick to make new friends. Always so bright and cheerful, the students took an immediate liking to her, and as lunchtime rolled around, she was soon met by Becca, Liz, Chris from her homeroom, Ashley from her Chemistry class, and some friends of friends. As the girls settled at the table with their food, Nichole finally turned to Becca and confessed, “I was so embarrassed.”

“Why, what happened?” Becca asked curiously.

“I went over to Allie Perkins’ house after school the other day.” As the words fell off Nichole’s lips, a strange silence fell over the girls. Everyone looked intently at Nichole. Eyes opened wide. Jaws dropped. Finally, Becca said, “You mean, the Sabbath girl?”

“Right. I wanted to ask her about this Sabbath thing. I told her I was going to show her where they changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in the Bible.”

“You didn’t!” Chris looked at her in disbelief.

“Well, I tried, but I kept flipping through the Bible while she just sat there peering at me with those dark eyes of hers. I couldn’t find the verse anywhere!”

“Ha, ha,” Becca laughed. “It’s hard to find things when you’re nervous.”

“But I know it’s in there,” Nichole insisted. “No one would happen to have a Bible on them, would they?”

Looking around, the girls looked at her like she was crazy just for asking before Ashley finally replied, “I can pull one up on my phone.”

“I should have thought of that last night. Just type in Sunday and see what verses come up,” Nichole said almost triumphantly.

After a moment, Ashley replied, “There’s no reference to Sunday in the Bible.”

“I don’t get it. How could it not be there?” Nichole mumbled curiously.

At this, some of the others now pulled out their phones to join in the search, as Liz called out, “I bet I know why it’s not there. I don’t think the names for the weeks were added until the Roman Empire. Before that, they were just called by their order. Try looking up, ‘first day of the week’ and see what you find.”

“Yeah, I think you might be right,” Nichole replied.

After a moment of silence, Becca blurted out, “There we go! There are nine references to the first day of the week. One in the Old Testament and the other eight in the New Testament.”

“Well, that makes sense, since the change wasn’t made until the New Testament times... but I still can’t believe I couldn’t find one of these earlier,” said Nichole.

“Well, don’t keep us in suspense! Go ahead and read some of them,” one of the girls urged.

“Here, I’ll let you read them,” Becca said, holding out her phone.

Liz reached out. “I’ll read them.”

Taking the phone, she began, “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn...”

“No,” Nichole interrupted. “I read that one the other day. It doesn’t tell us anything.”

“Yeah, you’re right. In fact, it looks more like an argument in favor of Miss Sabbath Girl than anything. It says that after the Sabbath was over, the first day of the week began to dawn. Looks as if the Sabbath must have been the seventh day of the week,” said Becca.

“Well, we know that. What we want to know is where the change took place,” Ashley inserted. “Try another verse.”

Liz noticed that several of the verses referred to the resurrection, but there was nothing about a change. Finally, Becca said, “Maybe the apostles changed it. Like, maybe Jesus told Paul or one of the apostles to change it.”

“Here we go,” Liz blurted out. “In Acts 20:7, it says, ‘Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.’ What about that one?”

Nichole shook her head. “Sorry. It just isn’t that convincing. For one, it doesn’t mention the Sabbath at all. Do you really think someone would be convinced that the Sabbath was changed by reading that verse? Really?”

Becca jumped in. “Are you turning into a Sabbath keeper too now?”

“Look, I want to get to the bottom of this too, but I’m just not convinced that Sabbath worship was changed to Sunday by that one little verse.” Nichole looked at Becca.

“But it says that they came together to break bread on the first day of the week, and the apostle Paul talked until midnight!” Becca confirmed.

“I know that, but I’ve also read in Acts somewhere that they came together to break bread every day. I read it myself. And it also said the reason Paul spoke to them was because he was getting ready to leave the next day. How could that possibly prove that the Sabbath was changed?” Nichole looked at Becca.

“Well... I don’t know... I guess it doesn’t,” admitted Becca.

Now Liz, still looking at the verses on the phone, interrupted the girls. “Wait. We still have one more verse. Check this one. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, ‘On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.’” Liz looked up for a response.

Nichole again shook her head. “That doesn’t sound much like Sabbath-keeping. It sounds more like bookkeeping!”

“Yeah, maybe they were figuring out their income tax!” Ashley joked.

Liz made a face at her and threw a French Fry, but Nichole was more serious. She turned to Liz and said soberly, “Liz, tell me the truth. If you were Allie and you read one of those verses, would it convince you that the Sabbath was changed?”

Liz was silent.

“Seriously.”

Liz shook her head.

“Me either.”

The table was silent for a moment. Finally, Nichole said, “It’s no wonder Allie looked so cool and

calm. I bet she knew it all the time I was looking that there wasn't any such verse. I'm such an idiot."

"Are you saying that Allie's right?" Becca's eyes opened wide in disbelief.

"No, I still don't think she's right about this, but how can I get to the bottom of it? There's got to be someone who knows the answer to this."

Ashley spoke up. "You can ask the youth pastor, Tim."

"That's a good idea. He's cool and really smart," said Liz, adding, "He's even kind of cute."

The girls erupted in laughter.

Then Becca replied seriously, "Yeah, it's not possible that this one girl is right and, like, the rest of the whole world is wrong!"

"Yeah, Pastor Tim is great. He'll have you straightened out in five minutes," said Ashley, adding, "I'm going to the youth meeting tonight at the church."

"Cool. Is it okay if I go to the meeting with you?" Nichole asked.

"Of course." Ashley smiled, and at that, the girls started to get up one by one, disperse back through the confusion, and make their way into the hallway to gather their books for the next class.

The rest of the day sped by anxiously. Nichole was finally going to get to the bottom of this thing. It had become to her a cause. Poor deluded Allie seemed like such a sweet girl. It just didn't seem right that she was made the school outcast for such a silly thing, and Nichole was determined to resolve this issue if it was the last thing she did. Besides, she was quickly growing to like Allie already.

The Youth Leader

From without, the little church looked like a candle, flickering and burning to prepare for the coming darkness. It glowed warmly, a beacon in the community, complementing the neighboring houses. Standing tall, proudly, sternly, with open arms, it embraced the incoming group of young people who flooded in to hear the popular youth pastor. Nichole was impressed by his stirring message, and after the talk, she approached Pastor Tim and introduced herself. The pastor replied cordially, "It's nice to have you here," then, noticing a disconcerted look on her face, he inquired, "Is something wrong? Is there something I can help you with?"

"Well, there is something I wanted to ask you about," Nichole confessed.

"Sure, what's up," the pastor inquired.

"Well, I go to the high school here, and I met this girl in our school. Her name is Allie, and well... she's kind of strange."

"What do you mean, strange? In what way?"

"Well, she goes to church on Saturday... as a matter of conviction," Nichole explained. "She thinks that Saturday is the day everyone should go to church. So a few days ago, I went to talk to her about the Sabbath."

"Is she trying to push her religion on you?" Pastor Tim asked curiously.

"Well, no... actually I went over there hoping to straighten *her* out on the subject, but when she asked me to show her a Bible verse where Jesus changed the

Sabbath to Sunday, I looked and looked... and... Well, I just couldn't find one anywhere. I've been looking tirelessly, but there doesn't seem to be one single verse that says Jesus changed the Sabbath!"

Pastor Tim, a little amused, laughed lightly, then looked again sympathetically into her face and replied calmly, "Don't worry about it. There's a simple answer to that. Just tell your friend to read Romans 6:14."

Nichole smiled in relief. "Really?"

"Really," assured Pastor Tim. "That's where Paul explains that we are not under the law, but under grace. You see, Jesus didn't exactly do away with any specific commandment. Instead, He wiped away the whole law when He ushered in His new kingdom, the reign of grace. Don't you remember when the apostle John said, 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'? Your friend is living under the old dispensation. She's living under the old covenant. We are living under the new covenant."

"Wow," Nichole replied, intrigued at how Pastor Tim had taken an issue that had her spun in such a web of confusion and in an instant ironed it into simplicity.

"You remember when Jesus was on the cross. He cried out, 'It is finished,' right?"

"Yes," said Nichole.

"When Jesus said those words, He had fulfilled the Mosaic law, and He was ushering in a new era of grace. That's why we are no longer under the law, but we are now under grace," Pastor Tim explained.

As Nichole listened, the words of the pastor made sense, and she was anxious to share the insights with her new friend.

The Visit

After school the next day, upon arriving home, Nichole unleashed her book bag from her shoulder and tossed it onto her bed. Looking into the mirror over her dresser, she dabbed at her makeup briefly and brushed it lightly onto her face, preparing to head over to Allie's house when the doorbell rang. Stepping over the sleeping cat, she bounded down the stairs to see who it was. Opening the front door, she was pleased to see her new friend standing in the doorway.

"Hey! How's it going?"

"Hey, I was just thinking of you," Nichole replied without answering her question.

"Really?" Allie looked at her curiously.

"Really. Actually, I was just getting ready to come over to your house and talk to you."

"Oh? About what," inquired Allie.

"The Sabbath," replied Nichole anxiously, leading Allie into the living room, where the two girls settled onto the couch. "I found that Bible verse we were looking for, and I could hardly wait to see you, so I could show you!" Nichole seemed to bounce as she spoke. Allie's dark eyes glowed with warmth and excitement as she confessed, "Great! There's nothing I like more than studying the Bible. I even carry a little Bible with me in my bag." Reaching into her bag, she pulled out a pink Bible with a brown strap that buttons around the edge.

Nichole had not planned on bringing up the subject that quickly. She was prepared to weed through small talk about friends, or music, or perhaps the

weather before bringing up the subject she was so anxious to discuss, but Allie's enthusiasm over the issue rendered any small talk unnecessary. Nichole reached over to the end table where she had set her Bible upon returning home after her talk with Pastor Tim the previous night, announcing, "It's in Romans 6:14."

"Right. I know that verse," said Allie confidently, and without even opening her Bible, she rambled off, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

She had quoted the verse exactly. Didn't miss a word. And there was something in that calm and confident little recital, something in that poised and ready tone, that robbed Nichole of some of that confidence that had been bubbling over. Still, she went on bravely. "Right. Now think about this. Paul says we are not under the law, but under grace. You see, the Sabbath was part of Moses' Old Testament law, but when Jesus died on the cross, that law ended."

Allie simply looked at her with a look of either puzzlement or amusement (or perhaps some concoction between the two) as Nichole went on.

"So if we're not under the law, there's no need for all this Jewish Sabbath stuff. That's Old Testament stuff. That old covenant dispensation is ended! It's finished! Over! Done!"

Allie smiled. Pleased. Not pleased with the claim. Not pleased with the weight of the verse or that there was any truth in the assertion that the Sabbath was no longer binding, but pleased at Nichole's determination to get to the bottom of the issue and dig up the truth no

matter what it cost. She imagined Nichole would make a good reporter or perhaps detective, with her persistent and inquiring mind, and looking at her, she said respectfully, “You’re really serious about getting to the bottom of this, aren’t you?”

“Sure.”

“Good.” Allie hesitated, looking at Nichole proudly, almost as a mother who would look at a daughter who had just committed some noble act, then added, “So let’s dig into it. But first, do you mind if I say a short prayer?”

“No, that’s fine,” Nichole replied.

Allie said a short prayer, asking for the assistance of God in finding the truth on this subject, then began, “Let’s look at what this verse is saying. Paul says, ‘sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace.’”

“Right.”

“Okay, 1 John 3:4 says ‘sin is lawlessness.’ Without the law, there is no such thing as sin, since the definition of sin is breaking God’s law. Since sin still exists, then the law must still exist.”

“I know the law still exists,” Nichole jumped in. “We’re just not under its condemnation, that’s all. That’s what the youth pastor said.”

“Okay, but what does it mean to be under the law, and if we are not under the condemnation of the law, does that mean we can just break the law?”

“I don’t know.”

Allie explained, “Let’s say some guy gets in a fight with his neighbor and ends up killing them. He is immediately under the condemnation of the law. He is

condemned by the law. The law takes that man and sentences him to life in prison. But let's say that after twenty years, the governor pardons him and lets him out. He walks out of prison, free, not on his own merit, but by the governor's grace. He is no longer under the condemnation of the law, but grace has set him free. Are you with me?"

"I'm with you."

"Now, since that man is no longer under the condemnation of the law, but under grace, does that mean he can go out and kill again or break any of the laws?"

"Of course not."

"Right," replied Allie. "And that's exactly what Paul was saying. He goes on to say, 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?' (Rom. 6:1, 2). You see, once we're saved, we are no longer under the condemnation of the law, but that doesn't mean we are free to break the law. In fact, once we accept Christ, we are more obligated to keep it than before!"

"Wow! This is making more sense than what Pastor Tim said," Nichole replied in amazement. "Tell me more."

"I better not now. Maybe later. I don't want to overdo it. You'll get bored with me and end up hating me like everyone else."

"They don't hate you."

Allie looked at her in disbelief. "Yeah, right."

"Okay, they're just really immature, that's all. Anyway, I like you."

Allie looked at Nichole curiously.

“Look, I know what the other girls say about you, but I’m not like that. I don’t give in to the pressure that other people put on me. And that’s what I like about you. You’re not a crowd-pleaser. You don’t just go along with the crowd to be popular. And I respect that.”

“It hasn’t been easy.” Allie looked out the window. Her eyes were distant, as if looking into a dream or another world. Now, as they sat on the couch, Allie saw in her new friend something she had not seen before.

“I just want to be like everyone else. People today always talk about the horrors of prejudice. Do you know what it’s like to be different than everyone? People look at you differently. Like you’re some kind of oddball. They question your sincerity.”

“If it’s that hard, why do you do it?”

Allie shrugged. “I love Jesus.” Turning back to Nichole, she said with the utmost sincerity, “He means so much to me. I look around at so many Christians who take their religion lightly, and I don’t understand it. Jesus died to give us a second chance to live for Him. He suffered so much. If He was willing to be made an outcast and suffer on the cross for me, then I’m willing to suffer for Him.”

“I see what you mean.” Nichole looked at Allie softly, sympathetically, as if she, for the first time, saw a whole new side of Allie Perkins. She could see the pain in her eyes now. She could see the deep sincerity. While the girls at school treated her with such indifference, Allie Perkins had feelings too. She wasn’t strange at all. She was simply doing what she felt was right. She was brave. She was noble.

The Decision

Autumn was still in bloom, but the chill of the approaching winter was sweeping through the streets and whistling around the corners of the little suburban New England neighborhood where Nichole and Allie had begun a weekly Bible study. They had agreed to study in Nichole's home, and although her parents were not especially religious, they allowed the arrangement and had actually come to enjoy the growing group of young people in their home. On occasion, when chance permitted, they would even sit in on some of the discussions.

The Bible study at Nichole's house had now been going on for over a month. She had invited several girls from the school to come, and while some graciously, or not so graciously, declined the offer, the crowd had grown and continued to grow each week, significantly.

On this particular Wednesday evening, as they were gathered in Nichole's living room on couch and loveseat, nestled on floors and buried in corners, preparing to begin their study, the doorbell rang. The small group looked on curiously as Nichole's mother ushered in Pastor Tim.

"Hey, you're just in time, Pastor Tim," one of the girls blurted out excitedly. "We're just about to start our Bible study!"

Pastor Tim turned, startled by the comment, and looked upon the small group in the living room in surprise, slightly embarrassed. He smiled and replied, "I'm very impressed. I wish all my students were as devoted as you."

“We’ve been doing this every week for the past few weeks,” Nichole explained as her guest took a seat a bit stiffly. “Allie is our teacher.”

“Really, is that so,” he replied in a tone of disbelief, almost as if to belittle her ability, as he turned his gaze towards her. Allie merely returned his gaze softly and confidently, then humbly replied, “I’m really not the best teacher.”

“Don’t listen to her. She’s the best Bible scholar I’ve ever met,” insisted Nichole, who never hesitated to say what she thought.

Pastor Tim, ignoring the last comment, turned to Nichole and said, “We’ve missed you at our meetings. You were coming for a few weeks, but you stopped. I just wanted to come by and make sure everything was okay. You haven’t deserted us, have you?”

Nichole had been dreading this question. She had hoped she could simply stop going to the midweek meetings and disappear, but now she was almost glad that Pastor Tim had come and asked this question here, at this time. Now he would have a chance to defend his position in front of Allie. She knew that what she was about to say was bound to wound or offend him, but there was no way around it, so she replied, “I’m afraid I have to, in a way, Pastor Tim. You see, I decided to attend a church that keeps the Sabbath on Saturday.”

Those simple words so softly spoken resounded and resonated through the room with such force and tension that they seemed to astonish everyone there. Nichole hadn’t said anything to the girls in the room. Her decision to start keeping the seventh-day Sabbath was news to everyone there, including Allie. For the

past few weeks, she had refused to go to church on Sunday, and while she visited Allie's church a couple of times during that period, she hadn't made her final decision audible until now. As the words fell from her mouth, Allie's eyes swelled up, and in spite of her resistance, a tear of utter satisfaction nestled in the corner of her eye and trickled down her cheek. Her mother, stepping around the corner, even looked on the scene with surprise.

Pastor Tim, surprised, turned to Nichole's mother and asked, "Are you going to allow this?"

Her mother, shaking off the surprise, looked over at her daughter and asked, "Is that what you want?"

"I'm totally convinced that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is 'the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,'" Nichole told her mother, taking her quote directly from the fourth commandment.

"So, you prefer the old law of Moses over the law of grace," Pastor Tim retorted.

"I've actually learned a lot about that since I talked with you last time," Nichole replied, not the least bit ruffled by his jab. "I learned that the Sabbath started in the Garden of Eden before the Jews existed, so it couldn't just be for the Jews. Then it was placed in the heart of the Ten Commandments, which has nothing to do with the law of Moses, which was nailed to the cross." Her brief and humble argument had a resounding effect on the other young people in the room, but the educated youth pastor resisted. The light of battle seemed to glow in his eyes, and he shot back, "Someone has sure fooled you. We aren't under the law anymore. We're under grace."

“But when in history were we not under grace? How were people saved in Old Testament times? How were Adam and Eve saved? How was David saved? What saved them?” asked Nichole.

Pastor Tim shifted nervously in his chair before he muttered the words, “They were... well... saved by faith in the coming Christ, of course.”

“Right,” said Nichole. “They were saved by faith in the grace and blood of Jesus. The Bible says we are saved by grace. Grace isn’t some new thing. Adam and Eve were saved by grace. David was saved by grace. Every believer is saved because of the grace of God. Grace has had to exist since sin entered the world.”

“That’s right,” one of the young people inserted. “According to the Bible, sin is the transgression of the law, so if sin still exists, the law must exist.”

Pastor Tim, visibly irritated, inserted, “Isn’t there danger in placing your own inexperienced opinions, or those of your friends, above that of the church? The church teaches that the death and resurrection of Christ marked a new era in history.”

“I cannot follow the church or church leaders. I have to follow what the Bible says. If you or anyone else can show me from the Bible where I am wrong, then I will be happy to change, but as far as I can see right now, neither Jesus nor the apostles gave any command to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. And I don’t believe that the church has the right or authority to change one of God’s commands.”

“Why, the transition from old to new is affirmed by Jesus Himself when He said, ‘It is finished,’” the pastor replied.

Nichole blushed lightly. The words threw her into a little uncertainty, but her voice remained calm, and she continued onward steadily. “The reason Jesus said, ‘It is finished,’ was revealed by Jesus Himself in His prayer at the last supper, when He said, ‘I have finished the work which You have given Me to do’ (John 17:4). In dying on the cross, Jesus had finished His work on earth. ‘The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ was dying for sinners (John 1:29). Jesus, God’s Lamb, had taken the place of the sacrificial lambs, which were only symbols of Christ. The entire Jewish sanctuary service and priestly ministry ended at the cross. That’s why, when Jesus died, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in half by an unseen hand. That’s also why we don’t kill animals or keep the Jewish feasts anymore.”

As Nichole concluded her argument, Pastor Tim turned towards Allie and replied with a sarcastic smile, “It looks like you’ve found yourself a gullible student.” He held his hard stare for what seemed a long time. His eyes sharp, blue, angry; hers dark, calm, confident, and she finally replied with a direct quote from the Bible. “When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.” At this, his blue eyes wavered, then broke from hers, and he stood to his feet.

“I don’t see any reason to go on with this,” he announced, nose tilted slightly upward. “I am sorry, Nichole, that you insist on following such a group of fanatics. Someday I hope you grow up and see how crazy all this is. When that day comes, I’ll be glad to take you back into our church. Until then, goodnight,” he replied coldly, then exited.

Three Months Later

Winter had finally arrived. Outside, snow lay in patches on the ground. An occasional bird was still seen resting on a phone line or on an empty crippled tree branch lingering over an empty nest. The grass had withered to a pale brown, and people scurried in and out of houses and cars while children picked at the patches of snow to make little snowballs or ice treats.

In Winthrop, the wind still rolled sharply over the sea and brought with it a bitter sting. It was Saturday morning, and Jenny was walking down the sidewalk with two plastic grocery bags when she looked up to see Nichole stepping out her door, decorated in a long flowered dress. Behind her trailed her mother, father, and little sister. Jenny paused, glad for the opportunity to rest her arms.

“Well,” she said cheerfully. “So the whole family is all dressed. Let me see. It’s too early for the theater, and you’re not carrying luggage, so you must be either going for pictures or breakfast.”

“Nope,” said Nichole shooting a smile back. “We are going into Boston to go to church. We have to leave early to get there in time for Sabbath school.”

“Church! Sabbath school!” Jenny’s eyes grew big in surprise. “Don’t tell me you...”

“Yep. There’s a church in Boston that keeps the Sabbath on Saturday. They’re called Seventh-Day Adventists.”

Jenny’s eyes stared deeply through Nichole in amazement.

“You mean your whole family is going?”

“Yeah, when I showed them what the Bible says, they studied into it too and found that the Bible didn’t say anything about changing the Sabbath the Sunday. In fact, the early Christian church claims to have changed the day without any support from the Bible. The Sabbath was not changed to Sunday by the apostles. It was changed by the Catholic Church, on the authority of the popes.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Check it out for yourself. It’s true. There are plenty of quotes about it all over the internet. Anyway, we’ve been going to church on Saturday for the past couple of months. So have Liz and Ashley. In fact, Ashley and I are getting baptized this month,” said Nichole.

The family gathered in the car as Nichole stayed and talked to Jenny momentarily.

“So you go every Saturday,” she said icily. “Just like the Jews?”

“The Bible says that ‘if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’” (Gal. 3:29).

Jenny just looked at her, and Nichole smiled and replied, “Look, Jenny, I know just how you feel. Remember. I thought it was as nuts as you did, but when I studied the Bible, I couldn’t find anywhere that says we are supposed to go to church on Sunday or that the Sabbath doesn’t matter to God. The Bible doesn’t say anywhere that we should stop keeping the Sabbath. I mean, it’s one of the Ten Commandments. You know, ‘thou shalt not kill’ and ‘thou shalt not steal,’ and all that stuff.”

Nichole looked into Jenny's eyes, but Jenny remained silent. "I just have to obey God, not man. That's why I'm going to church today."

Father gave a little 'toot' on the horn, urging Nichole to get in the car, as her sister peered cheerfully at her through the back window. Nichole turned and smiled, then turning back to Jenny, she said politely, "I better go."

"Right," Jenny said, hastily picking up her bags.

"You should come with us sometime. You may be surprised at how fun it is."

Jenny just smiled and gave a doubtful glance. As the girls parted, Nichole sent up an unspoken prayer that God would guide her friend into the light of Bible truth, and then she hopped into the car as the family pulled out of the little neighborhood and made its way towards Boston. As the car sped down the highway, Allie sat amazed at the thought that less than six months ago, her life had been so different. Amazed that God, in His Providence, had brought her family from their little Canadian home to find not only a new home and new friends but a fuller, clearer knowledge of the Bible and the will of God, in the little Winthrop High School.

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