

Double Down

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My grandma had this room in her house full of boxes overflowing with books. One of the boxes had nothing but these huge collections of The Far Side and Calvin and Hobbes. Every time I was over, I would spend hours hidden away in that room reading them. I never really got the jokes, but it was fun to pretend.

One of the Far Side comics showed God in Heaven, mighty upon his throne. He was holding the end of a rotary telephone that sat neatly on a simple wooden table next to him.

God says into the phone “Hello? Hello? This is God! Who is this?”

On the other end was regular ol’ sad sap Ernie Miller. “Uh, this is Ernie Miller, sir.”

God realizes he got the wrong number “Ernie Who?” he asks, “Is this 555-1728?”

“No, sir. This is 555-1782”

God apologizes and hangs up the phone.

Even as a kid, I was always a little bothered by this comic. It filled me with this unearthly sort of fear. I had been taught that God knew me. Me specifically. If God called me on the phone, even just by accident, I would at the very least expect Him to know who I was.

Good thing it was just a silly comic. God knew me. I knew that.

I knew that so hard that when I turned 19 I decided to serve a two-year mission with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I knew that God not only wanted, but needed me, to go out and teach the people of the world about His love. He knew me, so He knew them too.

The letter came telling me which corner of this good earth I would be sent to. We had a few friends over and they all put sticky notes on a globe guessing where I could possibly go.

New York? India? Australia? Every possibility shot a jolt of nervous electricity into my heart. I was shaking as I gently tore open the envelop.

“Dear Elder,” I began to read, “You have been assigned to labor in the Barbados Bridgetown Mission.”

A gasp flew across the room. Barbados? Amazing. The mission encapsulated five small islands in the eastern Caribbean. These islands were where God was asking me to go. So, knowing that God knew me, I decided I would.

Before I left, my dad told me this story of when he was a little kid, about three years old. He was playing in the driveway of his home when his dad, my grandpa, accidentally ran over him with his rusty red pickup truck. The large tires ran over his shoulder, across his chest, and off his hips. My dad, who was then unconscious, was scooped up by my grandpa and rushed to the hospital. As my grandpa left, he shouted to my grandma, still in the house, to call up the missionaries and have them meet him at the hospital.

Upon arriving, my grandpa refused to let any medical professionals see my dad before the missionaries ministered to him. The two missionaries, no older than twenty, soon arrived. They laid their hands upon my dad’s head and gave him a blessing of healing from the Lord. After, the doctors couldn’t find anything wrong with my dad. He didn’t even have a single scratch. He was sent home the very next day.

After he finished his story my dad smiled at me “be that kind of missionary son,” he said. “Be the kind of missionary that people can trust to bless them, even when everything seems to be going wrong.”

From that moment on, I decided that was exactly the kind of missionary I would to be. A missionary people could rely on. A missionary who was so obedient and good that people would call me before they called the doctors.

About a year into my mission, I was stationed in Grenville Grenada. It was the type of Caribbean you don't hear about on cruises or see in travel brochures. It's the type of Caribbean that they shove away to the side because no one wants to hear about dirty seaweed filled black sand beaches and mass poverty.

The church was small in Grenville, there was a group of about fifteen members who would get together and worship every Sunday. No one around town was really interested in our religion. Everyone seemed a lot more concerned about where their next meal was coming from then worshipping some white god from America. I could never really blame them for that.

It was in Grenville that I felt myself start to slip away from the obedient missionary my dad had asked me to be. I started to break the missionary rules every once and while. Nothing major like watching movies or drinking beer. No, just little things like taking an afternoon nap instead of knocking on doors or taking more than an hour for lunch.

It was on an afternoon with an extra-long lunch when a mother showed up at our front door yelling and crying for Sister Francis. She was a young woman, no older than 30. She wore a loose grey tank top, some pink tattered athletic shorts, and flip flops. In her skinny arms, she held her limp baby girl. The babies' eyes were wide open, bloodshot, and bulging out of her head. Her lips were blue and puffy, and she just hung there, like a rag doll.

Sister Francis was one of the members of the church. She was wealthier than most in the area and happened to have her own car. This was quite the rare commodity. Sister Francis also had a two-story stone house with tile flooring. Another rare commodity compared to the torn

vinyl over dirt most locals were accustomed too. We lived in Sister Francis's basement. So, we were able to hear the mother yelling her name. We went outside and informed the frantic woman that Sister Francis was not home, so she would be unable to take her to the hospital.

The mother asked if we could give her a ride, her baby wasn't breathing, and she was scared. I thought on this for a moment, technically, I shouldn't take her to the hospital. Missionary protocol specifically demanded that no rides be given to non-missionaries.

The Missionary Handbook page 48 reads: "Do not give rides to anyone other than full-time missionaries. The **only** exception is for a member who is going to or from a teaching appointment with you and cannot drive his or her own vehicle."

The mother was not a full-time missionary, nor was she a member of church. I wanted to be a good missionary. A dependable missionary. A missionary who followed the rules.

As I thought on his predicament, I realized how absolutely insane it was that I was even in a predicament at all. This was a human life and I was taking precious seconds thinking about whether or not following the rules was more important than taking her to the hospital.

We piled in our car, and I started driving. I looked in the rearview mirror and caught another glimpse of the child. She looked dead. A limp lifeless husk of blue oxygen craved skin. She couldn't be dead though. God wouldn't have brought her to us if she was dead.

Desperate for some way to help I turned to my companion and told him to turn around and give the baby a blessing. He shook his head "we have to do it together."

Missionary Handbook page 73: "Priesthood holders may administer to the sick or afflicted. Two or more of them normally do it together, but one may do it himself if necessary."

"Only normally," I said remembering the handbook, "it's okay, please. Give the baby a blessing."

My companion didn't respond. He didn't even turn around and look at the baby. He was like a deer in the headlights, unable to move. Each and every day, we would go talk to strangers about the power of God. Each and every day we would preach of His healing word and endless power. To anyone who would listen, we would tell of the miracles of Christ. How His apostles would lay their hands on the sick and raise them up. When it came right down to it however, we didn't bless that baby.

I used to be really upset that my companion didn't bless her. I used to be really mad that I didn't make him drive so that I could've blessed her. So that I could have proved that I was \ the missionary my dad asked me to be. I don't know if I would have blessed her though. How could I have? I think deep in my heart I knew she was already dead. Deep in my hearts I desperately wanted to believe that if I asked God, my old pal, to heal the baby He would have. But what if he didn't?

How could my companion, a twenty-year-old kid from ass nowhere Utah, grapple not only with the death of an infant, but the existence of his God and his Gods power and turn around and bless that baby to live? He knew what he was supposed to say. He knew that we had claimed to strangers that the power to raise the dead existed and was on the earth. If he had blessed the baby, and she still died, what would that mean for him? How could he face that?

Soon enough I pulled up to the hospital and my companion rushed in with the mother and the child. I went and found a place to park off to the side of the road. As I stopped the car and I sat alone, I looked up at God. I pointed my finger at Him and with all the strength of my conviction I commanded "You do not let that baby die."

God didn't answer.

The doctor took one look at the baby, pronounced her dead and walked out of the room.

Maybe God didn't hear me. Maybe He did and just didn't care. Maybe He was too busy with bigger things to make time for some little dead baby in Grenville Grenada. Maybe God tried and got the wrong number. Maybe ol' Ernie Miller picked up the phone.

My companion and I didn't talk much on the drive back to our basement apartment. We only ever really addressed it through disbelief and small talk. "That was crazy right?" We'd say. Too scared of the reality of what happened. Too scared to admit that maybe we failed. That maybe if we didn't take a long lunch that day, or take an afternoon nap, we would have had the confidence to force the powers of heavens to fill the oxygen craved lungs of that infant. Too scared to admit that the power to do so might not actually exist in the hands of two young white missionaries.

There is a sandwich made by the Colonel at KFC called the Double Down. It's a seasonal, limited-time-only, type of sandwich in most locations. Grenada however, well Grenada KFC's would make them year round. They are these wild, artery clogging sandwiches that cause you to feel your heart having to pump a little harder. There is no bread on the Double Down, no sir. Instead, melted cheese and bacon are laid to rest between two pieces of the Colonel's finest fried chicken.

When you eat a Double Down, you get to a point, about three bites in, where you can feel your body begging you to stop. Your stomach is full of grease, your forehead is sweaty, and your heart is pumping like you just ran a marathon. You know this thing is hurting you, and you know you should probably just walk away, but, you already started it. Shouldn't you finish? Aren't you the kind of guy who finishes what he started? Who sticks with it because you're too strong to quit?

Even though you know it's bad for you, do you keep eating? Or do you walk away?