

TRACTING THE FUTURE

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Michael, sixteen, was on his way to the house of his friend Josh. His folks didn't approve of Josh much, but Michael and his family had just moved into town, and so far Josh was his only friend.

Michael had got in an argument with his parents the night before because he hadn't come home until two in the morning and didn't get up the next day for early morning seminary.

"This is not acceptable behavior, Michael!" his mom told him when he finally rolled out of bed at seven thirty.

"We were just playing video games, okay? It's no big deal. Just leave me alone. It's not my fault we moved, is it? And that I have no other friends here. So what am I supposed to do? Sit in my room all the time and read scriptures? I can't do that."

In the heat of the discussion Michael realized he sounded more rebellious than he actually was, and now as he walked to pick up Josh for school, he felt bad he'd disappointed his folks. But he couldn't think of what else to do. His whole life revolved around his friends.

His mind was focused on his own problems that he didn't notice much else around him. Suddenly he realized someone was walking by his side. He looked over and was surprised to see it was a missionary.

“Where’s your companion?” Michael asked.

“Yeah, right, very funny, Elder.”

Michael looked down and saw that he was wearing a suit and a name tag.

“There’s something very wrong here.”

“You take the next door, right, Elder? Just do it like we practiced this morning, okay?”

They turned and walked up a sidewalk leading to a house. His companion knocked on the door.

A man with a beard and a newspaper in his hand opened the door. He looked at Michael. “So where’s my pizza?” the man asked.

“We...that is...him mainly, we’re here to tell you about our church. I have no idea why I’m here. I’m only sixteen.”

The man swore and slammed the door.

Michael’s companion tried to put a good spin on things. “I really think you can do better than that, Elder. You take the next door too.”

“You know what? I’m not actually a missionary.”

“Well, I admit you didn’t do very good on that last door, but I’m sure you’ll get the hang of it.”

“I don’t want to get the hang of it. I just want to go visit my friend Josh.”

A minute later they stood in front of another door. “Your door, Elder,” his companion said.

Michael knocked.

A woman answered. She was on her cell phone. "So I told him if he can't think of a better way to apologize than that, then it's over between us." She glanced at the two. "I'm not interested," she said.

"We're missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," Michael said quickly.

"I'm a very busy person. My personal life is in a shambles. What do you want?"

"Uh...well...we have a message...uh...I think."

"Look, I'm on the phone with my therapist. What's the message?"

"The message is...the message is, oh, man, let me think. The message is..."

She slammed the door.

His companion sighed. "Well, that was better...in a way. At least you dropped the part about being sixteen years old. Let's just keep going."

As they continued on their way, a guy with a beard and a large tattoo on his arm joined them.

"Who's he?" the actual missionary asked.

Michael looked at the guy with the beard and felt a sudden cold chill.

"He's me. There's a time warp here. That's the problem."

"Hi," his missionary companion said to the version of Michael with the tattoo. "How's it going?"

"I don't have to talk to you," the second Michael mumbled.

"You two kind of look alike," his missionary companion said. "Elder, do

you have a tattoo?"

"No, but my friend Josh and I were talking about getting one."

The three of them approached another door. "This is getting to be awkward with the three of us," his companion said. "Can't you get rid of him?"

"I don't know how he...and I got here."

"Well, take the door again. Try to get it right this time," his companion said.

Michael knocked. A man holding a crying baby in his arms opened the door.

"We're missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," the younger Michael said.

"I was going to serve a mission," Michael's rebellious self answered. "But then, I don't know, I got distracted I guess you could say, and there were a few other things that got in my way. A little drinking, a little partying, and I had to make payments on my car. So...I never actually went."

Michael turned to the guy with the tattoo. "You never went on a mission? But that's something...I...I mean we...talked about ever since we were in Primary."

"I outgrew it, okay? It's no big deal."

"But it is a big deal."

The man at the door shook his head. "Look, you guys don't need me. Just carry on your conversation without me, okay?" With that he shut the door.

Halfway toward the next house, a young woman carrying a baby started walking with them. "Good grief," his companion complained. "This is becoming

like a parade.”

“Who are you?” Michael asked the young mother.

“I’m Emily. I’m Michael’s wife. Which one of you is Michael?”

The guy with the tattoo and Michael both said, “I am.”

The young mom turned to the Michael in the suit. “Michael, is that you? How can it be you if we’re married and have a baby?”

“I’m not sure how it works but it’s some kind of a time warp.”

“I’ll never get married,” the Michael with the tattoo said. “Too much responsibility. I pretty much go to work and do my job and go home and drink and play video games and watch movies.”

“We can’t go tracting with all these people,” the real missionary said. “Let’s just walk for a few blocks and see if the rest of them will go away.”

A block later the Michael with the tattoo disappeared and Michael’s future wife dropped off a block after that.

“Okay, I guess we can start in again.”

They took three more steps and were suddenly joined by Michael’s mom.

“Mom, what a surprise,” Michael said.

“Why is that button on your suit being held on with a safety pin?” she asked with a scowl.

“Well, uh...it was easier.”

“I taught you how to sew a button on before you left on your mission.”

“I know, but this was...well...easier. And it doesn’t look that bad.”

“You’re representing the Church. You’ve got to look your best.”

“I’ll fix it first thing in the morning.”

“I’ll fix it right now. Is there some place we can sit down?”

“There’s a bench at the bus stop. We can sit down there.”

A few minutes later they sat down. His mom made him take his suit coat off and went to work.

“Good thing I have a sewing kit in my purse,” she said. “What are you eating for breakfast?” she asked.

“Oh, you know, good things.”

“Like what?” she asked.

“Fried bologna sandwiches and Kool-Aid.”

“What about oatmeal? You always liked oatmeal.”

“Actually I never liked it. You just always made it for us.”

“You need to eat better. I should have spent more time with you teaching you how to cook.”

A block later his mother dropped off.

“You want to take the next door?” Michael’s companion asked.

“I do. For real, when the time comes.”

They stood in front of another door. Michael brought up his hand to knock. But before he did, he heard a knock.

It was his dad. “Michael, wake up, it’s time to go to seminary.”

Michael quickly got out of bed. “Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re getting up now? It usually takes me two or three times to get you up.”

“I have a lot I need to do today.”

“Do you have a test?”

“No, I need to prepare for my mission. There’s so much that needs to be done, Dad.”

It wasn’t until just before Michael left on his mission that Michael told his family about his dream.

Five years later at the sacrament meeting where he reported his mission, a young woman came up to him and shook his hand.

“I really enjoyed your talk,” she said.

“Thanks. What’s your name?”

“Emily.”

Michael broke into a broad smile. “It’s so nice to meet you at last, Emily. We have so much to talk about.”

She seemed puzzled but then smiled warmly at him.

So far all his preparations for his mission and then for his life had served him well. Somehow he knew that would be true for the rest of his life.