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CSIA 6010

Close to Home

After listening to Melissa’s talk on Monday, I spent the whole week trying to think of times where I was in a situation where I had to choose between two bad choices. I could think of plenty where I was choosing between two good choices and had to choose one. For example when I had to choose between a well paying job that would put me on my desired career path, or serving a full time mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints. I chose to serve a mission, and I was called to the greatest place on earth, Mongolia. I had an amazing hard time, but it was so worth it. Frankly that decision has shaped my path to where I’m today. I could write pages on two good decision but finding a situation in my life where I was backed into a corner and had to choose between two bad choices was harder to think of. It would also be really easy to choose between a good decision and a bad decision. I could tell you millions of stories where I choose both good over the bad and bad over the good. But I think the point of this assignment wasn’t to understand the merits of always getting a good decision to compare to, but that in life we are placed with decisions that are not good. Where we have to choose between two bad’s where either one would result in an negative outcome or a hard outcome. I would like to talk about the time I came home off my mission. But I seriously was considering doing this years election.

Disclaimer: I’m going to be talking from my perspective as a missionary and I will be talking about my beliefs as a christian. I do not intend to offend anyone.

**What the situation was:**

During the Spring Semester of 2014, I was in my last semester about to graduate. I was trying to decide what I should do after I received my Bachelor Degree. I was trying to decide what job offer I was going to take. I had several job offers that could lead me onto the my desired career path. I went to my bishop or local religious leader for advice. He asked me what promptings I have recieved on what I should do. I told him that I had gotten the prompting to go on a mission. The next week I put in my papers, which meant I filled out my application to serve my LDS Mission. I was called to serve in the Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar Mission. I was so excited to leave but at same time I was very nervous. I entered the Missionary Training Center on August 19, 2014, excited, anxious, and hungry. I was put into what is called a tri companionship and I was assigned to be the senior companion. A companion, in LDS vocabulary means you have another same gender missionary with you at all times. Companionships are needed for safety, and to prevent us from falling into temptation. When I got sick with a viral infection a week later, I felt the need to keep going to class because I felt so behind in the language, learning the gospel, and trying to be a good example. So I did the normal schedule, not taking care of myself, and falling deeper and deeper into sickness until I had a upper lung infection a month into my MTC experience. I was forced to give time and attention on my getting better, along with the love of my MTC group (These were also missionaries who were going with me to Mongolia and we did everything together), and the goal to be well enough to travel to Mongolia in a month and a half. Through this whole MTC experience I started to notice something, something that I had not noticed my whole time at Southern Utah University. I was extremely anxious all the time, sometimes crippling anxiety, where I would have panic attacks over the littlest things. On October 25, 2014 I found myself well enough and I was given the ok to fly to Mongolia. I could go on for pages on what I learned and experienced over there in Mongolia, but for time's sake I’m going to keep it to the relevant parts of Mongolia. When I got there I was called to serve in the countryside city of Darkhan. Which is such a pretty place, if you have a chance to go, please go. If not you should look it up on Google, the area is stunning. Mongolia in the winter months gets down to -48 degrees C, with an added -12 degree wind chill. While in Darkhan my trainer was Mongolian who spoke very little english, but was an awesome guy. Again like the MTC my anxieties started coming back in full force, and with something new which I came to learn was Depression. I’m in Mongolia, with depression and anxiety, but I’m still pushing myself to the limits trying to be the best missionary i could be. Honestly it was working for a month or two. I soon found myself with a new companion and something the mission doctor proscribed as panic attacks.

It was December 27th 2014, in the middle of the night I woke up with this pain in my chest like someone was stabbing me over and over again. My companion called the mission doctor, he recommended that I put hot wet towels on my chest, and the need for us to come back into the city to see him the next morning. The mission doctor couldn't find anything wrong with me, and gave me something for the pain. I had the opportunity to meet with my Mission President who first gave me the option of going home, which I of course turned down I had 20 more mouths and I wasn't going home now. A routine started to form in my everyday, I would get up, do my studies, get ready, experience a nosebleeds (because of the medication I was taking), have a panic attack, Pray for strength, go out for a full day’s missionaries work, then come home to prepare for the next day appointments and go to bed. My random stabbing chest pains continued to occur throughout the day, everyday. My depression and anxiety was also getting worse as time went on. I would like to point out here that I was doing this to myself and not the mission or the church. My mission president would see me regularly recommending everytime that I go home and get better. Every time I would tell my Mission President, I’m staying. We finally arrived to March 2015, I had one really bad night where my companion was almost ready to send me to the local doctors. You have to realize that Mongolia is a third world country; their health care facilities are extremely outdated and scary. It was bad if my companion almost called for local help, but I was able to make it through the night and was asked by my mission president to come back to the mission office in Ulaanbaatar. After talking to the mission doctor, he told me that he doesn’t know what was wrong with me and that they had tried everything they could in country. I then had the longest 15 minute meeting I had ever had in my life.

**Why you had to make a choice:**

I went into that meeting thinking it was going to be like every other one with my Mission President. We would go over what was going on, solutions on how to fix the problem, and he would ask if I wanted to stay or not. Oh...how I was wrong. President began by pointing out how good of a missionary I was and how proud he was of me; he proceeded to tell me about the negative effects I was having on my companion, myself, and the mission. I wasn't eating, I was causing stress on my companion, they didn’t know what was wrong with me, my depression/anxiety was getting worse, I was only sleeping for 4 hours, I looked awful, and I was causing my loved ones back home pain.

**What your options were:**

He gave me the same question again that he had been asking me monthly for the past four months. Are you ready to go home?

* Option One: Go home and finish my mission 17 months early. When I promised I would serve a full 2 years or 24 months.
* Option Two: Stay on my mission.

**Why neither option was particularly good:**

* Option One: Go home.
  + Going home to me meant in some way that I was giving up.
  + There is an unnatural stigma against missionaries that come home early in the LDS community, and I didn't want to come home to that. The stigma being people assume you did something bad if you come home early.
  + I had not learned the language very well, if I went home the language would be harder to learn and keep.
  + I didn't want to let my family, friends, my god, and myself down.
  + I felt like I hadn’t finished my work yet in Mongolia.
  + The biggest one though I didn't fully recognize it when I was making this decision was I would still have the same problems I had on the mission but with nothing to distract me from my problems.
  + Leave all the friends I had made in Mongolia with the chance I would never see them again.
* Option Two: Stay.
  + Continue to get sicker both mentally and physically.
  + Continue to be a burden on my mission president, my mission, and my companion.
  + Continue to have my parents, family, and friends worrying about me at home.
  + Hinder the work that my fellow missionaries, and me had worked so hard to achieve.
  + I was on the point of breaking, mentally and physically.

**What Choice you ended up making and why:**

I decided to go home and finish my mission early. This decision was hands down the hardest decision I have ever had to make in my life. The main reason I went home was because I was a burden on everyone around me and at home. I also made the decision with the help of my Heavenly Father, and Mission President. I had gotten a prompting weeks before my final meeting with my Mission President that I was going home. The prompting hit me like a ton of bricks, I actually fell to the floor, which was a normal occurrence at the time. My last reason was I needed some relief from worry, and not knowing when I would have a panic attack or chest pain.

**And what the outcome was:**

I was sent back to Darkhan to grab my stuff, I had two days to spend in the capital city Ulaanbaatar to grab souvenirs, see the sites, see friends, and say goodbye. It took me almost 32 hours to fly home, where my friends and family waited for me at the Salt Lake City Airport. When I came home I still had the same problems I had out on the mission but I didn't have anything to fill my time with. My depression and anxiety got worse. I was meeting with counselors, church officials and specialty doctors. No one could tell me what was wrong with me, and to this day I still don't know what was causing my chest pains. I have a lot of suspicions, but nothing concrete. When I saw specialty doctors they told me my condition was psychological. When I visited with my psychologist they said that my condition was physical. I went through 6 months of what I would consider my form of hell. With no purpose, depression, anxiety, and health problems, it was very hard to keep moving forward with my life and I just lived from moment to moment. Eventually, slowly my chest pains started to fade, or at least I was getting use to them. I found work, moved to a city with a better social life, started my masters, and started to date more regularly. Today I’m doing good, and I’m happy. I have been asked many times, if I could go back would I make the same choice to serve a mission. Without a shadow of a doubt I would answer by say yes. I have learned so much from my experience, I have seen people change, I have seen myself change, I have seen miracles not only in my life but in the lives of others, I have made friendships, had experiences that will be with me until I die, and most importantly I have come to better know who I am and that I can get through the toughest situations and challenges. I would go back in a heartbeat to be able to experience those things again. I absolutely loved my mission experience, and the hardships with them. Gordon B. Hinckley stated, “You will come to know that what appears today to be a sacrifice will prove instead to be the greatest investment that you will ever make.” and Orsen F. Whitney stated, “All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our character, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable” and James E. Faust stated, “Here then is a great truth. In the pain, the agony, and the heroic endeavors of life, we pass through a refiner’s fire, and the insignificant and the unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong.”