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DIALING 911



Dialing 911 from my bedroom phone at 2:30 a.m.

“Emergency operator, may I help you?”

“Yes, my name is Alex Gee, my wife is nineteen weeks pregnant, and I think her water just broke! This is her second pregnancy, and,” I paused, “we lost our first baby just like this.”

“Someone will be right there, sir—what color is the fluid? Have you noticed any bleeding?”

“No, no, just a clear fluid.” I turned from the phone. “Stay calm, just a second, Jackie. I’m trying to get help. . . . I’m sure the baby is just fine—but you have to stay calm.”

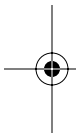
“Sir? Hello? Sir? Try to stay calm. . . . Who is your wife’s OB/GYN?”

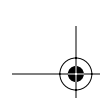
“It’s Dr. Koller! Uh—my wife is losing more fluid—hurry!” *Oh God, this isn’t happening again—I can’t do this again. . . . I can’t handle another loss like this. . . . Let this be a dream—please let this be a dream!*

“We’re coming, sir. The ambulance team should be there in just a moment.”

Click.

I began to pray desperately, “Father, you promised that whatever I





claim in your name will be done for me. I pray right now with authority, and I declare that my seed will be spared this time. Father, your Word says that the thief comes not but to steal, kill and destroy, but you have come to give us life and that more abundantly. I rebuke Satan, who has orchestrated this attack against my family and my faith. He is a liar, and I decree in Jesus' name that no weapon formed against me will prosper. You, O Lord, delight in the prosperity of your servant. You said that you would grant me the desires of my heart; all you have to do is speak one simple word and my baby will live. Please . . . please . . . please. In your name . . .”

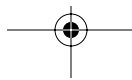
I am haunted by crystal-clear memories of the events of that cruel night. My stomach did somersaults as loud sirens and red flashing lights notified my sleeping neighborhood that my unborn baby and my faith were again in need of resuscitation. In my mind's eye, I can still see the paramedics cautiously walking Jackie to the ambulance as vital amniotic fluid spills from her body. That snapshot let me know that we'd experience death again. All the while, saddened neighbors, who knew how much this baby meant to us, poured out onto their porches as an act of solidarity, offering up prayers and kind thoughts on my family's behalf as the ambulance whisked us away to St. Mary's Hospital.

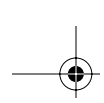
Although the hospital was only four miles from our home, the ride felt like forever. I wasn't sure if I could remain hopeful, because things looked pretty bad again. I had never been that scared in my entire life. I actually shook myself twice on the way to the hospital because I couldn't tell if I were dreaming or not.

Hold on! But I'm one of the good ones—I thought I was special to God! This shouldn't be happening to me, right? It's not supposed to be like this, is it?

A MINISTER'S CRISIS OF FAITH

I knew how to be strong for other people in situations like this. I had





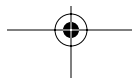
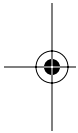
dedicated myself to God as a young boy, started preaching at fifteen, got ordained at twenty and was already serving as a senior pastor when these events took place. It's funny how the rules seem to change when it's your own family and your own faith on the line.

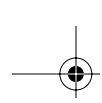
The resident finished examining Jackie, and things didn't look good. They checked us into a room anyhow and told us that they were going to monitor Jackie and the baby. Within a few short hours Jackie spiked a terrible fever, which meant that she had developed an infection. Now there would be no more pleading with the doctors or God. The threat of infection meant inducing labor so as to save Jackie's life and perhaps her uterus.

This was our second pregnancy and our second trip to this same emergency room. We would be robbed of the joys of parenthood once again. It felt like a nightmare, too painful and too eerie to be real. I felt haunted, pursued even, by an evil force that was mocking my faith in God. I had what felt like an out-of-body experience—as though I could've chosen to float away to some safe, numb state of being. I never knew that mental breakdown could be so close.

The experience of loss was blurred by mental replays of our first loss: Victoria, only fourteen months prior. The same symptoms . . . the same on-duty nurse . . . the same sick feeling in the pit of my stomach . . . the same numbness. Now we were in a slow-motion replay of the worst day of my entire life. I didn't know what was worse—the unbearable pain that I was currently experiencing or the cruel, venomous flood of my unresolved hurt, anger and pain over the loss of Victoria. The strong forces of old and new grief tore my soul into pieces. At this point I was too numb to pick up those pieces and too distrustful of God to ask for his assistance.

Soon Jackie would once again deliver a daughter who would be too small to live more than just a few hours. And within the span of a sin-





gle hour—sixty minutes—I would once again hold, name, footprint and say goodbye to a precious life that I helped to create. How many pastors dedicate and eulogize their own child on the same day? I did both that day with Alexis, just as I had with Victoria only a year before.

When Jackie and I lost Victoria, we were heartbroken. When we lost Alexis the very same way in the very next year, we were devastated. Furthermore, we experienced tremendous emotional pain and guilt that somehow we had failed God, who, in return, had chosen to reject or ignore our years of faithful Christian service. My underdeveloped theology had included the assumption that no bad thing would happen to God's faithful children and that God would grant anything they desired if they were just good enough.

SHAKING OUR FISTS AT GOD

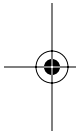
I was extremely angry with God and didn't know how to deal with that. I thought that if I expressed my anger at him, he would destroy me—and yet I knew that if I didn't express myself to God, hurt and anger would destroy me.

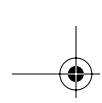
Who teaches us how to properly shake our angry fists at God? Who dares?

When we have great anger, misunderstanding and pain festering inside, it is next to impossible to worship God, let alone pray. After finally concluding that God could not be any more distant from me than he already was and that I had absolutely nothing to lose, I threw caution to the wind and began to vent to the Father. I developed what I call a bad case of "spiritual Tourette's syndrome"—I shook my fist and blurted out whatever popped into my mind to God.

"You're not fair! I don't deserve this." *No response.*

"You must have an awfully short memory. I am one of the good ones." *No response.*





“Didn’t it matter to you that I committed myself to chastity, sobriety and godly living beginning when I was a child—didn’t that count for something?” *No response.*

“I have preached that Satan doesn’t have the upper hand—that you are the Almighty One. Yet you allowed him to do this to me—twice! Are you who you say you are? Are you really all-powerful? Who’s really calling the shots around here, you or Satan?” *No response.*

“You allow babies to have babies and then toss them in garbage containers, yet you keep letting this happen to us!” *No response.*

“What’s so hard about giving two good people a baby, God? Haven’t I given you the best years of my young life? Haven’t I been true to you? Why weren’t you there for us when we needed you the most? We don’t ask you for much.” *No response.*

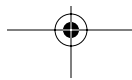
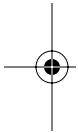
“God, I had tremendous faith in you. You promised that if I ask anything in your name you will grant it. I have quoted your promises in Scripture back to you—why doesn’t this work for me? I did what you told me to do; why didn’t you do your part?” *Still no response.*

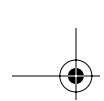
THE FUNERAL

My sense of abandonment was never stronger than when I sat in a funeral service for my second daughter, Alexis. That day I had written in my journal:

The funeral is today and I am stuck. If I don’t attend, I’ll never be able to live with myself. If I do attend, I’ll never be able to forget certain images like the infant casket that looked an awful lot like a tiny white shoebox.

I can remember the date, because it was my sister’s first wedding anniversary. I was saddened that she had to spend her anniversary at a cemetery, and I was upset that her anniversary would always remind me of this day.





The sky is perfect and blue. Once again, nature seems to betray me—looking and acting like any other gorgeous day, but it isn't.

I stood in line at the flower shop with miniature pink-and-white sweetheart roses in my hand. It looked like I was on my way to a baby dedication or a birthday party for a special little girl. Instead, I was on my way to my own daughter's memorial service. Everyone else in the shop wore happy smiles as they bought plants, bouquets and helium-filled balloons for loved ones. I wore dark sunglasses so that the sadness in my eyes wouldn't betray my torment. I prayed no one would ask where I was going with the pretty flowers.

Parents aren't supposed to buy flowers for their children's funerals. Parents are supposed to die first. Nothing about this hellish ordeal seemed right or fair to me.

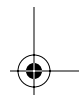
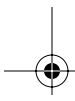
What makes this memory particularly sad for me is that no one outside of my immediate family (mother, sister, stepfather and, of course, Jackie) knew that the ceremony was taking place. I couldn't bring myself to tell anyone, much less invite anyone. To do so would have been to admit that this was really happening.

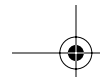
In fact, Jackie did not attend. She said she simply could not do it.

I understood. I didn't want to either. I suppose that if I hadn't attended, I would've convinced myself that the entire ordeal was merely a horrible nightmare and I would eventually awake from this sleep.

Things went from bad to worse for me at the memorial service. As a pastor, I am used to the pomp and circumstance of funerals, which in my African American church tradition are called "homegoings," and they are huge celebrations.

*There was no pomp today.
There were no pallbearers.
There was no pastor.*





*There was no joy.
No kind words expressed.
No one to say, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."
No one to say, "We've gone as far as we can go. . . . You're dismissed.
. . . Go in peace,
please return to your cars and drive safely."*

And what would the minister have said to comfort us anyway? "Be of good cheer—she is with the Lord right now"? Or I love this one: "God must've needed her more than us."

What would the minister have said about her? "She lived a good, long healthy life"? Would he have talked about her hobbies? Her classmates? Her work in the church? Her favorite songs? Favorite cartoons? Favorite toy? Favorite teacher?

No, because no one knew these things. No one gave us the time and opportunity to discover these things. And I felt like a failure because I couldn't even speak on her behalf other than to say that her mother and I created her in love. In hindsight, I am glad there was no minister. I would have hated him or her for even attempting to be on God's side by saying something "spiritual."

My mother, my sister, my stepfather just sat there with me. We tried to make small talk about heaven and seeing the baby again. It didn't work for me. The thought of heaven and God didn't particularly warm my heart. I suppose that my attitude wouldn't have been very welcome in heaven anyway.

But what kind of homegoing was this?

What do you do when you're experiencing the worst days of your life and God still refuses to make an appearance?

