

Is your life going as you planned? Has everything gone the way you planned when you got up this morning with no surprises or unexpected changes? Have the projects, events, or vacations that you planned and looked forward to for weeks and months gone exactly as you planned or expected? There's an old saying that if you want to make God laugh tell Him your plans!

Bruce and I experienced this back in October when we were fencing in a future community garden at St. Joseph Mission School in San Fidel. The principal, Father Antonio Trujillo, approached us this summer and asked if we would help with this project. He had submitted a grant request to install a new fence around the field adjacent to the old convent across the road from the school. The field has access to an irrigation system and the new water line that we installed two years ago.

Now if you have ever worked with Bruce, you learn that he likes challenges, doing new things and does extensive research into a proposed project. So, he carefully designed and planned a garden enclosed by 560 feet of six-foot high weld wire fence with fifty ten-foot round wooden poles embedded in concrete.

The work was scheduled for the week of October 7-11. We were to be assisted by a Catholic Mission Team of high school students from Tucson, Arizona, who would help us on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. We planned to dig the post holes on Monday, set the poles and pour the concrete on Tuesday, let the concrete set and construct braces on Wednesday, erect the fence on Thursday and complete the remaining work on Friday morning.

And of course, everything went according to plan. Right! On Monday we picked up a Bobcat with an auger from Frank's Rental here in Albuquerque. We wanted a ten-inch auger but they only had a twelve-inch one which meant that we would need more concrete. When we got to St. Joseph and started work, the pressure line on the auger would not stay connected. So, Bruce had to go all the way back to Albuquerque to get another Bobcat. While he was gone, we dug several post holes by hand. With the new Bobcat we were able to dig the remaining holes on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning.

On Tuesday morning, we tried to call the local concrete company in Grants to schedule the delivery of three cubic yards of concrete to set the fifty wooden posts. Unfortunately, our bad luck continued; the concrete plant did not have power due to a downed power line and was shut down for three days. We ended up having to use an old concrete mixer from the local hardware store in Grants and over ninety eighty-pound sacks of sackcrete. The high school students used three wheelbarrows to move the concrete over rough ground to set each post.

And our bad luck continued when we started erecting the fence on Thursday. Antonio had promised us the availability of a tractor to stretch the wire fence, but they couldn't find the keys to it. In short, the planned project of 3 to 4 short days, actually took 6 to 7 long days. Have you ever experienced something like this? You have everything planned out to the detail, things

seem to be going well and on schedule, and then all of a sudden one thing after another goes wrong, like last Sunday's worship service.

As you read the gospels, you see that Jesus, who came to live among us, even had days like this. He experienced all the same problems and troubles of life just as we do each day. People were always putting demands on Him; the religious authorities were always opposing Him and trying to trap Him; and the disciples and the people never really understood why He came to live among us despite all His efforts and teachings. Jesus clearly understood what we as human beings deal with on a daily basis, and in the Sermon on the Mount, He provides some guidance on how to handle the problems of daily life. Listen to what He says in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, verses 25-34.

Matthew 6: 25-34

During this project at St. Joseph, I learned a lot and did a lot of praying that week. I don't know how many times I asked God to fix this or that. And sometimes He did, and sometimes He didn't. You know things happen in life for a reason. Sometimes God sends trials, problems, and disappointments to help us grow spiritually. Also, when one door closes, God usually opens another door. Now while God opens the door, He also expects us to learn something from every experience in life. In the remaining time we have, let me address two major lessons that this experience taught me.

First, life is a whole lot easier when you walk in faith. As you can see from my summary of our fencing project, we had our share of problems and setbacks, but we never lost sight of the fact that the project would be completed if it was God's will. Hopefully, next year this community garden will provide the opportunity for local families to grow their own vegetables. I was amazed by how calm we were when something went wrong. We didn't get upset or threaten to quit, or wonder why we were sweating and getting dirty for a garden that we would never use. It reminded me what the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11 – "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

Many mornings during my quiet time, after reading the Bible and my devotionals, I would write in my journal: "Walk in faith; trust in the Lord, and see what He will do." 2 Corinthians 5:7 states: "For we walk in faith, not by sight." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going." We all have up and down times in our lives when we must walk in faith and trust in the Lord. There are times when we have to deal with an unwelcome diagnosis and illnesses; it might be heart conditions, cancer, or Parkinson's disease. There are those times we are waiting for a loved one to come out of surgery, for a child or loved one to return from traveling in a foreign country, for a loan to be approved, or for the results from a medical test or recovery from surgery. Some of us are going through difficult times right now. It's at times like this that we must walk in faith and trust in the Lord.

But how do you define faith? Once a minister asked a woman: "What is faith?" To which she replied: "Well, I'm not that smart or educated, but to me it is taking God at His word." Not a

bad definition. In the classic movie *Miracle on 34th Street*, Santa Claus says: "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to." The Bible defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 as follows: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see. Philip Yaney said that faith means trusting in advance what will only make sense in reverse.

So, what have I learned so far about walking in faith? Notice I said "so far," I'm still learning; I'm still trying to walk in faith! First, you need to stay in touch with the Lord. That's why a daily quiet time of prayer and Bible reading is essential. It gives you the opportunity to talk things over with God. Now I'm not just talking about praying when you get up each morning or before you go to bed at night. I mean staying in contact with God by following the advice of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – "Pray without ceasing." As I just said, God and I did a lot of talking during this fence project. I sure hope that He didn't get tired of me asking why certain things didn't go as planned. One thing I do know is that these conversations helped me remain confident in the promise of Romans 8:28 that all things will work out according to His plan. Someone once said that a test of faith is whether you are surprised when your prayers are answered.

Now prayer is essential in our daily walk with the Lord, but prayer without action is useless. Someone said that when we pray, the Lord expects us to have tools in our hands. In other words, action must accompany prayer. Notice that I said "walking in faith," not "waiting in faith." Walking implies that we are moving forward, taking one step at a time in faith. In the Indiana Jones movie where they are searching for the cup that Jesus was supposed to have used at the Lord's Supper, Indiana comes to a great ravine where there appears to be no way across. The cue on the map that he is following says "step out in faith." So, as he stands on the edge of the ravine, he takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and steps forward in faith into the thin air. To his surprise and relief, there is an invisible bridge that allows him to cross to the other side of the ravine and discover the cup. As Christians, we are called to step out in faith each and every day.

We cannot sit back and idly wait for things to happen; we must work at the issue based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God expects us to keep moving forward, and not sit back and wait. Faith in Jesus doesn't wait until we understand; if that was the case, it wouldn't be faith. As I noted earlier, when something went wrong on the fencing project, we didn't throw our hands up in despair and walk away. Instead, we went to plan B and, in some cases, we had to go to plans C and D, but we kept walking in faith. And in hindsight, some things turned out better than planned. For example, by using the concrete mixer and wheelbarrows instead of having the concrete delivered by a concrete truck, the high school students gained valuable experience.

There's the old saying: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." The Apostle Paul understood this when he wrote in the first five verses of Romans 5: "We also rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and

character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because God has poured our His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, it all starts with suffering. One translation of the Bible refers to this as “troubles.” Of course, this is something that we all know something about firsthand and have in common. We all know what it is to experience troubles and the need to trust in the Lord and walk in faith.

As Christians we face all kinds of problems and troubles every day – strained relationships, sorrow, disappointments, illness, bad news, and loneliness to name just a few. Paul says that all this stress produces perseverance. Now the Greek word used here means more than simple endurance. It means a spirit which can overcome the world; it means a spirit which does not just passively endure, but which actively overcomes the trials of life. It encourages us to keep pressing on, trusting in God even in the worst situations. For example, consider the postage stamp; its usefulness consists on its ability to stick with one thing until it gets there.

The second lesson that I learned during the work on the fencing project was from an old gospel song that kept coming to my mind as one thing after another went wrong. Do you remember the Christy Lane’s classic song *One Day at a Time*? She often referred to this song as her philosophy of life. Listen to these words: “Show me the stairway I have to climb. Lord for my sake, teach me to take one day at a time. One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that’s all I’m asking from you. Just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do.” That’s how you walk in faith and face what you are dealing with; taking one day at a time, as you step out in faith trusting that God will take care of you.

There’s an another old saying that life by the yard is hard, but life by the inch is a cinch. Life is easier and less stressful when you take it one day at a time. I think this is what Jesus was getting at in Matthew 6:34 when He said: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” The *Message* paraphrases it this way: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Jesus is telling us to not worry about what will or will not happen tomorrow, but focus on the present and all the good Lord has given you. In the previous verses in Matthew 6, Jesus tells us not to worry about what we will eat or wear; our Heavenly Father knows what we need. Instead in verse 33, He instructs us to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness, and all these things, in other words, all the things we need will be provided to us. Just as we stayed focused on completing the fence project, so are we to stay focused on the Lord, trusting that despite all the things that can go wrong or will happen, God will take care of us.

One final thought from our experience with the fence project at St. Joseph Mission School. If God wants something done, it will be done despite all the problems, setbacks, and delays. Time after time, I am amazed how God works things out. Sometimes I can hear God saying: “O you of little faith, remember what I said in Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you, plans

to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And don’t forget what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:9 – “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

So, when you are having one of those days when anything that can go wrong does go wrong. When all your plans are thrown out the window, remember to just walk in faith and take it one day at a time. God is with you and He will take care of you. Amen