

There is a common saying, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!” So, does God not want us to plan? Christ made plans. Paul planned his missionary journeys, so I think it is biblical to plan. It is natural to plan. Most of us plan our lives—education, career, ministry, and relationships. James 4:13-14 admonishes us not to boast about what we will do tomorrow because we don’t know what tomorrow holds.

Things don't always happen in the way we hoped. We may never know this side of Heaven why God allows our plans to change, but no experience is ever wasted. We can only trust God to know what's best for us.

At the beginning of our life as missionaries, things went like clockwork. We completed all requirements and arrived in Panama in August 1977, to begin a ministry that covered over 30 years. Living in Latin America, we soon learned things don’t always turn out as planned. There were a lot of frustrations and disappointments along the way but nothing was life shattering. That would come.

Panama had become our home and ministry opportunities were endless. While on our fourth stateside assignment in 2000, after much prayer, Steve accepted the position as Director of Field Operations. This meant leaving Panama, working out of the International Missions office in Nashville, and extensive travel to different mission fields. It was rewarding but, at times, very difficult.

For both of us, plans had definitely changed. We were no longer “missionaries.” We weren’t in Panama. At first, it was difficult to adjust to that reality and life in the United States. My thought was, if God placed me here, I would be happy and find my place of service. Soon, living in Nashville wasn’t so bad. Steve was traveling a lot but I was able to get involved in ministry. We had three sons who all married lovely Christian girls and grandkids became an enjoyable part of our life. Life was good.

Except, Steve was physically exhausted and we couldn’t find out why. He was realizing he couldn’t do his job much longer. Our mission director realized the same thing. In 2008, a big change took place; we made another lateral move within the mission and were redirected to Panama as field missionaries.

Wow! If adapting to living stateside was hard, leaving was even harder. We were settled. We loved being close to our kids and our four grandchildren (we now have nine). We were getting older. It was time to choose comfort over adventure—wasn’t it? God had prepared us for this next move but I was hesitant. Why couldn’t we just grow old close to our family? I had to wrestle this out in my mind and heart. God spoke to me in many ways but especially through His Word. The economic conditions of 2008 were not good and if our house sold before leaving for Panama in January 2009, only God could do it. He did. We closed on the house December 31, 2008. Our plans were changing. I could rebel or obey. I

chose to obey and will never be sorry. Our final years in Panama were the most physically exhausting but some of the most satisfying of our ministry.

Change in Family Plans

By the end of 2014, Steve was still able to keep up the daily teaching schedule at the seminary (which he loved) but it was hard. He had constant headaches and extreme fatigue. Plans were to continue as missionaries for several more years but after talking to Director Clint Morgan, we decided to retire June 30, 2015. The work would officially be placed into the capable hands of the Panamanian leadership in January 2015. We wanted to be there to celebrate and say our goodbyes. Again, plans changed and this time they were “life shattering.”