

The “what if’s” sneak in almost unnoticed at first. They come in the form of prudent, logical questions of preparedness; questions of cause and effect. We plan that if X happens then we can expect Y. But what if X doesn’t happen? What then? In the lack of certainty most of us begin to construct in our minds a Plan B, and sometimes a Plan C and in extreme cases a Plan D. In our mind’s eye, these plans become a matter of being ready for anything; of being prepared. But what happens when, in the middle of the battle, Plan B starts to look more enticing than the original plan? One has to decide which boat he is in: sink or sail.

So what is this type of “plan B” exactly? It’s having the once certainty of God’s direction thrown into question by an unforeseen event or set of circumstances. It’s Abraham who, only chapters before had leaped into the great unknown with everything he had to follow God’s call, entering Egypt and calling Sarah his sister. It’s Saul, God’s anointed leader, putting on the ephod because he got nervous. It’s any time we think that God’s once great plans have for some reason gotten derailed and now need our intervention or correction. Plan Bs are usually reactionary.

Plan B’s are best conceived and incubated in circumstances that are full of uncertainties and obstacles. And our work down here in Brazil on a macro level is just that, a place full of uncertainties and obstacles. On a personal micro level, we have seen God move and lives transformed. We have seen families healed and people delivered. But on an organizational macro level, what we have seen a lot of is uncertainties. Now as the leader of our organization’s work down here in Brazil I look these uncertainties in the face every day. I see the rapid reduction of the missionary body that was here even a few years ago. I see the growth and the maturing of the Brazilian denomination that OMS helped to start. I see a country that has a rapidly growing evangelical church, and my mind begins to wonder. God, did we hear you right? What do we have yet to offer? How can we best be used in your Kingdom? How can your resources best be used in your Kingdom? We know we heard you right, but sometimes it doesn’t make sense.

This uncertainty seems to only be underlined every time some young seminary student asks me, “So Micah, how long will you be in Maringá?”, or “Where will you go after that?” The only answer that I can offer is, “**Only** God knows for certain.” And though I have no doubt that God knows exactly what He has in store for us, He has not yet told us the details of His plan. There has been neither a burning bush nor a night vision, just that small still voice saying to keep on walking. As I was walking in this path of uncertainty a few weeks ago God called me to once again give up my back up plan. He told me to stop entertaining the thoughts of “what if,” in essence: to kill my plan B. As I sat in that metal chair wondering if I had heard Him correctly, His response came in the form of a Bible verse.

**Joh 15:2** and every *branch* that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Almost immediately my mind brought me back to when I was 12 years old, trying to earn money for a class trip to Washington D.C. working in a local vineyard. Pruning, as I knew, is surely not a fun process for the branch. It’s a process where the vineyard worker takes the new growth of the branch and cuts it off and throws it away. If the new growth isn’t cut off, the energies of the branch will be put into growing that new part and not into fruit production. The result of this neglect would be a beautifully big and green grape vine with little or no fruit. I remember seeing the reality of this neglect in a grapevine that used to be behind the pantry at my parent’s house. I remember that in contrast to the plants we had tended in the vineyard, this was an absolutely beautiful vine: big, green, full of leaves, growing each year. Also in contrast the plant had to the

others was a lack of eatable fruit. The grapes were either simply not present or so small and underdeveloped no one would ever consider eating them. If the vineyard worker wants a good harvest of grapes he must cut that vine back to a scrawny, scraggly bush looking thing. It'll look kind of pathetic to the untrained eye; but it is done with the end results in mind.

As the light of that verse penetrated my mind, it became crystal clear that my plan B had become a tender new growth. Whether I was conscience of it or not it was taking my energy and dividing my heart and it had to be killed. Killing my plan B would mean to feel again just like that insignificant scrawny, scraggly bush looking thing, naked and almost dead. So what to do at that point? Our situation hadn't changed, the same obstacles that were there before were still there. In fact in about 10 days time far greater obstacles would present themselves. What to do? How to let it go?

Well for starters I had to shift my concentration from things that I don't know, to things that I do. So what are the things that we know for sure, and how are we sure of them?

1. God wants us here in Brazil.

a. We know it because of the miraculous way that he provided for our funding. Even our supervisors are still stunned how in just a couple of weeks in September God called a few people to complete our funding. The word they still use to describe it is "miraculous."

b. We know if for the many, many little confirmations

- When we needed a car, the perfect car was provided for the exact amount that we had in our car fund

- When we needed a house, we had peace that God would provide the perfect house with out us having to stress out about it. That perfect

House was provided within our budget without all the normal legal hoops to jump through

- The house had built in hooks to hang swings for our girls (a simple thing they both love).

- The house was 4 blocks from a public swimming pool. This may not seem like that big of deal in the US, but finding a public swimming pool here in Brazil is much harder than one would expect. The pool was a big deal for us because "going swimming" was the big selling point that we were trying to sell the girls on to get them excited to move thousands of miles from anything they remember. In Londrina to find a public pool and even then it was so far away, that it was nearly inaccessible.

c. We know it for the unexplainable peace that we have at being where we are

d. We know it because all of our prior experiences seem to have been used to bring us to where we are today. Right now.

2. The missionaries that are here right now, though small in number, have been hand picked for this very moment

a. Though the few of us that remain are still untested in so many areas, I rest knowing that God delights to use weak vessels.

b. The passion that burns in us was put in us for a reason, and it won't be wasted.

c. Our areas of giftedness and abilities are different but we are all beginning to walk towards the same goal.

-We want God to use this church to reach the un-reached and under-reached areas of Brazil. Though, as I previously stated, the evangelical church is growing rapidly in Brazil many of the most prolific churches preach a prosperity Gospel. A type of "name it and claim it Gospel" that unfortunately often serves to burn and inoculate spiritually hungry people to the paradoxical power and freedom found only in submission through a personal relationship with Jesus.

3. The timing is perfect for "something" to happen

a. As many of you know, Brazil is a country that is growing. It's economic and political affluence is continuing to expand, as is evidenced by the recent international decision to hold both the summer Olympics and the next World Cup here. And where affluence begins to take hold on a country, receptivity to the Gospel's message is usually greatly diminished.

b. I see a window of great opportunity here. A window before affluence, prosperity and the pursuit of leisure strangle spiritual opportunity. A window when people are still spiritually hungry. A window when people are still open to the Gospel.

When I look at Brazil, I see a country that is sitting on the verge of sending its own great missionary movement out into the world, a missionary movement that could bring countless into the Kingdom around the world. Oh, there are definite macro reasons to be here! The potential is so great! But what is our role? How do we fit in? How do we get there? These are still questions that God only knows. But I know that He'll show us, when He's ready. I know he'll show us when we're ready.

Ok, ok, ok on a practical level: what have we been up to? Well after our move to Maringá we've been barely getting our feet wet in the ministry here. Maybe my big toe is fully in the water at this point. This has been because I was working pretty hard in preparations for some very significant meetings that were held in the first days of March. They were meetings between some of the leaders of OMS with the leaders of the national church down here to discuss evangelism strategies and church multiplication efforts in Brazil. These meetings didn't lead to the results that we were hoping for. From my point of view, it sure would have been great if we could have come to an agreement, but I rest knowing how much prayer support was backing the meetings on both sides. God knows, He'll show us when He's ready.

A few days after the meetings ended, the girls and I drove Marla back to Londrina to put her on an airplane for Africa. We've been saving our money for about a year and a half for her to be able to attend her best friend's wedding in Kenya, and she is there now. In truth, I had wanted to write this e-mail much sooner, but being a mom is no easy task, and doesn't leave a lot of spare time. I'm learning things like doll clothes come out of the VCR almost as easily as they go in, and a dining room table is a pretty easy platform to climb for an 11 month old when the chairs are in just the right spot. Yeah, I'm tired most of the days, but God has been good and sent uncles and aunts to help out. From the e-mails Marla has sent, she is having a great time and missing us lots. The feeling is mutual.

I've gotta run, you are all very appreciated,

For the only Cause that matters,

Micah and Marla

Ps. The first picture is of one of meetings that were held at the beginning of this month. The second picture of the girls with "aunt Gwen."

-----Cliffnotes: Killing Plan B-----  
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Doubts come in all shapes and forms, and often spring up from difficult circumstances or unexpected events. But what do you do when you're absolutely sure that God has placed you where he wants you, but it isn't as easy as you had expected? This e-mail deals with that question as God challenged me once again to quit toying with a "back up plan." Nope, we're to be here sink or swim, no plan B. In one sense it's kinda scary, but in another all of our energies can be put fully in one direction

Marla is in Kenya attending her best friends wedding. It's great that she can be there, and I'm having a great time with the girls... though it is a lot harder to do anything else during the day. Thanks for your prayers

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