

(RONALD REAGAN) In the opening pages of his autobiography, "An American Life," Ronald Reagan writes, "I was raised to believe that God had a plan for everyone and that seemingly random twists of fate are all a part of His plan. My mother told me that everything in life happened for a purpose. She said all things were part of God's plan, even the most disheartening setbacks, and in the end, everything worked out for the best. If something went wrong, she said, you didn't let it get you down: You stepped away from it, stepped over it, and moved on. Later on, she added, something good will happen and you'll find yourself thinking -- 'If I hadn't had that problem back then, then this better thing that did happen wouldn't have happened to me.' After I lost the job at Montgomery Ward, I left home again in search of work. Although I didn't know it then, I was beginning a journey that would take me a long way from Dixon, Illinois, and fulfill all my dreams and then some. My mother, as usual, was right."

(PLAN B) Call them what you want--setbacks, roadblocks, Plan Bs—eventually they happen to each of us. At the time, they only seem like a loss, a defeat. I'm sure that when Ronald Reagan lost his Montgomery Ward's job he didn't celebrate. Yet as his mother pointed out, that negative thing paved the way for something better. People who believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit believe His promise; that "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." It sometimes takes quite a bit of God-given faith, though, to really trust that the wall I just ran into is God's way of re-directing me. But that's what faith does. It looks at the roadblock and says, "All right, Lord, where are we going now?"

(THE APOSTLE PAUL) For evidence of the power of Plan B, look no further than today's first reading. The life of the Apostle Paul was a series of Plan Bs—beginning with his conversion and continuing on through ministry teams falling apart, shipwrecks and house arrest. You almost get the sense, reading the book of Acts, that nothing went according to Paul's plan. And yet everything went according to God's plan, and Paul learned to live with it.

We have an excellent example of that dynamic in this passage from Acts 16. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had their own travel itinerary, but we learn here that the Holy Spirit had other plans. God wanted them to head to Macedonia, going so far as to send Paul a vision of a man requesting their help. Clearly, Paul had learned to live by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, because it says that the group set out for the Macedonian region "immediately," concluding that God had called them to preach the Gospel there. Let me just stop the story for a second to ask you: Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to help someone today? Is there a request for help that has reached your ears—a situation that you know you could bring the Gospel to—that the Spirit is quietly drawing you towards? Will you respond with the faithfulness demonstrated by Paul, Silas, and Timothy?

(LYDIA) Back to the travelers—when they arrive in Phillipi, God’s Plan B begins to come into focus. There, at the riverside, they meet a woman named Lydia. Lydia was a pretty interesting woman. She was a “worshipper of God”—a phrase used to describe non-Jews who had come to believe that God of Israel was the true God. She was a business owner—and a fairly successful one at that, since purple goods were highly sought after, expensive items. Best of all, as Paul shared the good news of Jesus with her, the Lord opened her heart to receive his gifts, and she, along with her family, was baptized. Filled with the new life of Christ, she is also moved to extend hospitality to the missionary team, and her home likely became a makeshift sanctuary for Philippian Christians. Here is the power of Plan B in motion. The original frustration of Paul and company not going where they had wanted to go gave way to a call for help—and the outcome was the salvation of Lydia and her family. This was not the result of some great strategy or program, just a few men who were open to the direction of the Holy Spirit and faithfully went where He said to go. Do you and I have that same openness today? Or have we learned how to ignore that still, small voice that says, “Go and help people in My name?” Now there’s something to think about.

(CONFIRMATION1) Today, two of our young people are going to confirm that they still possess the gift of faith that was given to them in baptism. They are going to confirm that this faith has grown as they have learned the Word of God. They are going to confirm their intention to remain in this faith until it becomes sight. In fact they are going to confirm that they would rather die than fall away from Jesus. Sound intense? That’s because it is! It’s a huge statement for anyone to make, and they’re making it, here, today, before God and family and church. Please pray for Lauren and Chase, that they would remain faithful to the Lord Jesus; that they would be open to God’s Plan B’s for their lives; that they would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit leading them on life’s journey, and as you do that, why not renew your own confirmation? Why not renew your commitment to the Word of God and openness to the Holy Spirit?

(WORD AND SPIRIT) After all, it is through that Word that the Holy Spirit goes to work. The Word and Spirit confront us with our sins and the death sentence that is deservedly ours. The same Word and Spirit offer God’s solution; it is Jesus, who would stand in the way of punishment for us on the cross and assume our debt--all of it; leaving us forgiven and free. The same Word and Spirit promise an eternal connection to the risen Son of God, meaning victory over death! The same Word and Spirit promises that all things are working together for good for you and that the Lord will shepherd you through every roadblock you experience. If the Holy Spirit has opened your heart to believe these promises, give thanks today, because you own the greatest treasures a person can have!