

When planning a mission trip, there are many questions you ask yourself: where is God calling us, where is the area of greatest need, where will we stay, what work will we be doing, etc. This mission trip started out different than most, a trip that was planned to go to Atlanta, Georgia, moved to Slidell, Louisiana, and ended up in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Most of the trip was a series of questions: where was God leading us, what were we supposed to do, how do we know we are doing the right thing, where do I see him ...

It has been roughly 4½ years since hurricane Katrina, and we were on our way back to help people in the areas affected by this hurricane.. As we started out, I had created an expectation of where I thought I was to see God, I had created a nice box for Him to fit into.

As the week started, I was not seeing God where I expected; in fact, I questioned if He was there at all. We had stopped by one of the houses that we first worked on 4 years ago, it had been torn down. This was difficult to accept.

The first day did not go as planned and I felt as if I had failed and let the rest of the group down.. The week was a struggle, doubt and fear had crept in, I was questioning my resolve, my motivation for these trips and even my faith. Where was God in all this mess?

As the week winded down, I realized that God had been with me the whole time. He was showing himself in ways that I had not expected and teaching me things that I had thought I already knew.

He was in an empty lot where there was once a house that we had worked on, His simple way of saying to stop living in the past and to live in the here and now. It never was about the house.

He was in a bunch of kids who could enjoy themselves no matter the circumstances – a lesson in rejoicing in what you have.

He was in a couple of co-workers who had ask to come along to help and became family. A simple way of saying all you have to do is invite and he will do the rest.

He was in a group of people that continued to show trust and support when things did not go as planned – a lesson in compassion and love.

He was in a pastor that had as many questions as I about things but had trust in God – a lesson in simply having faith and stop trying to control the future.

He was in a couple of camp workers who worked tirelessly and were grateful for us being there – a lesson in serving others.

As I reflect on the trip and the many emotions that I go through, good and bad, there are many things that still have to be sorted out but best described by an email a good friend shared with me weeks before the trip. "Faith does not get you around trouble, it gets you through it. Once you relinquish the desire to control the future, you will find happiness."

While we did a lot of work and helped a lot of people, I started to realize that I had created an expectation of how I was to see God. I had wanted to see him in a homeowner who was grateful, in a house that was redone, in people that told me how great I was for going to help other people.

In the end, I had forgotten about the most important thing and was reminded that it is not about me but about God.

--- Bart Stuckey