

Most of you probably know that I just came back from Ecuador. When we were in Quito, one of the first things we did on our tour of the city was to see La Basílica del Voto Nacional, basically the National Cathedral. It absolutely towered over the rest of the city at 115 meters, or 345 feet. This gigantic monument to God was so large, that from the ground around it, it was impossible to capture even one full side of it in a single photograph.

After looking around the outside and throughout the lower floors, our group climbed up several stories inside and most of us went out to continue up the outside to one of the towers. If you think 345 feet looks high from the street below, trust me, it looks like a *very* long drop from a step ladder on the outside of one of the highest towers.

One of our hosts for the mission, Roberto, told us that at 9,000 feet above sea level, we were already closer to God just by coming to Quito. And if *another* 400 feet or so didn't help me get a little closer to God, the heart-felt prayers on the way up certainly did. As I was climbing up these small steps, clinging to the rail for dear life, I noticed what a huge gap there was between each step. It was certainly large enough to do some damage to your legs if you should happen to step right into it. And for somebody like me, a space that big could have easily provided a quick trip down the outside of the Basílica.

In between each of the steps was nothing more than chicken wire. Now, chicken wire is good for keeping chickens in a confined area. It is *not* good for keeping predators out. And it certainly would not hold the weight of even a child if they should misstep on their way up this tower. In fact some of the gaps even in the chicken wire would have been large enough for me to fall through even if the material *had* been strong enough to stop me otherwise. It was more a facade of safety, if anything.

In front of me on this climb was our team leader, Hunter. And when she was almost to the top, about four steps away from the platform of the tower, she observed that there was no more chicken wire. Without the distraction of the flimsy metal in the way, you could see clear down to the people selling shawls and shining shoes on the street below. 345 feet below.

Hunter paused for a just a moment before she kept climbing. If there hadn't been 3 people behind her, she may even have considered going back down right then. But after a little hesitation, she slowly kept going, quietly saying "I sure miss the chicken wire."

It's amazing the comfort we all found from this frail "safety measure". In fact, if we were getting closer to Heaven by climbing that *ladder*, we would have been in the Express Lane stepping on the chicken wire. We all had common sense enough to realize how very little it would protect us, yet we held as tightly to the chicken wire in our minds as we held on to the rail with our hands.

We'll come back to the chicken wire. But now fast forward 8 days and several hundred miles.

Our second week on the mission, we traveled to Shell, a town in the jungle of Ecuador. We spent two days traveling and two days working at an orphanage called La Casa de Fe, or the "House of Faith." The woman who started it is named Patty Arnold. After over twenty years as a mechanic in the U.S. Army, she went to Ecuador with a mission group to repair and give out wheelchairs. Now leaving your home country to do mission work for an extended period of time is already a pretty big step of faith. But some time after going to Ecuador, Patty adopted a foster child. In fact, she did this against the wishes of the missionary group with which she was working, and ended up leaving the group altogether. She simply waited in faith for God to let her know what her mission in Ecuador was going to be. She had eight or nine foster children before someone said "Well, don't you think this might be it?"

Patty realized that the mission she had been waiting for, using her skills as a mechanic, might not be what God intended. *He* wanted her to share the love of a mother. So she took another step of faith and began what is now a two building, multi-employee, 29-child orphanage and will within several years be an over two-dozen building facility on 7½ acres of land. And as if that's not enough to manage, Patty is not directly affiliated with any other mission group or church. She has no consistent funding and only the sporadic and much-appreciated donations she receives to pay rent, to feed the

kids, to provide even basic needs to them.

La Casa de Fe has been around for about five and a half years now. Patty has never once known at the beginning of a month where her funding would come from to pay the bills that would be due that month. She and her orphanage have been entirely based on faith. And she has never once had a month where she did not make it through without enough to meet her needs.

In fact, on our first day, Patty told the group about her plans to expand the physical part of the orphanage from two rented houses to her new property. Her last payment on the recently purchased land would be due in about a month, which is now this coming week. She needed \$10,000 to finish paying it off. One of our team members immediately blurted what we were all thinking: "Where are you going to get \$10,000?!" "I don't know," said Patty, "But it'll come,"

Patty, and anybody who has worked in or with La Casa de Fe will tell you that there is no way that just a normal person could have held that place together. And Patty will be the first to tell you that that's just what she is: a normal person; a mechanic; a mother; but a woman of faith. And that *faith* is exactly what has kept her doing what God called her to do.

Oh and in case you were wondering, on our second day, Patty calmly mentioned what she had forgotten to tell us in the jumble of the previous afternoon. She'd received an exactly \$10,000 donation just hours after our conversation. What an amazing testimony to her faith, and even more so to the providing hand of God.

So how often do *we* really let go and trust Him? How often do we listen to what He calls us to, and have confidence that He will meet our needs?

If I let go and trusted as much as I should, I'd probably be twice as far along towards a bachelor's degree as I am now. And changing my major is certainly one of the lesser problems I've had thanks to having less-than-enough faith sometimes.

What is it that we place our trust in rather than God? Money? La Casa de Fe surely doesn't have a pile of it sitting around for whatever they need. Our own abilities? Patty Arnold certainly hasn't used the skills she thought she would for her true purpose in life.

I think as Americans, or maybe just as humans, we can be absolute control freaks in trying to plan and run our lives. We set up the "protection" we look for in our income or our plans or the other distractions of life. We forget how easy it would be to fall through that chicken wire if we weren't depending on God to lift us up.

Our mission team was constantly amazed in Ecuador how people with so little could have so much faith. The members of the church thought we were so lucky to be able to come there and to be able to help them. And we thought they were lucky because of their relationships with God and with each other. Many of them live on tiny amounts of income and support large families. And yet they are generous enough to spend their valuable time cooking potato soup for a dozen Americans because they trust that God will provide for them.

That Psalm we read earlier, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm." What is it we trust in? Do we let go and have faith in God? Or are we distracted by the horses, the chariots, and the chicken wire? Amen.