

# The Gates

By Dana Termini

For sixteen days in February 2005, artists Christo and his wife of more than 40 years Jeanne-Claude, displayed their work entitled “The Gates” in Central Park, New York. The Gates project was comprised of 7,500, 8 to 16-foot high saffron colored, rectangular gates, spaced at 12-foot intervals with 8-foot saffron colored fabric panels hanging down. “The Gates” straddled all 23 miles of the footpaths in Central Park. The project was first proposed to the city of New York in 1979. It took over 26 years for the artists’ vision to be realized.

Aside from whether you like their art or not, Christo and his wife have demonstrated a tremendous amount of vision, patience and tenacity over their artistic careers in order to see their projects realized.

For example in 1980 they received a 230 page written rejection of their project from New York’s Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.

Imagine if you received a 230-page rebuttal of your dream: what effect would that have on you? How would you react if you were denied in such dramatic detail? What would that kind of criticism do to your faith, to your energy, would it keep you from pursuing your dream?

I was amazed when I read Christo’s response to this report.

“I find it very inspiring in a way that is like abstract poetry. You have a man who is very serious, he’s a lawyer from Harvard and he’s in that job and he’s involved in discussing that project very seriously. You have a lot of humor and it’s refreshing, I feel honored to have that printed and distributed to many places like City Hall and to have it evaluated. He adds a dimension to the work, no matter what he thinks. It’s a new dimension because I never think the way he thinks. That enriches the project; it gives it all kinds of angles of perception. It’s very revealing.”

Christo found the rejection inspiring. He kept his sense of humor. He realized that his critic did not share his vision or point of view, but instead of considering the man his adversary, Christo considered the man his teacher. He was able to separate his ego from his art and listen to a man that had a completely different point of view than himself. As a result, he felt that the man contributed something to the project that he and Jeanne-Claude would have never thought of. Christo felt honored, not threatened, that so many people were thinking about his project.

How we respond to criticism is often more important than the criticism itself. We have to be careful not to be so narrow-minded and defensive that we can’t see someone else’s point of view. The Bible says, “In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom.”

The other evening I went to the YMCA to watch some swimmers in a training clinic. The swimmers all performed their workout under the watchful eyes of the coaches who offered encouragement, tips and critiques on how the swimmers could improve their strokes and form. All the participants were video taped so that they could see what their strokes actually looked like.

No matter what the topic is, it takes a lot of courage to allow yourself to be critiqued. Obviously the critiques should be given in a respectful manner with the goal of improvement. I am not advocating you subject yourself to cruel cynics, but to have capable eyes evaluate you can be invaluable.

I did a similar swim clinic several years ago with a friend and I found it to be extremely revealing. How I thought I swam and how the video actually showed how I swam were not always the same. We can only improve through growth and we can only grow through self-awareness.

Spiritual growth and training are among the primary functions of the church and its leaders could be described as our “spiritual coaches.”

In his beautiful Bible “*The Message*,” Eugene Peterson translates Ephesians 4:12-14 this way:

“He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher **12** to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, **13** until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. **14** No prolonged infancies among us, please.”

As Christians our spiritual goal is to become more like Christ, to be efficient and graceful and to function rhythmically and easily with the Spirit and each other. Wow, that's a lofty goal.

In swimming, the coaches often tell you to “quiet” your stroke to swim smoothly and rhythmically. Efficiency trumps brute strength every time. You are not supposed to fight the water, but to flow through it by using a delicate balance of strength and glide. An efficient stroke takes years and years of disciplined practice.

Another reason coaches are so important is that they constantly monitor you so that you don't practice incorrectly thus reinforcing bad behaviors. Many hard working, well-intentioned athletes simply repeat inefficient mechanics over and over so instead of progressing they never reach their full potential.

In sailing as well as surfing there is a term called “trim.” Trim is the sweet spot of maximum efficiency and minimal drag. Captains, wave-riders and swimmers are always self-correcting their position to achieve perfect trim.

Christians are described as “disciples” of Christ because we practice the disciplines of Christianity. Athletes practice their sport under the guidance and watchful eyes of their coaches and in the company of their teammates. Likewise, Christians practice Christianity under the guidance of their ministers and in the company of their local “church team.” Just like athletes, Christians never achieve perfection, but they can constantly progress through practice and grace.

The patience Christo and Jeanne-Claude demonstrated is amazing.

Remember it took them 26 years to see “The Gates” project realized.

*The Message*, Romans 8: 24-25

**“24** That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. **25** But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.”

The waiting enlarges us just as a pregnant mother is enlarged as she awaits her baby. Waiting means gestation and growth. Instead of being frustrated and discouraged by delayed timelines and situations, know that your dream, your promise, your future are in God’s hands and time is the womb of your destiny.

Psalms 31:4 “My times are in Your hand;”

With God everyday you grow and develop into the person that He has called you to be. Don’t be diminished by the waiting, be enlarged by it. Taking the pregnancy metaphor one step further, I believe that faith is the umbilical cord between God and us that transfers all the life enriching sustenance that we need.

Patience may be a virtue, but it isn’t passive. There is a lot going on as we await the delivery of our dreams. Patience isn’t inactive either, as we await our due date we should be praying, learning, growing and developing our skills, gifts and talents. We should become increasingly enlarged in our vision and understanding. The longer we wait, the larger we become and the more joyful our expectancy.

Don’t be discouraged.

Henry David Thoreau said,

“I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him... If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

Take time by the hand and walk in the direction of your God-given destiny. Grow through the process; expect God to grant you success in “common hours.”

Author Joseph Campbell said, “When we follow our bliss, we are met by a thousand unseen helping hands.”

When God visited Abraham and Sarah after many years of a childless marriage, He told them they would become parents well into their old age and they both laughed.

I heard Dr. Robert Schuller say “If it wasn’t impossible we won’t need God” As children of God, God wants to manifest His love and plans for us in this natural world and sometimes those plans are so big and so wonderful we just have to laugh. Is your dream so big that it makes you laugh to think about it?

When Abraham and Sarah finally did become parents they named their son Isaac, which means laughter. God wants to do such amazingly wonderful things in your life that you will just have to laugh at the wonder of it all.

After Dr. Schuller sought out famed architect Philip Johnson to create a church for his congregation and television program, “The Hour of Power”, he was disappointed by the architects’ first sketches.

Dr. Schuller said, “ I was hoping for a great idea,” he said. “You’ve given me a traditional church. I’m not traditional. This is California; People here don’t come to church to be closed up in a box. They want to be close to green, to water, to sun.”

The architects were baffled by Dr. Schuller’s “dream church”, the concept was utterly unique and so was Dr. Schuller and the dream God had put in his heart. Johnson said, “He’d like a big glass tent.”

The architects went back to work and came up with Dr. Schuller’s “great idea.” The Crystal Cathedral, an amazing 10,000 windowed Cathedral with fountains, foliage and abundant light was designed. The structure has no heating or air conditioning plant. The whole thing is climate controlled through special glass and louvered windows. The frame is designed to withstand an 8.0 magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale. The Cathedral cost 18 million dollars to build.

Dr. Schuller understood that his dream was God's dream and that through his partnership with God the impossible was possible.

Hebrews 3:4

"Every house has a builder, but the Builder behind them all is God."

We should join Dr. Schuller in believing in the God of the "big idea" and together we can laugh our way to heaven.

Thank you for listening.

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