

CHANGE

OF

PLANS



By Richard F. Ostergaard

I had a solid and logical plan for how my life would proceed, but it wasn't the Lord's plan.

A couple of months into my third season of collegiate football, during a routine five-man sled drill, my life's plan started to unravel. As I hit the blocking dummy, I felt something snap in my neck, and a sharp pain shot down my right shoulder. I stood up and tried to move my arm but realized I had no strength.

I did not know it at the time, but in that instant all my plans and dreams would be altered, and my future would change dramatically. I had dedicated years of my life to football, but as I walked off the practice field that day, that would be the end of it. I would never put on my pads, cleats, and helmet and go out onto the football field again.

After visits with local doctors, I was referred to a neurosurgeon, who explained that I had injured the main nerves coming out of my spinal column going to my right arm. He also said there would be no football for at least a year, and that if I injured the nerves again I may lose the use of my right arm.

With this crushing news, it seemed like my world began to crumble in other areas. My grades rapidly began to go south, and I neither had interest nor ambition to turn them around. I found myself, day after day, lugging my arm in a sling on the sidelines as I watched the guys practice. I finally decided to spend time in the library instead of the football field but found it difficult to concentrate.

The academic quarter seemed to drag on forever, and one frigid, dark November afternoon, I found myself sitting in despair in the old amphitheater on campus. As

I sat all alone, I felt terribly abandoned and depressed. I gazed out into the valley as the cold wind whipped wisps of leaves around my feet. Nothing was going right, and my life seemed to have little meaning or happiness. My athletic dreams and goals had crumbled, my grades were poor, I felt I had few friends at school, and I was far away from my family.

Why me? I thought. Why did this have to happen when things seemed to be going so well? What did I have to look forward to now? As I pondered these questions, I found little solace. The clouds, the cold, and my state of mind seemed to be wrapping over me in darkness as I descended into self-pity.

As I sat, reaching for anything to lighten my mind, a thought came that prayer could bring a little relief. I halfheartedly offered up a few words in a weak plea but was hesitant, as I mistakenly felt the Lord would not want to listen to me. During the past year I had become increasingly distracted by the excitement and prestige of athletics, and my church activity had become sporadic at best. My face cradled in my hands, I tried to hold some composure from my grief. I felt so alone.

After some time, I felt, ever so softly, a warm pressure on the back of my head and neck. I felt immediate relief from my despair and dared not lift my head lest the feeling would leave me. I only knew that whatever this feeling was, I wanted it to continue. After weeks of misery, I felt complete and total relief. What was this? Tears began to fall freely down my cheeks, and soon an undeniable impression came into my mind that I knew the Lord was there for me and it was time for me to go on a mission.

I had turned down my home bishop's invitation to go on a mission 10 months earlier, explaining that my plan was to

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pursue my football scholarship for another two years. I told him I might think about a mission afterward. I was confident, if not proud, of my plan and was taken aback when he did not share in my enthusiasm and confidence.

I sat there on the cold bench for a while, contemplating what had just happened to me. Going on a mission had been the furthest thing from my mind that afternoon. Serving a mission right now had definitely not been in my plan. But a mission was the *only* thing on my mind now. I had been given a personal revelation. I could not deny it, and my heart was filled with light and happiness. Serving the Lord was now what mattered most in my life. My mission and future could again be bright and happy. I could not restrain myself as I stood up, crying out as I flung up my good arm in exuberance.

The next few weeks went by quickly, and I gained new enthusiasm for life. I made efforts in correcting my grades in order to finish out the quarter. When it was over, I closed this chapter of my life, leaving my athletic plans and dreams behind. I had no regrets or remorse over my decision. Instead, I felt excited about preparing for a mission and setting my course for a bright future. Cheers from the crowd in a football game were pale compared to the cheers I felt in my heart by going on a mission.

As I look back on this memory, I can see the importance of making the right choices at the right times. Sometimes we feel we have a solid and logical plan for ourselves. But if it's not in accordance with gospel principles and the whisperings of the Holy Ghost, our plan seldom evolves into true happiness and joy. Nor can our own plan replicate

the blessings we receive by living the gospel in faith, with a determination to live the commandments. For young men in particular, the opportunity to serve as a missionary is the right plan. I believe there is nothing that provides more growth than unselfishly serving the Lord and His children. Other self-generated plans, though appealing, will ever fall short in comparison.

This experience was sacred to me, and the chance to redesign my own plan with the Lord's help has significantly changed what I am today. I will ever be grateful to the Lord for the experience on that cold November day that changed my life and helped me understand the Lord's plan for my life. **NE**

