

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR A SECOND CHANCE

By Amber Jensen

The father of one of my struggling students told his daughter, "It's not too late for you to succeed." The Lord gives us the same message.

Sandra was a student in my advanced English class. Several weeks into the year, she hadn't done any of the homework or projects. She just daydreamed at her desk. She made up excuses for why she hadn't completed her assignments, and she demonstrated neither the attitude nor the work necessary for success in such a demanding course.

Her counselor and I decided to schedule a conference with Sandra, her father, and some of her other teachers to determine what direction she should take: should she drop her advanced courses and take standard ones instead? Most substantial was the unspoken question weighing on all of our minds: could we find a way to help Sandra succeed?

Believing that Sandra had been given many chances to succeed but instead had chosen to fail, I went into the meeting feeling very discouraged. Secretly I hoped she would decide to drop my class so that I wouldn't have to worry about her anymore. I felt I

had done all I could and that it was already too late.

In the meeting, Sandra's body language revealed that she too doubted her ability to succeed. She stared at the table as I recounted her failure in English class. As her history teacher confirmed that Sandra was failing his class as well, her body slumped lower in her chair and I could see tears streaming down her face.

Mustering compassion, I explained to her and her father that if Sandra wanted to succeed in these challenging courses, she was going to have to change the behavior that had gotten her so deeply into this hole and that it was going to be very difficult.

A Message from Her Father

The counselor then turned to Sandra's father, a man with little education who seemed uncomfortable in the school setting. The counselor asked him if he had any questions for the teachers. He said he didn't and thanked us for what we had done for

Sandra. But then he said he had something to say to his daughter.

My heart tightened. I had been a part of some parent-teacher conferences where the parents had verbally rebuked their children in front of teachers and counselors, berating them for their laziness, inattentiveness, and lack of motivation. I braced myself to hear it again.

What I heard instead surprised me. Sandra's humble father turned to his tearful 16-year-old daughter who was weighed down by shame and regret and said to her, "It's not too late. It's not too late for you to succeed. It really is not too late."

I left that meeting grateful for his loving reaction but concerned that he had no idea what it would take for his daughter to pass at this point. It seemed impossible. Word came later that she had decided to drop her history class but not my English class.

Later that day as I knelt in prayer, considering my own shortcomings and asking my Heavenly Father for



forgiveness, I realized how much I had to learn from Sandra's father. Insecurities and feelings of inadequacy had at times in my own life made me wonder if I was worthy or deserving of a second chance. In those moments, the Lord, like Sandra's father, chose not to berate me but instead to reassure: "It's not too late, my daughter. It's not too late."

The Message of the Gospel

How often have we believed the message of the adversary that we are beyond hope? But the prophets tell us otherwise. Isaiah proclaims, "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy unto him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah

55:7). Mormon adds his witness, "As oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven" (Moroni 6:8). The joy of the gospel is that it is never too late. For as often as we seek forgiveness, the Lord's redemption will allow us to start anew.

Sandra, with motivation to start again, made slow but significant changes. The transformation was not easy—it required daily effort to overcome her bad habits—but she saw the rewards of her efforts as her grade gradually improved.

From a gospel perspective, our final grade will not take into account how long we faltered or how deeply we dug ourselves into a hole. Instead,

the Lord will judge our lives based on what direction we're heading, how we have repented, and how much we have relied on the Lord's Atonement.

In my limited understanding, I had doubted Sandra's ability to overcome the mistakes of her past. In contrast, our perfect Father never loses hope in His children's capacity to achieve salvation by being perfected in Christ. It does not matter how far gone we are; He will always seek after the one. The Lord beseeches us to no longer wander as strangers in sin but instead to seek Him in hope and enjoy the blessings of His infinite Atonement. Indeed, it is never too late. ■

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