

WHEN GOOD PLANS Don't WORK OUT

By Stephanie J. Burns

Planning for the future is important, especially for young adults. But what happens when the best-laid plans don't work out?

Jung Sung Eun of Korea didn't pass the qualification exam to become a teacher. Tina Roper of Utah, USA, lost a job that she had expected to turn into a career. Todd Schlensker of Ohio, USA, received a spiritual confirmation to marry but saw his engagement come to an end. Alessia Mazzolari (name has been changed) of Italy ended what appeared to be the perfect relationship.

No one likes having to resort to "plan B." But even when our plans fall through, Heavenly Father does not abandon His children. There are multiple good ways for life to work out. In time, we may even find that the roadblocks that changed our plans gave us needed insight and experience (see D&C 122:7) and led to something better.

Building Character, Not Résumés

Sung Eun had worked hard to achieve her lifelong dream of becoming

a teacher. She explains, "Because I have always tried to do my best in all I do, I have almost always been able to obtain what I hoped and prayed for." But that didn't happen when she took the teacher qualification exam. "When I failed it," she says, "I felt I had lost all my dreams in one day."

Tina wasn't initially worried when another company acquired the one she worked for. The new organization promised her a long-term position, so she moved closer to her work with high hopes of an exciting new job. When the company laid her off a few months later, she felt "lost, confused, sad, and quite scared."

Rather than focus completely on building their résumés, Sung Eun and Tina realized they could also focus on building their character. Both women found comfort through gospel study and prayer.

"The Apostle Paul was a wonderful friend who helped me be patient and

continually confront challenges," says Sung Eun. "He always had a positive attitude and willingly waited for what God had for him, rather than hoping for his own timing.

"I learned something from his example: the period of waiting is not merely the process that we must go through to get what we want. Rather, it is a process by which we become who our Heavenly Father wants us to be through changes we make."

Tina found that the change she needed most was a shift in perspective. "I was surprised to discover that I had measured my self-worth in worldly ideas of value," she remembers. "I felt valuable because of my employment and position, which were taken away. I now find my self-worth in the eternal truths that I am a daughter of my Heavenly Father and I have divine potential. These truths can never be taken away."

Both Tina and Sung Eun admit that



while building character isn't always pleasant, the fruits of personal growth are sweet. Sung Eun says, "The year after I failed the teacher qualification exam was not only the most painful and depressing time period, but it was also the most precious. I became more able to truly understand other people's difficulties and had a desire to help them with real intent and care."

The examples of Ammon and his brothers in the Book of Mormon showed Tina how the Lord was stretching her faith to help her reach her full potential. "The Lord's plan was for the Nephites to save their Lamanite brothers instead of using a sword to solve the problem," she explains. "The sons of Mosiah were given a task that required greater faith, but they were also given a promise that if they bore their afflictions with patience, they would receive success (see Alma 26:27). Being patient is one of my hardest trials because I want to understand my entire plan—but I realized that Heavenly Father's plan and timing for us will always be the best."

Keeping the Commandments No Matter What

Todd faced a bright future upon returning from his mission. While attending school, he met a wonderful young woman. After several months of courtship and a spiritual confirmation, Todd proposed and she accepted. They planned their wedding for the end of the summer, and both returned

home from school to prepare.

“Three weeks after we said our good-byes at school, she ended our engagement,” Todd recalls. “*Heartbroken* could not express my feelings strongly enough. There were so many unanswered questions in my mind; it didn’t make sense. I had received a confirmation in the house of the Lord, and now our relationship was over. My testimony had never been tested this hard.

“Unfortunately, for years following my breakup, I couldn’t get past it. I didn’t know how I could ever trust a feeling of confirmation again. I had always trusted in the Lord and tried my best to keep the commandments,” he continues. “It all seemed for naught.”

Alessia thought that her relationship with a certain young man was meant to be. “Our story was so beautiful that, even though we had the normal difficulties that every couple encounters, we thought the relationship would never end,” she remembers.

When Alessia’s boyfriend left on his mission, the separation was difficult but for a different reason than Alessia had expected. “While he was gone, I began to know myself better. I realized that many things in my life were not yet right and that many times I had hidden behind some silly ideas rather than humble myself and face reality,” she recounts. “I had been living in a kind of fairy tale, as if being in love were enough to make



everything turn out right, and often this caused me to overlook the most important things.”

Still, Alessia expected a happy reunion and continued relationship after her boyfriend’s mission. However, upon his return, the couple dated only a short time before breaking up. “It was one of the most painful moments I can remember,” says Alessia.

In their respective experiences, Todd and Alessia both eventually recognized that even though a key relationship in their lives was altered, they couldn’t abandon their obedience and allegiance to the Lord. He became their anchor when everything else was changing and uncertain.

“I didn’t have all the answers to why I got a confirmation to marry someone, and it didn’t happen,” Todd recalls. “But I realized that didn’t matter. What *did* matter is that I still had faith in Christ, and I was going to use that faith to trust in whatever the Lord had in store for me.”

Alessia knew that completely pledging herself to the Lord would bring her the strength that she needed. “I understood that the moment had arrived for me to decide what kind of person I wanted to be,” she says. “Would I continue to live life half-way, or would I start on the path to becoming a true disciple of Christ? I wanted to know Him deeply, love Him truly, and try to be a better person

by obeying all His commandments—not just externally but in my heart with true honesty.”

Developing Hope in the Future and Faith in Christ

After being confronted with unanticipated setbacks, all four of these young adults struggled to find the courage to live in the present and again plan for the future. But they found that their faith in the Lord grew.

Sung Eun remembers that after failing her examination, trying new things became difficult. But then came a crucial discovery: “I realized that the real failure is to dwell on the past and make little effort to try to work things out. I decided that rather than continuing to be sad, I should turn this difficult time into an opportunity to learn. My ability to understand life in general broadened and deepened, and I learned that the end of one thing always brings about the beginning of something else.” She has since retaken and passed the exam and is now “a happy teacher who enjoys spending time with students each day.”

Tina chose to trust that something was waiting for her, even though it was difficult to face an uncertain future. “I decided to reenter school, and there I studied the art and technology field, an area I had desired to become involved in but I did not possess the needed skills,” she explains. “I am ready to start another adventure, a much better one, thanks to the wisdom of my Heavenly Father.”

Todd continued trying to date for six years and worked to develop trust in the Lord. Even when he met women he admired very much, he had to fight to keep his doubts from the past from destroying his hopes for the future. “Finding the determination not to succumb to my doubts of six years was not easy,” he says. “But I was firm in attempting to prove to myself that I really did trust in the Lord and His promptings, even though I had been angry with Him before.” A new relationship eventually led to a temple marriage.

“I often wonder why the Lord blessed me with someone as great as my wife when I struggled so long to fully trust the feelings of the Spirit,” reflects Todd. “It is a testimony to me that the Lord is waiting to bless us, but it’s always on His timetable.”

Alessia, by rededicating herself to the Lord, developed a deep and personal testimony. “The plan of salvation became real for me, and my covenants became more binding and deep. Christ’s Atonement was not theory anymore or something that I had read about, perhaps too superficially. A change of heart was happening inside, and I had a sure witness.” Today, she says, she feels like a new person.

Regardless of the turns life’s journey may take, the final destination of eternal life is what Heavenly Father plans for His children (see Moses 1:39). Some may even find that “plan B” was simply a way of making His “plan A” a reality. ■



THE BEST IS YET TO COME

“We look back to claim the embers from glowing experiences but not the ashes. And when we have learned what we need to learn and have brought with us the best that we have experienced, then we look ahead and remember that *faith is always pointed toward the future.*”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Best Is Yet to Be,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2010, 24.

For more on this topic, see Boyd K. Packer, “The Least of These,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 86–88; Robert D. Hales, “Waiting upon the Lord: Thy Will Be Done,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 71–74; Ann M. Dibb, “Be of a Good Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 114–16.