

Life Not Turning Out How You Planned? Here's How to Love It Anyway

Your life might not go according to plan. And that can be a good thing.

By Sarah Griggs

I have been a young single adult for more than a decade now and have been doing some reflecting on all of my experiences over the last 10 years. In all of my reflecting, I had an important realization.

I'm friends with one of my former Young Women leaders on social media. I saw recently that it was her birthday, and I figured out that when she was my leader, she was the age I am now. It was a strange realization for me because I looked up to her so much and she seemed so wise when I was a youth. I laughed to think of myself as being her same age and not feeling wise in any way.

But what really shocked me was that when she was in her late 20s

as my leader, she had six kids! Six! I couldn't help but think how far from those circumstances I am and how very different our lives are. I'm single, I've never been married, and I'm working on building a successful career. When I realized how different our lives are, I could have been very frustrated, feeling like I had failed at life. I could have let loneliness and sadness fester into bitter comparison, asking questions like:

Why am I not married yet? It seems so easy for everyone else to find a spouse.

Why can't I have a family now?

What is wrong with me?

But as I thought about it, I wouldn't trade places with her for the world. In fact, I wouldn't trade



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places with any of my friends who are married and have children. Not because I don't want those things—of course I do! But I also know that I have a unique purpose and role in Heavenly Father's plan and that He is transforming me into the person He wants me to become as I follow Him.

When My Expectations Were Shattered

I believe one reason why people in their young adult years might feel frustrated by life can be explained in one word: *expectation*. Often what we expect—or what others expect or what a culture expects—doesn't happen, leaving us feeling hurt, alone, betrayed, frustrated, or confused.

Certainly, some of my expectations weren't met in the last decade. I figured I would follow in the same footsteps as my older siblings—meet my spouse while attending college, get married, start a family, and live happily ever after. At one point in college, I thought I had found my husband. I was in love with a wonderful guy I was dating. Marriage had been hinted at a couple of times over our year-long relationship, and I was planning him into my future. It all felt so perfect. We were both graduating from college and applying to graduate schools that spring, and I planned to marry him and go to grad school.

And then all of that suddenly changed when he broke up with me. I was devastated. But I still had the dream of going to grad school—until a few weeks later when the rejection letter came and that dream was shattered too. I remember the day I opened that devastating email. It started with those ominous words “We regret to inform you . . .,” and I immediately felt the salt pouring into my already deeply wounded heart from the breakup.

Tears instantly came to my eyes, and I got up to go to the restroom to cry. When I returned to gather my backpack, there was a small slip of paper on my chair. I picked it up and found the words “Proverbs 3:5–6” scrawled in messy handwriting. I opened my scriptures and read as more tears ran down my cheeks:

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

How Unmet Expectations Led to Greater Happiness

I am forever grateful to the “angel” who followed the inspiration to put that scripture reference on my chair that day, because since then I have tried harder to trust God. At that time, I felt like my entire world was crashing down; my expectations for my life had been blown out of the water. I was bitter, angry with God, depressed, and humiliated.

But from my expectations not being met, I have been able to feel more joyful now than I ever have before. Having my heart broken and being rejected by graduate school at my dream university set me on a path to pursue school at another university. I went to that other school very reluctantly. And as a result, I was eventually led to landing my dream job as a collegiate track and cross-country coach. I'm grateful I trusted in the Lord and “leaned not unto my own understanding.”



When my world seemingly fell apart, I had no clue what was waiting for me in the next few years and how my life would completely change. My job is exactly what I need right now. I have the opportunity to invest in and influence dozens of amazing young people. I am able to grow and be challenged every day. I get to see people's dreams become reality. I get to be with my athletes through the ups and downs, to celebrate with them and to cry with them. And above all, coaching has helped me grow closer to my Savior and rely on Him more.

Find Joy Where You Are Now

I can honestly say I wouldn't rather be anywhere else than where I am right now. I wouldn't rather be married. I wouldn't rather have children. Because wishing for those things is wishing to change the perfect, individual plan God has for me. I know those things will come when the time is right, but right now I am joyfully experiencing the life I have been given.

My wish is for other young single adults to stop wishing they were in different life circumstances. Life might not go according to the plan you have for yourself. But instead of being bitter, angry, and depressed about the life circumstances you find yourself in, why not embrace the here

and now and turn it into an incredible journey of growth, fulfillment, and joy? President Russell M. Nelson taught that "when the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy."¹

Learning to embrace and love the times when my expectations are not met hasn't been easy. But looking for and appreciating the unexpected opportunities and mercy from the Lord has changed my life. And focusing on Heavenly Father's plan for me instead of *my* plan has helped me come to appreciate who I am becoming.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has helped me find joy in the journey of life, even if it's a different journey than the one I once anticipated. I've come to a greater understanding of God's love for me, as well as the importance of trusting in His timing and completely acknowledging that His ways are higher than my ways (see Isaiah 55:9). ■



Sarah Griggs grew up in Colorado, USA. She served a mission in Nicaragua and is passionate about coaching, traveling, running, enjoying the outdoors, and spending time with friends and family.

NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.