



Heart and Soul
DEVOTIONAL

Sabotaged Plans and Shattered **Dreams**

» **WHAT WILL THE REFINING PROCESS**

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED IF OTHER PEOPLE ARE ABLE to sabotage God's plans for your life? Or perhaps you think they already have? Have you been certain of God's hand guiding you in a particular direction, but then someone jumps in the way—the plans fall apart, and your dreams come crashing down? When this happens, have God's plans for your life been sabotaged? »

BY GAVIN ANTHONY

It can be hard to get our heads around such developments. On the one hand, we know God is all-powerful. The whole of Satan's army could not destroy what He is doing. But often, the evidence in our personal lives appears differently. Just when we felt sure of God's leading in our plans, we've seen someone throw a great big monkey wrench into the works, bringing our precious plans and dreams screeching to an abrupt and unexpected halt.

And here's the problem: if people *can* mess up our plans—the plans in which we believed God was guiding—it must mean that God's will for us inevitably has to resort to plan B, right? Or maybe plan C? And if people are still getting in the way of God's direction, might we find ourselves having to live even with plan Z? And who wants to live with second or third best? So we pray for God to intervene and restore plan A.

But it doesn't happen.

Doomed to Live With Plan B?

I was talking to a friend who was describing her consternation at a failed relationship. The couple had prayed about their future and had recognized God's clear affirmation that they should move ahead to marriage. And they both wanted to. Then all of a sudden, the young man abandoned the

maybe it's a job opportunity that suddenly falls apart because of a rumor that has tarnished your reputation. You had been sure God was directing events, but someone intervened, the plans fell apart, and your dreams withered.

What happens then? Why does it so often appear that God allows His own plans (assuming ours and His coincide) to get blown off course? Do the actions of others mean we are condemned to the plan-B shelves of God's designs?

I have never once doubted God's love for me, or His ultimate control over the events in my life. But sometimes during my ministry I have found it hard to reconcile these truths with the disruptions of plans in which I was certain God was working.

While searching for an answer, I was confronted by Job's strange response to God at the end of the book that bears his name: "Then Job replied to the Lord: 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted'" (Job 42:1, 2).

What does Job mean? After all, by this time all the possessions and children that God Himself had given Job had been destroyed (Job 1:6-19). "No plan of yours can be thwarted"? Really?

Then Satan further afflicts Job with painful boils, and Job has to cope with a wife who adds insult to injury (Job 2:7-9).

Yet in the face of the loss of his God-given blessings, Job is still convinced that "no plan of [God's] can be thwarted." Plan A, Job believes, is still on track.

But how can we believe that, when we've just seen Satan wreak havoc in Job's life? Near the end of the book, across four chapters (38-41), God asks Job all sorts of astonishing questions—84 in total—such as "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" "Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the

deep?" "What is the way to the abode of light?" (Job 38:4, 16, 19).

Each question builds an astonishing picture of the greatness and sovereignty of God. Surprisingly perhaps, God never addresses the cause of Job's suffering. Instead, God describes Himself and His abilities to Job in a way that said, in effect, "*Don't you think I could have intervened if I thought plan A was really being ruined?*"

Coping With Broken Plans and Dreams

In view of Job's conviction that God's plans cannot be derailed, let me suggest four truths to help us cope when "outside" forces appear to crush the plans and shatter the dreams we believed were from the hand of God.

1. *God's greatest plan for your life—His plan A—does not lie in the physical realm.*

We become preoccupied with relationships, jobs, and "stuff." But the only thing we can take to heaven is a Christlike character. As Ellen White notes, "A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next."¹ So if a character that reflects Jesus is the only treasure we can take to heaven, it stands to reason that God's greatest plan for your life will always be related to the re-formation of that divine image. Both the success and the failure of plans and dreams can result in the perfection of God's character in us—His ultimate plan A for our lives.

2. *The breaking of plans and dreams carries an immediate call to persevere with personal integrity.*

While Job's friends are absorbed in their discussion, it's Job's declaration that rings out above the hubbub to catch our attention. "When [God] has tested me," Job says, "I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). In the middle of the mess, Job is not questioning the

LEAVE BEHIND?

relationship for another woman. What will my friend do now? Will she have to settle for man B—God's "not-My-first-choice-for-your-life" husband?

It could be a special church project that gets voted down because a board member objected for a reason that doesn't seem to make any sense. Or

**EVEN IN THE
MIDDLE OF
BROKEN DREAMS,
GOLD IS BEING
REFINED IN THE
CRUCIBLE.**

goodness of God or trying to discover or punish the culprit who caused his pain. Instead, he's focused on demonstrating that his character will remain pure before God—even under these horrendous circumstances. For it is such circumstances that tempt us to abandon our integrity—a treasure that is of far greater worth to God than the most wonderful plans we can imagine.

Indeed, the temptation to respond sinfully when other people shatter our dreams is very real. We can easily react to them in anger or with a desire for revenge, which can bring us even more pain than the original hurt. As psychologist Larry Crabb warns: “[Your] brokenness isn’t so much about how bad you’ve been hurt but how you’ve sinned in handling it.”² That’s why maintaining our integrity under pressure is so important. Our plans may break, but damaged character is much more serious.

3. *God may allow plans and dreams to break so we can refocus on His plan A for us.*

We are stubborn. And sometimes it’s only when our dreams are shattered that we become open to reevaluating what’s really important. Standing among the pieces of a shattered reputation, I begin to realize that nothing is more valuable than the opinion of God. Broken plans and shattered dreams may cause me to value possessing the character of Jesus rather than possessing the latest laptop or longing for a bigger house: I begin to see that there is nothing more valuable than reflecting Jesus. Broken plans and shattered dreams may wean me from desiring a more prestigious job to being content to serve in obscurity. I finally begin to realize that contentment in the obscure places is often where the peace of God is found.

Crabb notes that the greatest blessings have always been linked to an encounter with God. “One way [God] works,” he says, “is to allow our lower dreams to shatter. He lets us hurt and doesn’t make it better. We suffer and He stands by and does nothing to help, at least nothing that we’re aware we want him to do. . . . Through the pain of shattered lower dreams, we wake up to the realization that we want an encounter with God more than we want the blessings of life. And that begins a revolution in our lives.”³

Such intimacy is priceless, for it is from this intimacy with God that Christlike character flows. When such intimacy happens, even in the middle of broken dreams, plan A is still on track, for gold is being refined in the crucible.

4. *The breaking of plans and dreams may be permitted to equip us to minister to others more effectively.*

As far as we know, Job never knew about the discussion Satan had with God and the “deal” made to test his loyalty. Job must have matured spiritually through the experience,

but the very fact that these 42 chapters are in our Bibles is evidence that Job’s personal story was intended to provide spiritual lessons throughout the millennia.

But Job’s story isn’t the only one. Can you imagine the number of people who have found peace from the psalms David wrote as he fled from cave to cave to escape King Saul? How about the number of young people who have resolved to remain true to godly principles, having read the stories of Daniel and his friends in pagan Babylon? Or Joseph refusing to give in to discouragement in the grime of an Egyptian prison? The list goes on and on—of people who unwittingly became an encouragement for millions.

Perhaps our stories will not be written down like Job’s, but that does not mean our broken dreams are without meaning. The apostle Paul recognized that the troubles that came into his own life were a means of encouraging others. He writes: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. . . . If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer” (2 Cor. 1:3-6).

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.” Those words are as true for us as they were for Job. Failed plans and broken dreams are not failures and broken pieces in God’s sight. In fact, they may be the very wells He has provided from which you may draw strength, maturing you into the perfection of His character. ■

¹Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 332.

²In Agnieszka Tennant, “A Shrink Gets Stretched,” *Christianity Today*, May 1, 2003, at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/may/7.52.html.

³Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams: God’s Unexpected Pathway to Joy* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

GAVIN ANTHONY WORKS IN THE ICELAND CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, WITH HEADQUARTERS IN REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

