

# Frustration

We had a plan. It was a good plan that made wise use of our time and resources. I was going to sit down and write my first column for “Teen Talk,” incorporating situational humor, some interesting research I found out about in college, and sound biblical principles. It wouldn’t take more than an hour.

Meanwhile, Courtney (my wife) would be working in the kitchen. Close friends of ours just had a baby, and we signed up to provide supper for them this evening. We decided to make Stromboli. Because I spent most of my teen years baking and selling bread, I was in charge of the dough. I mixed it up, and settled down to write my column while it rose.

The idea was that Courtney would finish the Stromboli while I wrote and revised, and we’d be done around the same time. I’d submit my column, we’d waltz over to our friends’ house, coo over their newborn, and deliver a terrific, homemade meal.

That was the plan. Now, more than three hours later, I’ve written two whole paragraphs. I’ve also re-read about half of an old textbook and worn myself out on Google and Wikipedia. The nifty bit of research I was hoping to use as a base for the column has vanished. At first, I didn’t succeed, so I tried again, and again...and again. I can’t make my point without the research, and the research is gone.

In the meantime, I’ve also been distracted by the Stromboli. We’ve used up all the yeast in our house, and another jar of yeast we got from my mom trying to get the dough—or even just yeast and sugar in warm water—to rise. We’ve tried everything. Nothing has worked.

So the dough is unrisen and the column is unwritten. Futility reigns.

I’m reminded that frustration is an inevitable part of life. We set goals, make plans to reach our goals, carry out our plans and then the whole thing goes sideways. Nobody always gets what they want.

So how do we respond to frustration? How should we respond when the dough won’t rise? More importantly, how should we respond when college plans, career plans, relationship plans, or summer-job plans change unexpectedly?

Here are a few strategies I’ve learned. This list isn’t exhaustive and isn’t meant to be. Hopefully, though, it’s a helpful starting point.

One thing I try to consider when my plans fall apart is whether God is using my circumstances to tell me something. I try to do this even when the frustration is minor, because even if God isn’t explicitly speaking to me, there’s almost always something I can learn. I’ve discovered that I can save stress and energy by taking time to listen to God before a situation escalates. Jonah is a good example from the Bible of someone who learned this lesson the hard way.

Secondly, when plans don’t work out, it’s important for me to get a biblical perspective. I read Romans 8, and remind myself that all creation groans in the anticipation of being made new, and that God is working in all things for our good. I might also look up Bible passages relating to frustration. Even when whatever is frustrating me is small and I feel silly for getting upset, I find that reading scripture resets my priorities and refreshes my mind.

A third thing I do is evaluate how much my goal and plans are worth to me. Some goals are worth persevering for, and sometimes a frustrating plan is still the best option. Knowing that I’ve “counted the cost” of a plan can give me the energy to keep pursuing it. Other times, counting the cost helps me understand that following my original plan or pursuing my original goal just isn’t worth it.

Sometimes, there’s a specific message in frustration. Other times, it’s just a reminder that the world isn’t perfect, but God is at work. And sometimes, when I add it all up I discover that it’s a better plan to forget the Stromboli, buy some soup and breadsticks for my friends, and write a column about something completely different.



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