

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED

by Kelly Keith
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What do you do when life doesn't turn out the way you expected?

“Accommodations will be made for those adversely affected,” I read as I reviewed the press release my Fortune 500 company was sending about upcoming layoffs. With a red pen, I crossed out the word “adversely.”

After all, I reasoned, someone might find a new job they loved more or that paid better or that led to the next wonderful thing in life. We didn't know if the effect would be adverse or not. And in corporate America, we painted everything—even layoffs—with a positive spin.

But in real life—with all its disappointments, ended relationships, stress, money issues, and illnesses—it can be a lot harder to find a silver lining.

Sometimes life just doesn't go the way we planned. What do you do when life doesn't turn out the way you expected? Here are five healthy ways to respond when life doesn't go as planned.

1. KEEP YOUR PROBLEMS IN PERSPECTIVE.

When my daughter was in first grade, there was a late snowstorm in March, and we had to cancel her birthday party. She was devastated. It seemed like such a big deal to have to reschedule your seventh birthday party.

At least it did until two years later, when her dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. A missed birthday party can't compare to growing up without your dad.

Some troubles just aren't as big as others. Sometimes we need some perspective, a reminder that small life disappointments are just that. Small. They may sting at the time, but they don't compare with the big issues of life.

Mourn the loss of the birthday party, but then keep moving ahead. Coping with those little challenges with perspective helps us learn to handle the bigger ones.

2. REMEMBER YOUR PAST WINS.

Right now as you're reading these words, your track record for getting through hard days is 100%. You've faced difficulties in the past, but you're still here. You're still going.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to cancel a long-planned trip to Greece. We were extremely disappointed. But here's what I knew: I'd been through the death of my late husband, and I'd come out of that terrible experience more resilient.

I knew that my track record wouldn't change. I would get through this disappointment, too.

When you're walking through a tough time, it always helps to remember the challenges you've already conquered. Take a moment to look at yourself and remember what you've overcome up to this point.

You can do it. Not without pain. Not without heartache. But you can get through it, and you'll come out the other side with more resilience for the next challenge. (We all know there will be one.)

3. COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS.

The power of [intentionally practicing gratitude](#) has been shown through a number of studies. In fact, "gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships."¹

That doesn't mean that you have to smile all the time, pretend everything is OK when it's not, or ignore bad things when they happen. It means that when things are hard, you can choose to seek out "silver linings."

Several years ago, a friend's husband was laid off while the two of them were caring for their son as he battled cancer. Instead of feeling like the world was against them, they chose to be thankful that her husband had the opportunity to spend more time with the family. Reframing their thoughts and seeking out gratitude helped them weather the storm. And after their son passed away, the extra time they'd had together was even more special.

When life gives you disappointments, seek out the blessings that may be in disguise.

4. KEEP THE FAITH.

In **John 16**, Jesus says plainly, “In this world you will have trouble.”² Notice he doesn’t say that you *may* have trouble. No, you *will* have trouble. There’s no room for doubt; it’s a certainty.

Thankfully, Jesus doesn’t stop there: “But take heart!” he says. “I have overcome the world.”³

Jesus knew quite a bit about the troubles of this world. Christians believe that though **Jesus is God**, he was also fully human during his time on earth. He experienced the disappointment, frustration, and difficulty of human life—all while knowing that, ultimately, he would die on the cross to save humanity.

In the Christian understanding, through **his death and resurrection**, Jesus ultimately triumphed over the power of sin in this world. And because of his sacrificial death on our behalf, we all have the opportunity to pursue a relationship with him.

Through this relationship, we find **forgiveness of our own sins** and the promise of eternal life. As a result, we can find further reassurance and hope in Paul’s words:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. . . . In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. . . . And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.⁴

When trials and tribulations come your way, keep the faith. God works all out for good for those who love him.

5. CHOOSE PEACE.

Jesus also explained in **John 16** why he was telling his disciples about the inevitable hardships of this world: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.”⁵

It’s worth noting that Jesus doesn’t say we *will* have peace, like he says we will have trouble. He says we *may* have peace. That peace comes from having faith in Jesus, and it’s our choice. We can choose to **find peace in trusting God**.

Despite the certainty that our lives will be filled with hard times, we can still be internally filled with peace because Jesus promised that the gift of peace is available to us: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”⁶

In the midst of disappointment and discouragement, you don't have to be afraid. You can be at peace.

No life goes untouched by pain or disappointment. Things simply don't go as planned because, more often than we'd like to admit, our lives are out of our control. But we can control how we respond.

We can choose to keep our problems in perspective. We can choose to focus on our past triumphs. We can choose to count our blessings. We can choose to keep our faith. We can choose peace.