

Worrying vs. Planning

1 Nephi 4:6

And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

Alma 14:13

Be it according to the will of the Lord. But behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

3 Nephi 13:34

Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.

I have had occasion lately to counsel with both of my daughters about the future. The oldest is getting married, and wanted to know how to keep from worrying about money all the time. The other is about to graduate from college, and wants to establish her plans for the future. I found that I gave them both about the same counsel: “You know the commandments: Live them. Do the best you can at what you are doing right now. Recognize that you have family and friends that will support you if the very worst possible comes to pass. And then just stop worrying – the Lord will provide what you need when you need it.”

I have often reflected in my own life that I have rarely had a plan for where I was headed. I have just lived the above advice, and the right opportunities have arisen when I needed them. I have pondered this effect to try to understand if I am just being lazy, or if there is a true principle involved.

I suppose the counterfeit to this principle is fatalism – I can’t do anything about it, so why worry¹. As with so many principles, the counterfeit is slyly constructed to use many of the same words, but to shift the basis of the discussion. In fact, we do not know the future, and we cannot plan for all of the contingencies that may arise. We cannot even know that all of our plans can be carried to fruition. This, however, is not an excuse for inaction, but a challenge to view things in their true light. We are dependent on the Lord, even when we think we are responsible for something. Our challenge in mortality is not to accumulate wealth, or even to follow a certain avocation. We are to learn to walk by faith and to accept the power of the atonement.

¹ A friend encapsulated this thought as follows: “Where there is no solution there is no problem.”

Returning to the central theme, then, our challenge is not to have a perfect plan for our lives. Our challenge is to be prepared for whatever may arise in our lives. We need to take the steps that we can – acquire knowledge, increase in righteousness, understand the gospel, and make such provisions for temporal security as we can. Then we must stand ready to fulfill whatever assignment the Lord may give us.

Perhaps callings are a good symbol for this approach. In general, we do not take courses to prepare for a certain calling². But if we are living the gospel, we will be prepared for any calling, understanding that there may well need to be some specific learning and spiritual tutoring needed when a calling is received.

Our eternal goal is to live the life that God now enjoys. Interestingly, we know very little of the details of that existence. We do know that every commandment which has been given to us is a part of the preparation for that life³. Worrying about the future is not a true doctrine, but preparation is.

² Missions and temple attendance may be considered as exceptions to this pattern.

³ D&C 29:34