

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart October 2022

Planning for the Future while Trusting God's Provisions

by Mike Emlet



God is truly sovereign. And I am truly responsible for living according to God's revealed will. He upholds all things by His righteous right hand (Isa. 40:10; Heb. 1:3). And what I do with my hands matters (Matt. 5:30). It's one thing to affirm both God's sovereignty and human responsibility as biblical teachings, but how do we faithfully live out these truths in a balanced way in everyday life?

The fact is, we live constantly in the experiential tension between God's sovereignty and our responsibility, between the call to trust and the call to act...I am called to live in a world where God is sovereign and my actions do matter.

But it's easy to become imbalanced and to drift

into either the "power mode" or the "presumption mode." In the power mode, we take charge of our lives as though human responsibility were the only piece of the equation... Here there is a functional absence of a sovereign God—we, of course, acknowledge God's sovereignty, but practically speaking, it doesn't affect our daily lives. On the other hand, there is a magnified emphasis on secondary causes. As a result of these imbalances, we may be tempted toward anxiety, fear, over-control, over-responsibility, perfectionism, and anger. Why? Because we think it's all up to us.

In the presumption mode, we let go of our lives as though God's sovereignty were the only piece of the equation... Here there is a magnified emphasis on God's sovereignty but a functional absence of secondary causes. As a result of these imbalances, we may be tempted toward laziness, passivity, stoicism, fatalism, and indecision. Why? Because we think it's all up to

God.

Scripture steers clear of either extreme... God's Word provides an alternative: prudence. Prudence involves wise and prayerful planning. It is characterized by a robust view of God's sovereignty and providence - He is responsible. Further, it retains a proper emphasis on secondary causes—I am responsible, too. We see this dual emphasis throughout the entire Bible. ...Scripture calls us to trust God's providential care and to plan well and work hard in various spheres of life. I want to drill down into one specific area: providing materially for ourselves and our families while entrusting our labors to the Lord's care.

Inherent to our role as God's image bearers is to engage in meaningful work. God planted the garden of Eden but Adam was to "work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:8, 15). While the fall made work toil-some (3:17-19), laboring to provide for self, family, and others in need remains normative for us.

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Inherent to our role as God's image bearers is to engage in meaningful work. God planted the garden of Eden but Adam was to "work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:8, 15). While the fall made work toil-some (3:17-19), laboring to provide for self, family, and others in need remains normative for us.



Even in the wilderness when God miraculously provided manna for the Israelites...God sovereignly provided, and the people responded in the practical work of obedience, stewarding what He provided. Our work is important, but it is undergirded by the providential work of God.

... As stewards, God warns us against laziness that leads to poverty (Pr. 6:6–11), tells us to work quietly and earn our own living (1 Th. 4:11–12; 2 Th. 3:6–12), and exhorts us to provide for the members of our household (1 Ti. 5:8) and for those in need (Eph. 4:28)...

At the same time, God calls His people to remember that He is their ultimate provider. When the Israelites arrived in Canaan, God's miraculous provision stopped and they were to do the work of cultivating the land (Ex. 16:35) ... Further, Jesus reminds us

not to be anxious about material provisions because the Father cares for us, knows our needs, and has already given us the greatest gift of all—His kingdom (Lk 12:22–32)...

So, it is right to consider the material needs of our family, to budget accordingly, and to work diligently...On the other hand, don't hoard your possessions in self-protective ways, driven by pride, fear, or covetousness, as portrayed in Jesus' parable of the rich fool (vv. 13–21).

God calls us to live not by our own power, nor by foolish presumption regarding His providence, but by a wise and balanced prudence. Make plans, but hold them loosely. Live according to God's revealed will, entrusting yourself and your loved ones to His sovereign plans...Expect that sometimes, God will upend our plans and we will be called to humbly submit to His loving and good purposes.

How do you know if you are becoming unbalanced? First, look for the overflow of your heart - the particular temptations

and ways of living ... associated with an over-emphasis on either human responsibility or God's sovereignty. Second, pay attention to your prayer life. If it is anemic, you are saying (functionally, at least) that your own planning and actions are what really matter (power mode) or that it doesn't really matter what you do (even in prayer) because God will simply do what He will do (presumption mode).

What we do matters. We don't presume that God will work apart from our agency in a given instance. But with humility regarding our own plans, we acknowledge, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand" (Prov. 19:21). Only He can say, "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa. 14:24). And that is good news. God's sovereign, infallible purposes give us freedom and courage to dream, make plans, work hard, fail boldly, succeed humbly, and seek His face yet again.

[Taken from Tabletalk, October 2018]



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