TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN

*By Fred Hobbs*

Some people in my circle of family, friends and acquaintances have pronounced proclivities in dealing with the concept of plans and/or planning. A recently acquired new acquaintance, “Al”, is intelligent and thoughtful. Also, he has a master plan for daily living which includes, for example, a specific time for eating and for retiring for the day. Every day. Given an opportunity to be spontaneous, Al seems to consider carefully the impact of engaging in any activity that was not already planned before agreeing to participate in a proposed endeavor.

At the opposite end of a planning scale, if one existed, would be one of my nephews, Don. He is extremely successful in his career, has a forthright and upbeat personality and always gets the job done well. Yet, from all appearances, he is very flexible and does not seem to be uptight with last minute changes to a plan or uncomfortable with making last minute plans.

As for my personal philosophy toward making plans, I admit to having a case of “disambiguation” (split personality.) This phenomenon even cropped up in my chosen profession. In my long career in broadcasting, I was required to be on time for live broadcasts and to cover news stories whenever and wherever they occurred. Every day was a blank slate. And, of course, most news events are not planned. No one knows if or when a fire or a plane crash will occur. A reporter can’t suit her or his schedule to the whims or activities of the mayor or governor. In the news media, there literally is a “deadline a minute” and the reporter has no control and no way to plan. So I had to both plan and not plan and never quite know which was going to be appropriate in a given circumstance. Consequently, I had to be flexible in my planning or, more to the point, not count on planning at all.

Whenever possible, I prefer to be spontaneous. Generally, I leap at the chances that pop up: a sudden, unplanned invitation to go to a movie, to join my family in a Sunday drive or to attend an event involving one of my grandchildren, but which said youngster had forgotten to mention ahead of time to grandpa.

Planning for long distance travel is another matter. In that process, I prefer to start early and leave plenty of time to deal with unforeseen events. If possible, I book my flight and hotel reservations weeks in advance. (My nephew mentioned above, by contrast, arranges every part of his trip only a day or so in advance and never seems to suffer for it, often even getting a cheaper deal!)

Planning ahead for the more serious aspects of life is extremely important and provides a large measure of “peace of mind.” My late wife and I signed up for long-term care insurance just weeks before each of us developed separate medical conditions. If those particular conditions had been diagnosed at the time, that coverage would have been denied. Making that planning decision proved to be very wise, both financially and emotionally, during the illness that ultimately took my wife’s life.

So, if the question is “to plan or not to plan”, the answer, sad to say, is that all-too common and unsatisfying response: it depends.