

Which Way Are You Swimming?

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Welcome to fall semester. We hope you have all been able to settle into your new schedules. Fall semester can be a time of fresh starts. It can be a time of great expectations. It can also be a time when things are practically perfect. For example, it is probably safe to say that right now most of you have perfect grades in all of your classes! It can be a time when hopes run high and your roommate situation is quite fabulous. It is a time when all of our athletic teams are on course for tremendous seasons—yes, even perhaps national championships! And it is a time when you are able to meet new people, even perhaps that special someone.

The beginning of fall semester can indeed be an exciting time. You are most likely focused on a course of study and ready for what this new semester has to offer. We are excited for you! We hope that all of your expectations are met and that your experience here is a wonderfully memorable one. We also hope that as you are here at Brigham Young University and after you leave to pursue your own course in life, you will always take great care to do those things that will keep you out of harm's way, both temporally and spiritually; that you will have proper focus and perspective; and that you will heed the counsel of

Nephi's brother Jacob, who said to his family, "O be wise; what can I say more?" (Jacob 6:12).

Sometimes as we embark and proceed on a new journey we find that our expectations are not met. What we had anticipated and hoped for in the beginning of our journey has not come to pass. Our ideals are not our realities. Maybe we are not getting the grades we had hoped for or we haven't met that special someone. Perhaps we didn't get the job we thought we deserved. We may find that things are just not working out as we had planned. The question then becomes, What will be our reaction to our unanticipated situation? What will we do? This is where I believe Jacob's counsel to "be wise" deserves serious attention.

At times, in these situations, the easiest thing to do is to place the responsibility for our situation on something or someone else. This is a dangerous course to take. It is harmful. It is extremely unwise. We see this in the Book of Mormon when people blamed their behavior on the traditions of their fathers. Not accepting responsibility for the direction of our own lives can distort our perceptions and can cause

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us to lose focus of the things that are important. It can cause us to become disoriented and can keep us from progressing. It is a waste of valuable time in these days of our earthly probation.

Another easy but unwise thing we might do during unforeseen situations is obsess about things we can't control. Recently I read about "a thrill-seeking photographer" who was described as a person who "often dived with death in the water."¹ He would repeatedly put himself into very dangerous situations in order to capture footage of extreme water events. Even though he "was described as an experienced waterman,"² this young man unfortunately died because of his dangerous fixation. He "drowned after he was sucked into a deadly whirlpool he was trying to film."³ "There was a sign warning people not to swim [near the whirlpool], but it was ignored by [this young man]."⁴ As this young man's family dealt with the loss of their son, they "warned others 'not to do this sort of thing'" and to "take heed of any warning signs present."⁵

The image of this young man being drawn into a deadly whirlpool reminds me of how we can easily be drawn into dangerous situations if we lose focus. We need to be careful and heed the warning signs—such as promptings from the Holy Ghost, advice from our loved ones, or even counsel from Church leaders—so that we will not be drawn into the potential whirlpools of life. When we dwell on things we can't control, we often fail to understand the gravity of the warning signs—or simply fail to even see them. Instead of looking for ways to overcome adversity, we sometimes focus on things we can't control. This causes us to murmur and wallow in self-pity. This can be deadly to our salvation. When we obsess over things we can't control or refuse to take responsibility for our actions, we become caught in a whirlpool. In other words, we stop progressing and are simply churned round and round by conflicting currents.

A perfect illustration of the different ways we can behave when encountering unexpected disappointments is found in the Book of Mormon. Nephi stated:

And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow. . . . After I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food.

And it came to pass that we did return without food to our families, and . . . they did suffer much for the want of food.

And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel . . . did begin to murmur exceedingly. . . .

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, having been afflicted with my brethren because of the loss of my bow, and their bows having lost their springs, it began to be exceedingly difficult, yea, insomuch that we could obtain no food. . . .

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow [and] an arrow. . . .

And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts, insomuch that I did obtain food for our families. [1 Nephi 16:18–21, 23, 31]

Even though Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel were all equally suffering from want of food, each made a choice. Laman and Lemuel chose to blame Nephi and obsessed over the loss of his bow while apparently ignoring the fact that their own bows needed fixing. This did nothing to improve their situation. On the other hand, Nephi made the wise choice to progress. He took responsibility, focused on the things he could control, and did something about his family's situation.

It is important to keep a proper focus even when things are not going as planned. Instead of being caught in the whirlpools of life, as Laman and Lemuel often were, it is important to continue to progress toward our goals, no matter how difficult the situation may be.

I am reminded of the advice of a little fish named Dory to her friend Marlin while

searching for Marlin's son, Nemo, in the 2003 Disney movie *Finding Nemo*. Marlin is very distraught over his missing son. Dory tries to encourage Marlin by telling him:

When life gets you down, do you wanna know what you've gotta do? . . .

*Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming. What do we do? We swim, swim.*⁶

We will be held accountable for all we do. What will we do when faced with situations that could potentially cause us to lose our focus? Will we flounder by blaming others and losing focus so that we are sucked under by the whirlpools around us, or will we choose to keep swimming? I believe that we will be faced with unexpected situations throughout this life because that is the nature of this life. I also believe that we can prepare ourselves and be ready when these things happen. To prepare ourselves, we ought to follow King Benjamin's counsel:

Watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives. [Mosiah 4:30]

As we do these things and choose to progress, even in the face of adversity, God "shall consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain" (2 Nephi 2:2).

This is my testimony and my prayer for you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Kieran Corcoran, "Daredevil Photographer Drowned After He Was Sucked into the Deadly Whirlpool He Was Trying to Film," Daily Mail, 17 January 2014, dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2541344/Daredevil-photographer-drowned-sucked-deadly-WHIRLPOOL-trying-film.html.

2. "Whirlpool Death Man Jacob Cockle 'May Have Been Filming,'" BBC News, 30 May 2013, bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-22714382.

3. Corcoran, "Daredevil Photographer."

4. "'Admirable' Cornish Surfer Drowned After Being Pulled into Hayle Estuary Whirlpool, Inquest Hears," Western Morning News, 18 January 2014, westernmorningnews.co.uk/loved-Cornish-surfer-drowned-pulled-Whirlpool/story-20458766-detail/story.html.

5. "Whirlpool Death."

6. IMDb's page for quotes for *Finding Nemo* (2003), imdb.com/title/tt0266543/quotes.