

CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR BALANCE

“It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

— Philippians 2:13

If you could sum up in three words what it means for a man to live a balanced life, what would those words be?

If you are a businessman, you might choose words like *visionary*, *goal-oriented*, and *profitable*. Or you might approach it more as a father, choosing words such as *teacher*, *role model*, and *mentor*. You might even think of it in a spiritual sense with terms like *servant-leader*, *purpose-driven* and *Christ-like*.

What does it mean to achieve balance in this crazy world, anyway? Is it really possible, or is it just an elusive dream – like that summer home on the beach, the physique of those guys in the home-gym infomercials, or that multi-million dollar portfolio that is so far from reality?

If balance is possible, how in the world do we get there? Many days it feels more like we’re stuck on a treadmill with the speed set too fast, desperately trying not to stumble as we juggle all the demands that scream for our attention. Our reality feels more like overworked and underpaid *chaos* than anything even close to balance. Before we discuss what those three keys should be, let’s bring it closer to home.

Are there one or two elements in your life that seem the hardest to balance right now?

What habits have you established, or what disciplines do you maintain that have made a positive difference in these areas?

I'VE BEEN THERE

As we begin this study, let me set the record straight: *Can I ever relate to your struggle!* I know what it is like to climb the corporate ladder, trying to keep everyone happy, and fall miserably short as a Christian. Even now, as I walk the road of a pastor, God continues to shape me into the man He wants me to be.

So, I write this to encourage you: *No matter where you find yourself today, there's hope.* Over the years, God has taught me biblical principles that have changed my life. I have learned to seek His will and trust Him *above all else.* You can, too. How? This next passage is a great place to start.

Read Psalm 37:3-5.

What condition is required to receive each of these promises?

What are some practical ways you can trust God with your life?

EARLIER DAYS

I became a Christian in 1981 while a college student, and from day one I was “on fire” for God. My wife and I married two years later, during our senior year. Then I was off to tackle the business world.

During those early years, my career got more challenging; I became a father; and Barb and I spent many hours working on our home. Then came many promotions, several relocations, activities with my wife, Barb, and our three children, regular church involvement, and increasing demands in a career that required extensive international travel. I continued to do many “good things,” but they were often done in my own strength rather than as a result of the overflow of a dynamic walk with Christ. I knew something had gone terribly sour, but I couldn’t put my finger on what it was.

Galatians 3:3 asks, *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?* That was me. I had begun well “in the Spirit,” but then everything got out of balance. My heart had drifted away from the passion I’d had for God and drifted toward the cares of the world. From the outside, everything looked fine; but inside I was in a rut, making less and less time for Bible study, prayer, and personal worship...just going through the motions. Although I continued to serve God as Lord, I began to let the vibrancy in our relationship slip away. I drifted farther and farther away from the path He had charted for me, all the while sinking in the deceptive quicksand of a lukewarm walk with God.

Talk about miserable! I was achieving everything I thought I wanted in business, literally seeing the world, from a somewhat prestigious vantage point. Yet *without Christ as my focus – my purpose for living* – it gradually became empty and exhausting.

What a letdown! My passion for Christ was waning, my wife wasn’t happy, the kids were a challenge, and I wasn’t sure how to fix any of it. In short, I needed a spiritual overhaul.

Read Revelation 2:2-5.

Have you ever found yourself in this kind of imbalance?

What three steps does verse 5 direct us to take when we get off track?

How could these steps apply to your situation today?

In the year 2000, God got my attention. I made adjustments that refocused my life, stoking the dying embers of my passion for God into a roaring bonfire.

Now I find myself a pastor, counseling and encouraging hundreds of people about the very issues I struggled with for so many years. Talk about amazing grace! As I have worked to rebuild my life around biblical principles, God has somehow turned my weaknesses into my strengths. So it's with joy and a humble heart that I share these truths with you, hoping to direct us all toward balance.

You might find yourself in a similarly frustrating pattern today. You've made a commitment to Christ, but you just aren't seeing the fruit you desire, and you aren't experiencing the joy that you once knew. Maybe you've attended church for years, but it has never really meant that much to you. You've heard people talk about "living for God," but you're more comfortable with tradition than transformation, with what's familiar rather than with personal change. If that's you, don't worry. God will meet you right where you are.

Perhaps, a friend has encouraged you to go through this study, despite your unfamiliarity with the Bible. Relax! This won't be too painful. If God can keep a count of the hairs on your head (or lack of them!), He can surely help you understand His Word. Finally, maybe you're on fire for God, raring to learn more and be more like Him. Whatever the case, I pray that this study will encourage and challenge you to the point of change. Sound good? Then let's get started!

THE BALANCED LIFE

Back to my original question: If you could sum up in three words what it means for a man to live a balanced life, what would those words be? How about **Doing God's Will**? While this answer may seem far too simple, these three little words hold a profound key to a balanced lifestyle.

Read John 6:38.

In your own words, what is the key to a balanced lifestyle?

Doing God's Will. This was Jesus' key to balance while He juggled countless demands here on earth. We'll take a closer look at what this phrase says, but first let's see what it *doesn't* say:

- Doing *my* will
- *Knowing* God's will
- *Studying* God's will
- Doing *good things for God*
- Doing *nothing*
- Doing *the will of others*

What this little phrase *does* say:

- We have to *know* God's will and then *obey* it.
- We have to *trust* God's will more than we trust our own opinions or feelings.
- God has a *specific will* for every area of our lives.
- *We have a responsibility* to carry out God's will.

Which of these points challenge(s) you today? How?

Read Mark 3:31-34.

What is necessary in order to be included in Jesus' family?

Many times life becomes unbalanced because we don't take the time to discover God's will as we forge ahead, knee-deep in the mundane duties of daily living. If we're not careful, life can keep us too busy for what's really important. This is why priorities are so important. We just don't have time to waste.

USING YOUR TIME WISELY

Did you ever realize that you have the same number of minutes in your day as the President of the United States, or the CEOs of the top companies in the country? You do. Let's see what the scriptures say about how we use that time.

Read Ephesians 5:15-17.

What four things does this passage exhort us to do?

How would you rate yourself presently in these areas?
