

Seek First: Living Balanced



“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Matthew 6:33-34 ESV

Gail E. Dudley, Small Group Bible Study

Would you agree that many of God's children do not live balanced lives? Think about it. For many of us, we allow the demands of this world to dictate our next move. Our lives are filled with checking the likes and comments on our Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tik Tok, feed, and stories. Most times before we even begin our day. Our schedules are filled with nonstop meetings, networking events, ministry activities, school sports, recitals, lessons, gatherings, church, fellowship dinners, conference calls...you get the point. We are faced with sickness and other illnesses due to lack of sleep, and rapidly gaining weight or losing it at an unhealthy speed. We wonder why we are restless, frustrated, and at times angry. For some of us, we are pushed to climb a ladder to success or find ourselves working 24/7 as entrepreneurs trying to scale our businesses while slowly losing a grip on life. Is all of this necessary? Is it possible that we have received a lie from satan that has kept us in bondage and out of balanced?

When you wake in the mornings, are you tired? Is your mind ten steps ahead? Are you finding that you forget things? When you think about your schedule and to-do list, do you become exhausted?

Transparent Moment:

As an entrepreneur and a business owner for over twenty years, I use to work from home. Because I was building a business, I found myself working around the clock. Years ago, I experienced a TIA. That's a mini-stroke. After a series of questions, the attending doctor leaned over with a stern look and said, "As women, we must do better. We must take better care of ourselves." She was holding onto my hand with a pretty tight squeeze. Eye to eye, she continued speaking by saying, "You have a choice. Set office hours or find yourself back here in the hospital in worse condition." I love it when God sends His children to tend to a need. She removed her identification and stated, "I'm a believer, and God just blessed you with a miracle. My patient in the other room had a stroke. You experienced a TIA. What are you going to do with this gift that has just been given to you?"

She would not release me from the hospital. I was there for an entire week. Upon being discharged, she handed me an open and closed sign. Her card read, "You determine the time of day, but place this placard on your office door when you are open for business, and be sure to close the door and turn over the sign when it's time to shut down for the day. Do yourself a favor and not return to your office for any reason until the next business day."

I would love to tell you that I still follow her prescription. I haven't done a great job until recently. Being in ministry, serving as a consultant for churches and ministries, building a publishing business with my daughter, and now using my education of spiritual direction meeting with women Monday - Friday, I find myself working all the time. That was until...

God spoke to me the week before Thanksgiving. It was clear that He was calling me to a time of rest, refreshing, and revival. For December, I pretty much-watched movies, read books, listened to music, and at times sat in silence. I cannot tell you how my life has changed since that time. During my time of self-care, I realized what's important and what is not.

I also took the time to re-evaluate my business and ministry. I implemented a business communication protocol designed by my friend, Dr. Kim Carter, that everyone who agrees to enter into a business agreement with me will have to adhere to if they want to work with me. It hit me that clients were texting me at 11 pm with new ideas about their project. I would awake to messages, voicemails, and emails.

Although I am an entrepreneur and a minister does not mean that I have to be available from sunup to sundown and beyond. That's not healthy. That's out of balance.

Why had I made myself available? I had believed the lie of the enemy. My downtime gave me an understanding of helped me get a hold of my purpose and life calling.

I'm recharged and ready to walk into my appointed future. How? Because I took the time to get back into balance.

Now, I want the same for you.

Interesting Numbers

As printed in HuffPost, American Medical Association states, "60 to 80 percent of visits to primary care doctors may be related to stress, yet only 3 percent of patients receive stress management counseling. Why is it that so few people are getting help from their health care practitioners when it comes to stress?" (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/stress-health_b_2971079)

Here's my question. Why is it that so few people, event today, are taking time out of their schedule and speak with a therapist, a minster, a spiritual director, or a friend? Are we still hiding behind the stigma that if we need to talk to someone, we are not handing life or trusting Jesus?

Write your thoughts to the questions above.

Consider the following: *(reprint with permission from my Spiritual Formation course at Ashland Theological Seminary)*

- Stress is a response of your mind, emotions, and body to whatever demands are being placed upon you.

- Some Signs of Stress:
 - Tenseness, Irritability, Depression
 - The appearance of being in a daze
 - Constant fatigue
 - Forgetfulness
 - Low tolerance...frustration
 - Lack of patience
 - Loss of appetite
 - Sleeplessness
 - Frequent headaches
 - Sudden crying over minor things
 - High blood pressure
 - Premature aging
 - Immune-system breakdown

List signs of stress you are currently dealing with in your life:

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Looking at this list, write down your honest thoughts.

BUSY

Our famous words...

I'm too busy

I don't have time, I'm just too busy

Consider this as you think of the word

"BUSY"

Being Under Satan's Yoke

(author unknown)

Satan's goal is to distract us, and he often will do so by lying to us and leading us into chaos. Chaos can cause stress. Stress will steal our time. The cycle repeats itself. If we are not careful, we can spiral downwards. Through his craftiness and with our cooperation, we take our mind and heart off God and His word, which leads us towards a life of continually being busy and not seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness.

God gives us room to make choices. He wants us to enjoy life, yes, but He must be our focus. If we are doing too many things and find that we are too busy for God, then something must go.

Life Balance Evaluation

Looking at your schedule over the next 24-hours, week, 30-days, what could be areas that trigger stress? Be honest.

Do you use a planner? Not electronic, but something where you write down appointments, meetings, etc. Why or why not?

Are you able to make any adjustments to your schedule so that you may release your stress? Why or why not?

The Bible says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

Considering the next 30-days. Is your burden light? Explain.

What are you willing to do to take God's yoke upon you and learn from Him?

Questions

- Who has control of your time?

- What things, events, life situations control you?

- What would you consider time challenges for you?

- What steps will you take to rearrange the things that prevent God from being first in your life?

- Are you too busy to study the Bible? Attend Bible Study small group? Why or why not?

- How's your prayer life? Do you take time to pray?

- What steps will you take in developing and maintaining an intimate relationship with God?

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The Bible Says...

✠ Life through the Spirit – Romans 8:5-8

- Romans 8:9 *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”*
- Romans 8:13 *“If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”*

✠ Living Sacrifice – Romans 12

- Romans 12:2 *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

✠ Ephesians 4:1

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

✠ Living as Children of Light – Ephesians 4:17-19

- Ephesians 4:22-24
- Ephesians 4:27
- Ephesians 5:15

List other scriptures that can help keep you focused on Jesus when you are faced with stress and a too much on your schedule.

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God's Word: *our source for balance*

- We can't assume that we have time to _____
 - Psalm 90:10 NIV

- We cannot take time for _____
 - Proverbs 27:1 NIV

- Realize that time is a _____
 - Ephesians 5:15-17 NIV

- We will be held _____ therefore, balance your time.
 - Romans 14:12 NIV

- There is a difference between _____ and _____ time.
 - Mark 13:30-33 NIV

- With God, there is a _____ for everything.
 - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV

What adjustments will you allow in your life and create balance by studying God's Word?

Exercise

Make a list of everything you do from the time you get up until the time you go to bed. (*Use a blank sheet of paper to complete this exercise and be honest. Yes. Use paper and pen. Not the computer*)

“There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death.”

Proverbs 16:25 NIV

Write down things from your list that prevent or disrupt you from spending time with God. (*Use a blank sheet of paper if needed*)

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“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

The Attitude of Balance

- Implement the following attitudes
 - Faithfulness rather than faithlessness
 - Humility rather than boastful
 - Sincerity rather than success
 - Gratitude rather than greed
 - Servanthood rather than self-centered
 - Vision rather than visibility
 - Passion rather than status

- Remain...
 - Focused rather than fearful
 - Deliberate rather than driven
 - Accountable rather than blame
 - Generous rather than greedy
 - Content rather than complaining

Taken from "Breathless" by Gary R. Collins 1998

Plan, Set, Build, Work

1. Plan ahead. Plan based upon your current schedule.
2. Set realistic goals and expectations – never over-schedule yourself – learn the power of NO!
3. Plan time for prayer, Bible Study, and build relationships with others to help you stay focused on God.
4. Practice self-care and create balance in your life.

Note to self:

As a Christian, you have the responsibility for determining and controlling the boundaries in your life.

My Prayer to God

It's the new year. Let's do better and practice self-care.

Author: Gail Dudley

Office hours in central Ohio are now available if you would like one-on-one spiritual direction sessions with Gail. Office hours are Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm.

One-on-one online conference calls are also available Monday – Thursday.

All sessions are 50-minutes plus 5-minutes prayer at the beginning and the end of the session. Each session will have scripture reading and building a plan specifically for you based upon the word of God, processing, and a time for silence.

Schedule here: <https://atthetablewithgail.as.me/spiritualdirectionsession>

Looking for a planner? Check out: [Plan in Motion 2020](#)