

The Balanced Life

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

That song is based on Ecclesiastes 3 verses **1-8**. And there **is** a Time or a Season for Everything, but how do we *find the time* to do 'anything' **well**?

We receive dozens of e-mails a day. There is a pile of mail at our homes and workplaces to sort through. I hate to think of how many times our 'phones *ring* or # of texts *coming in*' — we carry 'cell phones' -to *make sure* we can *always* be reached & have answering machines to grab the calls *we do* miss!

I listen to the radio 'as' I wake up to *catch up on* news -to hear what's going on in the world, & I receive 6 or 8 blog posts a day -telling me *what to think*.

TV Ads tell us *how we should look* & *where we should go*. We are in a culture which is 'overstimulated' with *messages* & *demands*. ENOUGH ALREADY!

How do we '*sort through*' all these *tensions* and find **balance** in our lives? How do you handle 'the pressure' of what the boss is '*telling*' you to do, what your spouse is '*asking*' you to do, what the kids '*want*' you to do, what the school is '*requiring*' of you, what the church is '*calling*' you to do, -plus, the *expectations* of friends, extended family, and the community?

There are a *couple of approaches*. Some folks *try* to do it **all**. When 'anyone' asks them to do 'anything', they *try* to *do it* even if *they don't have 'time'* or they *don't 'want' to do it*. They are 'people pleasers'. They *cannot* say, "No."

Now, sometimes people *try* to do it 'all' because *they* think they flourish on a 'crammed' calendar. The more they *have* to 'do', the better they *like* it.

Maybe you **are** *that kind* of amazing person who **can** do a *lot* at one time.

-Some people seem to *thrive* on chaos — the *more* the better.

-Their *days* are a swirl of 'overwhelming activity' from beginning to end.

-However, even these 'dynamos' often *reach a point* where 'They're done!'

And, 'other people' handle this 'stress' by 'withdrawing' from everything.

Maybe *you've* been burned out by people and activities before, and now you just say "No" to everything. You never join anything, and if you are still *involved* -then you are *busy* 'quitting' everything you '*used to*' do.

You 'throw in the towel' because it's the only way you know how to handle it. You have not learned: "How to 'Live' a Balanced Life."

But..., neither 'hyper-activity' nor 'withdrawal' is the answer to 'feeling' **good** about *life* -and 'adjusting to' its *realities*. There *must be* **balance**.

We were *not meant* to live like this. Think of what *happens* when a tire is *out of balance* on your car? One *tire out of balance* by *just a few ounces* can shake a whole car. Everything *seems fine* until you have to operate at speed

Or, what happens when you have inner ear problems and *lose* your sense of balance. Your *whole world* becomes disoriented. You can't *function normally*.

It's the same when your 'life' is **unbalanced**. There *must be* a 'balance' *between* "home, work, rest and fun". There has to be a 'balance' between the "physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual" parts of you.

That 'balance' will *look different* for each person, because we all have such *different* God-given personality make-ups. -I know people who *cannot stand* 'quiet' or 'lack of contact' with *other people*. Inactivity drives them 'crazy'.

For 'others' too much 'busyness' and 'contact with other people' absolutely drains them of 'energy'. Balance will *not* be the same for every person, -but... there are "some principles" that apply to **all** of us.

The **first** thing you have to do, if you are going to have **balance** in your life, is: You have to discover your PURPOSE. What is your Purpose in this world?

This is the core question of our lives. If you have *not* thought seriously about this, you have not taken life seriously.

Many of the problems in people's lives would **be settled** if they *understood* their purpose in life **and** *lived it out*. In **Romans 14:8** Paul said, "If we live, we live **to** the Lord; and if we die, we die **to** the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

If it is **true** that we belong to the Lord, then we *also have the* 'obligation' to live for the Lord. As the Word says in **1st Corinthians 6:19-20**, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body."

Our *lives* are not our *own*. They do not belong to us. We *belong to* God.

'Accepting' these Spiritual Truths can *move you well on your way* to discovering your Primary PURPOSE!

Consider the wisdom of **Philippians 2:12-13**,

"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is **God** who works in you to will and to act according to **his** good purpose."

Our purpose is to 'live out and fulfill' the purpose of **God** for our lives. He is working to unfold that plan in **your** life, and your 'responsibility' is to cooperate with his work in You, which *is...*forming you in the image of Christ.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the 'glory' of God." The **FIRST** purpose of your life is to know God - & to have an 'ongoing relationship with him' that brings him 'glory' in the way you **live** your life.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do 'good works', which God prepared in advance for us to do."

What is your purpose? It is to know God *through* his Son Jesus Christ & live for Him. Your purpose is to 'do' as much good as you can **for** Him & others. -You are not here to serve and please yourself; you have a 'higher' calling.

But, if you don't 'understand' **your** purpose, then your life is 'built on the 'wrong' foundation. & if your life is built on the wrong 'foundation', it will not matter 'how splendid a structure you build' - because it will 'crumble & fall'.

Your primary purpose is **not** to be successful or have a wonderful career. Your purpose is not to be happy or earn a lot of money. Your purpose is not even to find love and have a family.

These 'other things' are *not* 'bad' in & of themselves, they're 'good'; it's just that they can't come before the '**main** purpose' for which you were 'created' — to know God and glorify HIM with your life.

JESUS taught, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

Once you 'get' your Primary Purpose straight', 'the rest' 'all' falls into place.

This is what Solomon has been discovering and recording in **Ecclesiastes**; -the things 'of this world' **are** TEMPORARY, as elusive as the morning MIST.

In chapter **2 vs. 20** we saw that Solomon 'made a choice' to "change" his 'outlook' regarding 'what was really important in life'. So, in **2:24** -he says, "There is nothing better for a man to do than to eat & drink, and 'cause' his 'soul' to "see good" **in** his labour. *This, I saw, is also from the hand of God.*"

The **Second** thing you *must do*, if you are going to have '**balance**' in your life, is: You have to *establish your* **PRIORITIES**. First: you *get* a firm grasp of *what* your real purpose **is** in this world. First: you *understand* that your 'life' belongs to God, and that you are to 'live' for Him *rather than* yourself.

Second: you need to *understand* God's specific plan for **you**. Begin by asking yourself, "What are my gifts? What are the specific talents & interests that God has put into my life? How can I *use* these to fulfill 'his purpose' for me?"

The reason that '*these*' questions are important is that you may be *doing* many good things, but you may not be doing '**the** things' that God has in mind for you at 'this time'; -for 'everything' there is a SEASON.

Setting Priorities is not about choosing *between*: what is good & what is bad. -That was settled when we *decided* to live out our God-given purpose in life

Setting Priorities helps us 'choose' *between*: what is good & what is **best** — *between* what *could be* beneficial & what is *actually* **God's will** at *this* time.

He has made you with 'particular' *interests, skills & gifts*. Go in the direction of your 'interests and gifts', because this is *how & why* God has *created* **you**.

This is about *getting* the most from your life -through BALANCE. Setting 'priorities' helps you to *trim down* 'your involvement' to a reasonable level.

A few years ago in a Time magazine's Cover Article *entitled*, "Stress, Anxiety & Depression," the author calls *our condition* "The twentieth century blues."

Stating, we are *over-involved* and *stressed-out*. North Americans are driving 'ourselves' *at an increasingly frenzied rate* that is *pushing us* over the 'edge'.

We are *trying* to 'live out our dreams', but *instead* -we *find ourselves* living in a 'nightmare'. And 'we Christians' are not functioning any 'differently'!

Casting Crowns recorded a song *about this* called: "American Dream".

So he works and he builds with his own two hands
And he pours all he has in a castle made with sand
But the wind and the rain are comin' crashing in
Time will tell just how long his kingdom stands
His kingdom stands

This American Dream is beginning to seem more & more like a nightmare

In the first 2 Chapters of 'Ecclesiastes' –Solomon was *expressing* his own 'depressive mood'- because his 'life was out of balance' –his 'focus' was off.

Yet in chapter **3** he *begins by stating*: the way things **are** in Life is the way **God** has ordained them to be –there are Seasons in Life- and the *differences* in them are as 'stark' as Summer & Winter, as Birth & Death.

Life is a series of Series, a Mist of Mists –a temporary phase followed by 'contrasting' phases. Each Season 'will Pass' *giving way* to the next.

Just as God *has* 'balanced the seasons in nature' He has *given us* a mixture of Experiences in Life, -which 'offset' each other –*good* times & *bad* times.

LIFE is a 'mixed-bag' –it consists of comfortable situations and difficult ones –each one *having* their 'time'; -and *these* 'contrasts' even vary by 'degree'.

Even when your life is like 'a bed of roses' you still 'get stuck' by the occasional thorn! When life's at its darkest –a ray of sunshine breaks thru!

There is a 'limited time' for each of '*these things*' *under heaven*. & we need God's knowledge & wisdom to be able to learn what we can from *all* of them. And, -to know when to let a Season 'go' and 'move on'.

GRIEF is like that –people will mourn the loss of a 'loved one' or the loss of 'a wonderful period in their life' too long sometimes. Grief is 'good' & necessary –but, it too is for a season! At some point we must...'let it go'!

LIFE keeps 'moving on' and we must 'move with it'. *Hanging-on* to what 'once was' but is not returning is folly, & it is 'unhealthy' –it *steals* your joy!

Solomon's Poem of the Seasons of Life is a *description* of Normal life. God has *designed* a world of "change" –whether we 'like' *change* or not!

This is the Life that God has given *us* –and it is the Life in which we are to **be** CONTENT –or as Solomon *phrases it* –the Life we are to ENJOY!

Some of these Events we do not have 'much control over' –like *those* in verses **2-4**, but in 'others' like those in **5-8** -we do control "our responses".

The *bottom line is*: If you do not take charge of your life, someone else will, *making* 'your life decisions' *4 u*, & determining how *your* time is being 'spent'

But **God** has given **you** the responsibility of ordering your life — no one else. Only "you" have the responsibility for the things you say 'yes' or 'no' too.

& you cannot learn to 'say' **no** until you understand your Purpose and set your Priorities. Once you do, you are prepared to say **yes** to the things that you enjoy and that ultimately 'matter', and **no** to the things that 'do not' **fit-in** with your "list of priorities" for God's plan for you at the 'present time'.

You are freed from **guilt**, because you understand the purpose & direction that God intends your life to take, & you know he wants you to be in control

The **third** thing you have to do, if you are going to have **balance** in your life is: You have to make 'your' PLAN.

First, you must understand your purpose; Second, you set your priorities; but, if you 'have' **no plan** on 'how' to make it happen, -it 'never' will.

Nothing is going to happen until you make it happen. It's too easy to let 'life' sweep you along, & let your agenda be filled with the 'tyranny of the urgent'.

If you are not deliberate in planning out your life, your life will 'drift', & life will "just happen" & the years will go by & you will wonder where they went!

That's NOT what you want! You want your life to happen **on purpose**.

Take the time to sit down and write out **your** life purpose. Put your priorities down on paper. Make a plan to fulfill those priorities and make them happen.

Begin to say **no** to some things, and cut out 'other' things to 'free up' time. You need to Make sure there **is** 'enough time' **for** the **important** things.

Pencil in: time for God, time for family, and for ministry to 'other' people. 'Your ministry' may be encouraging someone over the phone, baking a pie, teaching a class, witnessing to your neighbor, writing a letter, leading a small group, working with children, youth or the elderly. *Whatever it is...*

Your ministry will be unique to **your personal** 'gifts and calling', & you **will** have **time** for God to use you through it -because- you have made a plan.

The reason this is so important is that it will determine: whether you are going to 'waste' the "best of your life" or 'choose' to live it on purpose.

Will you make **your** life count? Will **you** get **balance** in your life **by** discovering your purpose, establishing your priorities and making your plan?

You may have noticed that the 'important things' I just listed were all about spending our 'time' on relationship building with God & with other People.

Loving GOD & loving 'others' **is** foundational to the **Balanced** Christian life.

At the Core of the Earth's Centre is a SOLID MASS of IRON and it generates 'magnetic fields' which keeps *everything else* 'holding together'.

If the earth ever got 'out of balance' it would 'spin chaotically' into space destroying 'life' as we know it. The same is true of 'balance' **in your** life.

Jesus Christ needs to be at the center of **your** life, and *all other things* need to come from your relationship with him -if there **is to be** balance in your life

Concerning 'Christ', Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:17**:

"He is before all things, and in him all things 'hold' together."

So, **if your life** is 'falling apart'- it is because **he** is 'not' holding it together. Without him **at** 'the center' -your life **is** 'out of balance' & 'spinning' out of control. Your *default will* be to "please people" rather than pleasing God.

But...when your life **is** 'in balance' you will find more contentment, and you will be more confident in your 'choices'. You will be free to **be yourself**, and you won't *feel as 'pressured'* by the 'expectations' of *other* people.

You *will* **have** direction, and your life *will* take on a new energy as it finds the "explosive power" of 'operating in' your areas of "gifting & interest".

You won't repeat the same old mistakes, nor spend your time and effort on things that 'do not' *ultimately matter*. In short, you will **enjoy** life 'more'.

You will grow closer to God and your relationships will be richer. People will take priority over 'things'.

Your *life* will take on an eternal dimension. Your *life* **will** be grounded in God as you discover your **purpose**, establish your **priorities**, and make your **plan**. -as you allow God's will for your life to **be your #1 priority**.

In Chapter **3** vs. **12 & 13** we are *hearing from a man* who has had a change of heart on what **is** important & lasting in his life -& it comes *pouring out*.

He no longer 'depressed', but *optimistic, satisfied, thankful, & enjoying* life!

He says, "I know there is nothing better for man than to rejoice, & do good, while we live; and also, that every man should eat & drink -and enjoy 'the good' in all his toil; -it is 'God's gift to us."

Solomon is stating that there **is** a *godly* Purpose to life and he has found it! *Enjoy* your food. *Enjoy* your work. Be happy. And do Good Deeds!

Solomon's Philosophy is simple: Enjoy Life! It is God's GIFT! This theme is so central to his writing that it appears again in 3:22, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7 & 11:8!

You see, once we replace "everything is meaningless" with the alternate translations of "everything is temporary" & "everything is a puzzle" then *this book* 'becomes' much more BALANCED in its assessment of LIVING.

Yes, in **2:17& 18** he was "fed-up" with his life –listen...we all *get our shorts in a knot* sometimes! & in chapter **4** he will 'rail against oppression', & in **5:8** the level of Corruption in the world 'bugs' him, and **ch.12** laments "old age"; -these things **are** 'troubling to the soul'. Life is a "mixed-bag".

Living the BALANCED Christian Life does not *mean* that we *must* go about with a 'permanent-smile' stuck on like the Happy Face on your Bulletins!

Life is too RAW for that! Life has too many 'ups & downs'. Our **faith** is not an 'opiate for the masses' as Marx said.

No –our Faith- doesn't "mask" or "dilute" the hardships of Life, instead it allows us to FACE the 'difficult situations' knowing 'this too shall pass'.

Like Solomon our *hopelessness* over the futility of life's *desperate situations* has been replaced with the ability to find JOY because our FOCUS is changed

We are 'able' to *enjoy* 'what we **have** been 'blessed' with –not *lament* what we lack; & we can self 'regulate' that 'enjoyment' with the '*wisdom*' of God.

PAUL agrees with Solomon. In **1st Timothy 6:17** he writes, "*set your 'hopes'...on GOD, who richly provides us with 'everything' **to** ENJOY!*"

Again, in **Philippians 4:11-13** he explains the *background* for his *famous*, "I have learned to be **content** whatever the circumstances."

-CONTENTMENT is the essence of the ability to ENJOY *anything* & *all* things.

In Ch. **3** -Solomon urges 'us' to "CAUSE" *ourselves* to see 'GOOD' in OUR work. If 'you' can't –do as **James 1:5** says "if you lack **wisdom** –ask GOD."

That **is** the place to *start*, before you seek to *understand* your **purpose**, or to *establish* your **priorities**, or to *make* your **plan**...ASK **GOD**... for as **Ecclesiastes 2:26** declares: **HE** gives *Wisdom, & Knowledge, & JOY!* AMEN.