

Balance for Leaders – Presentation Notes

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Introduction

- The story of Nick Wallenda crossing Niagara Falls on a Tight-Rope.
- These are common statements in our culture and among people: “I’m so busy” or “I need more balance” or “I feel burned out”.
- Many people are coveting “balance” in their lives. They are searching for it and it seems to be eluding them.
- But what does it all mean? What is at core of the issue? Are these feelings real or perceived? How can we live a balanced life?

There are 3 things that I want to present to you today:

1. Propose a new definition of Balance
2. Share some societal/cultural Factors affecting you and I related to balance in our lives.
3. Tools and Tips to restoring balance in our lives

A new definition of balance - What are we looking for?

- So how does someone capture this illusive “balance”?
- If you were told to go outside right now and to capture a Snurdle, how would you go about doing it?
- I mean you have something in mind when I say Snurdle and you might go running around looking for what you have in mind, but what if what you have in mind isn’t at all what a Snurdle is then you are really going to be frustrated chasing around
- You would probably find this to be very difficult. How can you capture something which you don’t really have a concept of?
- Thus it is important to clarify our understanding of balance in order to more effective in finding it.
- In this regard some definitions may be valuable. Let me share with you what I believe to be less useful definitions of Balance and what I believe to be a more useful definition of balance.

✘ Proposed less useful definitions of Balance:

Well Rounded Regularity or Equalizing the Scales

- this is often a default definition of balance that many people adopt. They feel that they should try to develop every possible area of their life and aim towards being a well-rounded person with many interests, pass-times, etc. They feel that each area of their lives must weigh out evenly like the scale, so one is constantly running to adjust. They also may feel that every day, week, month, year should be regular.
- The problem is that this is a definition which is nearly impossible to achieve. Therefore it results in a tremendous amount of stress because one never experiences this definition of balance.

- ☑ Proposed more valuable definition of Balance:
 - Consistently Living Life on the Edge, Without Falling off the Edge.
 - Living Life – living not just simply existing. Living life to the full!
 - Without Falling Off the Edge – knowing one’s limitations and boundary’s so that they don’t fall off the edge and crash.
- This definition seeks to view balance less as an equalization of all parts and more like a balance beam. It states that we can find balance by doing some things to live our lives to the fullest but ensuring that we don’t overdo it and fall off the edge.
- When you think about great leader (Winston Churchill, Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, etc), they were not balanced in the sense of the previous definition. Yet they accomplished great things and lived life to the full because they lived life on the edge, without falling off.

Therefore the key component in understanding balance isn’t trying to do a little bit of everything or to balance the scales equally in all areas. The key is knowing where the edges are in one’s life and this requires life-leadership.

Societal/Cultural Factors Affecting You and I related to Balance

- We also need to orient ourselves with respect to a number of background considerations. These are things, often present in our culture, and sometimes in ourselves, which affect the pursuit of Balance. This assumes that the person is already committed and growing in their spiritual lives. These come from things I have experienced personally, observations I have made with many people and comments directly from a variety of people. There are 4 major categories:

1. **The Tendency Toward Activity** – The world is a busy place. More than ever our society, business, etc. is lending toward efficiency, activity, busyness, and production. Even our educations have become very active. We work with students and student life has changed dramatically in the past 20 years.

We live in this kind of culture, and must acknowledge that it can and is rubbing off on us even without us actively choosing it. There are 2 aspects of this area that I observe are also quite common:

- a. Automatic Refill - Another result of our culture of activity is that people tend to automatically fill their lives with activities. Even if space opens up in one’s schedule, there is a tendency to automatically find something new to fill it. For example, a person might feel that they are very busy and little free time but when a regular activity, like a class once a week, ends, there is a natural reaction to find something else to fill it. This is despite the fact that the person feels too busy. The natural response seems to be that they feel that since time has opened up, they need to fill it.
- b. Have Your Cake and Eat it Too - Related to the previous point is that there can be a tendency for leaders to think that they can “have their cake and eat it too”. This means that they feel that they need to try and be involved with as much as they can. They don’t realize that they can’t be involved in and do everything. This can lead to a

feeling of being stretched so thin that the quality of their involvements is quite diminished. But this is also a cultural attitude that can infect our perspectives on balance.

2. **The Tendency to define our Value in what we do** – Our culture also disposes us to define our self-worth by what we do. Therefore the more you can do and the better you can do it, the more valuable you are. This can lead to a performance oriented disposition where we seek to find our value in doing. This can also be transposed in an incorrect way in ministry or leadership. Since ministry and leadership are a gift of self and is very much connected to one's life purpose, we as leaders can mistakenly seek to define ourselves and seek worth in the activities of ministry and ministry, and justify it to oneself as good because ministry and leadership are good. This will quickly lead to burn out, lack of fulfillment, frustration, and people pleasing. Self-worth must always be found in our identity as a child of God, and not in what we do whether it is ministry or not, but yet our culture often tells us the opposite.
3. **The Tendency for Compartmentalization of our Lives** – Today it is quite a common feature of our culture to live in a compartmentalized way. We see it in many areas. I recall a homily I once heard where the priest was challenging the congregation not to compartmentalize their faith simply to Mass on Sunday. This tendency in our culture can kind of lead to us trying to keep a bunch of separate boxes in our lives, all neat and tidy from each other. This compartmentalization can lead to polarizing or separation of family, friends and work which can be unhealthy.

It can really affect us when we find ourselves pulled in opposite directions or approaching personal life and work almost as enemies. For example: My work takes me away from my personal life (family and friends). The needs of my personal life make it difficult to accomplish the goals of my work. It can create a great tension.

This compartmentalization of our lives can create competing interests and tensions between ministry, work, family, friends recreations. This reality of our culture leads us to feel pulled in multiple directions, never being able to find satisfaction in any of them. This reality is very tiring and can be very frustrating.

Another related temptation that can be experienced that of the “grass is greener” perspective where we tend to think that if we were just doing something else or perhaps working somewhere else we wouldn't be a stressed or unbalanced. The temptation is quite common for young leaders, since often there can be a lack of experience of work in other settings.

4. **The Tendency to not recognize seasons In your Life** – Where we are in life plays an important factor in our pursuit for balance. For example, the early years of one's career can be extremely filled with activity. They are learning what and how to do their work. This takes more time and energy than someone who has been working in a certain field for a number of years.
 - a. Think of new teachers. They need to prepare lessons plans, correct assignments and tests, organize extra-curricular activities, etc. The first few years can be extremely hectic.

- b. But also think of learning a new sport or skill. At first it requires a lot of practice and hard work before it comes naturally.

But there are also times when we move into other seasons: marriage, family, etc. These have different requirements. I have recently been reflecting on the fact that I have 6 kids! It is quite different than if I had 2 kids or no kids.

So our state of Life as can have an impact on us. Single people often can give more time because of less family demands and this could lead to over-activity or unbalanced activity. Single people can choose to invest most or even all of their time in work or ministry related activities and relationships; and not choose to develop other areas of their lives. Individuals who have other commitments such as family, community, etc. do face this issue as intensely since they more easily feel the need to be invested in these other relationships. Not being aware and able to acknowledge the seasons of life we are in, can have significant affects on our ability to find balance.

- Looking at these 4 background issues, does one come to the conclusion that this experience of activity is a normal healthy way to live?
- No. Aspects of our culture are not healthy, but in order be able to live in the culture without it negatively affecting us, we need to recognize and understand the culture and these issues.
- We will look at ways to overcome and mitigate these factors but first I want you to take some time to identify within yourself, which might be affecting you.

Discussion: As you look at your own life and these factors which can you identify affects you most? Why?

Life Leadership - Tools and Tips to restoring balance in our lives:

Working from this new definition or different understanding – *“Consistently Living Life on the Edge, Without Falling off the Edge”* - we can begin to look at some practical ways of life leadership. There are 5 areas of recommendations I would make for leaders regarding Balance and I include a number of tips for each. These tips aren’t exhaustive nor does a person need to do them all tomorrow. They are there to stimulate your growth in this area.

1. Recognizing the cultural traps and factors affecting – When one can understand that the culture is pulling them in certain directions and that we are all affected by the culture to greater and lesser degrees, one can actively recognize inappropriate attitudes and behaviours. Before one can improve, one always needs to understand their present reality.

TIPS:

- Seek to continually be aware of these factors and others
- Review these from time to time

2. Taking ownership of your own self leadership – It is very easy to blame other people or circumstances for ones feelings of imbalance, to attribute the negative feelings of the

activities of our lives to what seem to be external factors, like our work: “I am just so busy because of ministry/work.” This temptation if acted upon can cause 2 difficulties. Firstly it could disproportionately assign blame and secondly it could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: when you speak negatively about how busy you are, you really start to feel busy.

But in fact, this response will cripple people from ever gaining balance in their lives. It is very important that one realizes that the unbalance is not the fault of the activity in their life; it’s the person’s fault for not managing it. By adopting the perspective of personal responsibility for busyness or imbalance, one moves into a place of proactivity instead of reactivity. You take control of leading your life instead of external factors leading you.

Another important consideration is that growth and maturity in time management. Investing in learning a solid system of managing goals, roles, tasks and relationships. A lot of stress results from the sense from having many tasks or goals left undone. And in fact, no “eustress” (positive feelings after completing something) are experienced because of poor life management. Thus their life feels out of control. A lack of personal time management can also lead to a sense of being busy on the inside and unable to “leave” work at the end of the day.

TIPS:

- Commit to taking ownership of your own life and busyness
- Read and learn about Time Management: *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
- Have all your plans in 1 Calendar with Work and Family, etc.
- Utilize Technology but not a substitute for personal ownership
- Have someone experienced in Time Management mentor you

3. Discover what is important to you; pursue, and integrate your passions –

It is correct that one should be passionate about their work, but they should also be passionate about other people and activities outside of work. This is important in order to keep you grounded. Other passions keep you from being over-invested in a single area. Therefore, it is key to ask oneself: what are my passions? What do I love to do? And then to find opportunities to express those passions. Express them together with your ministry and family. Creatively bring them together where you are able.

TIPS:

- Develop a personal mission statement (<http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>)
- Discover what is important to you now: Follow the Money...and the time (Do a time audit and money audit)
- Find out what recharges you and find ways to build it in. e.g. skiing
- Join a sports team
- Find ways to integrate family and work
 - Involve your wife and kids in your ministry
 - Bring Kids with you to ministry
 - Have young people into your home

4. Figure out what you can handle – Taking time for reflective thought and recreation – It is important to be proactive in taking regular time away to reflect on one’s life, goals, balance, organization, etc. Being able to see the big picture comes more naturally to some, but time away gives space which can better enable us to get a handle on things. This is an area that is lacking in many young leaders lives. They can be more focused on production than on taking time to evaluate how they are doing, where they are going, and if anything should be changed. Reflective thought and recreation are also needed in order to stay sharp and to be able to better invest oneself in their work. Reflective time is having space to be free of mental burdens to think creatively and evaluatively.

It has been proposed already that balance includes getting the most out of life and knowing your limitations. This is not always easy and in fact, these university years are an opportunity to grow in discovering your gifts and limitations. But knowing what you can handle; when you need time away; when to say no; etc. are absolutely key to achieving a sense of balance in one’s life. And remember, you are not the Saviour, Jesus Christ is the Saviour.

TIPS:

- Pray daily
 - Examen of Conscience (see Appendix)
 - Planning and evaluation times weekly
 - Follow the Sabbath principle: Work when you are working, rest when you are resting.
 - Learning to say No in Three Steps:
 - i. Sincerely acknowledge the honor of being asked to do the request
 - ii. Explain the limitations of your current circumstance and how it would adversely affect you and likely the completion of the request
 - iii. Politely but firmly decline (and perhaps suggest an alternative person)
 - Monthly or Annual Retreats
 - Try something new each year that you have always wanted to do
5. Establishing a Rule of Life – A rule of life is simply a means of setting up some fixed or stable aspects or events in your normal life. This is a lesson we can learn from religious orders. They have traditionally excelled in this area: morning and evening prayer, community nights, etc. Families also do it by setting a regular supper time, common times for chores, bedtime routines. You can discipline your life by setting some of these events as a rule of life in your personal life, your household, or your community. This might include a regular morning prayer time, regular supper time, regular night ritual and bedtime. These self-imposed rules give you a sense of grounded-ness and do not have to be extra to the regular things in your life.

TIPS:

- Set work or study hours
- Create Traditions – family or with friends
- Have a cleaning schedule – a cluttered desk/room is a cluttered mind
- Family meals together – with no TV
- Bed time and wake time

Conclusion: A New Perspective

Remember Nick Walenda balancing high above Niagara Falls. Nick is actually a Christian and in his most difficult moments, he simply prayed, outloud calling upon the name of Jesus. You can too.

When we talk about seeking balance, a lot of us are also talking about seeking fulfillment, meaning, and purpose. We want our lives to be rewarding, enjoyable, satisfying. But in order to achieve this and in order to really be able to use the tools I shared with you previously, there is one most significant factor – and that is perspective.

In order to gain this we have an ally in the Holy Spirit.

Luke 11:13: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Ask for more of the Holy Spirit. Ask for him to enlighten you to grow in manner of life to the full!

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1. How is this information going to impact your growing in this area of “balance”? Why?
 2. What is one thing I should stop doing?
 3. What is one thing I should start doing?

The Examen of Consciousness

This is a prayer where we try to find the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we reflect on our day. This prayer can be made anywhere: on the beach, in a car, at home, in the library. Many people make the Examen twice daily: once around lunchtime and again before going to bed. There are five simple steps to the Examen, which should take 10-15 minutes to complete, and what follows is just one interpretation of these five steps in discerning the movement of God's Spirit in your day. Through this method of praying you can grow in a sense of self and the Source of self; you can become more sensitive to your own spirit with its longings, its powers, its Source; you will develop an openness to receive the supports that God offers.

Before you start: Try to be in a place where you are least likely to be disturbed, and where there is the least amount of external noise. Perhaps you might light a candle or change the lighting when you pray to symbolise the start of this activity. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.

1. Recall that you are in the presence of God. No matter where you are, hilltop or valley, country or city, in a crowd or alone, you are a creature in the midst of creation. As you quiet yourself, become aware that God is present within you, in the creation that surrounds you, in your body, in those around you. The Creator who brought you forth into being is concerned for you. The Spirit of God, sent by Christ, will remind you that you are gifted to help bring creation to its fullness. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you look on all you see with love. "Love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous or boastful, it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; ... it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right ... Love hopes all things." (1 Cor.)
2. Spend a moment looking over your day with gratitude for this day's gifts. Be concrete and let special moments or pleasures spring to mind! Recall the smell of your morning coffee, the taste of something good that you ate, the laugh of a child, the fragrance of a flower, the smile brought forth by a kind word, a lesson that you learned. Take stock of what you received and what you gave. Give thanks to God for favors received. Also look at your permanent gifts that allow your participation in this day. Recall your particular strengths in times of difficulty, your ability to hope in times of weakness, your sense of humor and your life of faith, your intelligence and health, your family and friends. God the Father gives you these to draw you into the fullness of life. As you move through the details of your day, give thanks to God for His presence in the big and the small things of your life.
3. Ask God to send you His Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions and attitudes and motives with honesty and patience. "When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13) The Holy Spirit inspires you to see with growing freedom the development of your life story. The Spirit gives a freedom to look upon yourself without condemnation and without complacency and thus be open to growth. Ask that you will learn and grow as you reflect, thus deepening your knowledge of self and your relationship with God.
4. Now review your day. This is the longest of the steps. Recall the events of your day; explore the context of your actions. Search for the internal movements of your heart and your interaction with what was before you. Ask what you were involved in and who you were with, and review your hopes and hesitations. Many situations will show that your heart was divided—wavering between helping and disregarding, scoffing and encouraging, listening and ignoring, rebuking and forgiving, speaking and silence, neglecting and thanking. Remember, this is not a time to dwell on your shortcomings; rather, it is a gentle look with the Lord at how you have responded to God's gifts. It is an opportunity for growth of self and deepening your relationship with God. Notice where you acted freely—picking a particular course of action from the possibilities you saw. See where you were swept along without freedom. What reactions helped or hindered you? See where Christ entered your decisions and where you might have paused to receive His influence. "Test yourselves," St. Paul urges, "to see whether you are living in faith; examine yourselves. Perhaps you yourselves do not realize that Christ Jesus is in you." (2 Cor.) His influence comes through His people, the Body of Christ. His influence comes through Scripture, the Word of God. Now, as you pray, Christ's spirit will help you know His presence and concern. As you daily and prayerfully explore the mystery of yourself in the midst of your actions you will grow more familiar with your own spirit and become more aware of the promptings of God's Spirit within you. Allow God to speak, challenge, encourage and teach you. Thus you will come to know that Christ is with you. Christ will continually invite you to love your neighbor as yourself and strengthen you to do this.
5. The final step is our heart-to-heart talk with Jesus. Here you speak with Jesus about your day. You share your thoughts on your actions, attitudes, feelings and interactions. Perhaps during this time you may feel led to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, etc. Having reviewed this day of your life, look upon yourself with compassion and see your need for God and try to realize God's manifestations of concern for you. Express sorrow for sin, the obscuring darkness that surrounds us all, and especially ask forgiveness for the times you resisted God's light today. Give thanks for grace, the enlightening presence of God, and especially praise God for the times you responded in ways that allowed you to better see God's life. Resolve with Jesus to move forward in action where appropriate. You might like to finish your time with the Lords Prayer.