

“At the Center of It All”

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Bible Passage: **Philippians 4:7-8** (*The Message*)

“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying pray. Let petitions and practices shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when God displaces worry at the center of your life.”

Sermon nugget: In today’s fast-paced society, often our daily busy routines cause people to face worries and concerns. What does it mean to have a sense of balance within our busy lives; and how do we find inner peace at the center of it all?

We are living in a time and culture where the majority of our daily routine is consumed trying to raise a family, work, or with other things. Our days are spent racing from one place to the next; the next appointment, the next soccer game, or the next committee meeting. Most times it seems like we are spinning our wheels. We feel overwhelmed, stressed; and we become worried and concerned.

How many of us have ever stopped for just a moment; and wished that we had a little more peace and balance in our lives? Well, that’s what we are going to explore this morning. “What does it mean to have a sense of balance; and, how do we find inner peace at the center of it all?”

A few days ago, someone sent me an article that says, “**The way to find inner peace is to finish things you've started.**” And I must say; that’s definitely working for me! I am now making a point of always finishing what I start. And because I care so much for you, I’m passing this wisdom on this morning. Here are the things I’ve finished today:

- Two chocolate donuts,
- a bagel,
- a cup of coffee,
- a glass of juice,
- and a bottle of water.

I think this really works; I feel better already!

I suspect you know that’s not the kind of peace we are talking about this morning. Today’s theme is more about an inner peace; the kind of peace that brings presence of self control or discipline in our lives. It’s the peace that gives us the ability

not to let outside events-- influence our emotions, our actions, or our reactions. I wonder what outside events are causing us imbalance today.

What are we worried or concerned about:

- Our career?
- Our family?
- Our health?
- Our relationships?
- Our finances?

I suppose you like me sometimes let pressure from the outside world -- shake our inner world. We become overpowered with worry, stress, anger, or grief. And, we try to avoid these feelings; because they bring imbalance to our lives. But to achieve true balance is by understanding the nature of these feelings, not by suppressing them.

You see balance is an integral part of our daily living; and finding that balance is one of life's greatest goals. When our lives are balanced, we can feel it! We take things in stride. We feel healthy and vibrant, challenged by life, but relaxed enough to enjoy it; yet excited by the possibilities ahead.

You know another thing about balance is that it is not still or neutral. Really, it's like riding a bike; it comes easier as we gain momentum. It's an ever-evolving dynamic that enables us to go forward, adapt our speed, and manage unexpected turns. So when our lives become imbalanced, we know it; so we began yearn for balance.

A few years back, a group of people participated in a study that dealt with American citizens "Yearning for Balance." The study was conducted here in Indianapolis and in three other major cities across the United States. The results provided some very interesting information. As a matter of fact, an Indianapolis man spoke out about the issue connected to Americans "yearning for balance." He states,

**“We have an abundance of most everything.
People today are yearning for things money cannot buy:
more time, less stress, and a sense of balance.”**

Obtaining a sense of balance is not easy! Let's face it; we live in a world full of chaos. Life is fast, mobile, instant – quicker is always better. We want to be up to date; and we want to have the latest, fastest, and greatest of everything. Some of us want to be reachable; so we find ourselves stressed; always running out of time.

The reality is we need to set aside time to rest, to relax and to enjoy unstructured, non-

goal-oriented activities. This will give our bodies and minds time to recharge, both mentally and spiritually. So what could possibly motivate us to do this, when there isn't any spare time left?

Well, I am reminded of a quote from one of my favorite theologians. He describes what motivates people into finding that center of value. As he understands it: “Every human being has an ultimate center of value. The thing that most occupies our thoughts. It affects every action that we take. It colors our thinking about every aspect of life. It is the one thing that makes us move and be; the one thing that gives our lives meaning. Without that center of value, there would be no reason to live.” (H. Richard Niebuhr)

Obviously our center of value cannot be replaced with a soccer game. And many might argue the reason to live. Some will say it's to do good and make a difference. Others may say their purpose for existence is their children. Then there are those who simply can't decide. These are the ones who feel that their sense of balance is slipping. But I believe we sometimes lose our balance, in order to regain it. The mistake we often make is accepting our imbalances as part of who we are – as oppose to learning from them.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, in her book “Kitchen Table Wisdom” writes about learning from life's experiences. She says:

Life is the ultimate teacher, but it is usually through experience we discover its deepest lessons. We are all here for a single purpose: to grow in wisdom and learn to love better.

We can do this through losing as well as through winning, having and by not having, and by succeeding or by failing.

Each of us can have a profound sense of balance outside ourselves; but only after we look within. That's why we should not cling to things; such as circumstances, people, and possessions to hold us in balance, when we do, we rely less on our internal strength; that inner strength we find when we pray.

And this is what our Bible passage is trying to help us realize this morning. Paul is the writer. And Paul always has a wonderful way of putting people's minds at ease. Imagine never having to worry or be concerned about anything. It seems impossible, doesn't it?

Many of us have worries on our jobs, in our homes or at school. But Paul advises us to turn our worries into prayers. If we want to worry less and have more inner peace and balance, Paul says

“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying pray.”

I am reminded of a story about a successful CEO who was forced to search for that inner strength. He was young and energetic. At the age of 20, he owned four different companies. He led a lavish lifestyle, had it all! But one day, his busy schedule came to a halt. At the age of 31, he was indicted for criminal conspiracy.

While staring at the wall in his cell, his outlook on life changed drastically. He realized it was more to life than having a huge career. He began to focus on his obligations as husband and family. And he vowed to turn his life around by placing God at the center of it all.

Eric Aronson is his name. He is also the author of a book, entitled DASH. Here is what he writes,

“On our tombstone, there will be two dates ... the date we were born and the date we died. That little line between those two dates – that DASH – is Our Life! Please, take some time right now and ask yourself ... How Will You Live Your Dash?”

He continues by saying, **“Don’t let your life be wasted on empty pursuits. Spend time every day praying and reflecting on the center of life and how to achieve inner peace.”**

I am convinced that the way to achieve inner peace and balance is by looking within. And as we look within, remember our Bible passage that says, **“Let petitions and praises shape our worries into prayers, letting God know our concerns.”** Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. **It’s wonderful what happens when God displaces worry at the center of your life.”**

I don’t know about you; but from now on, I’ll be taking my time. For only God can give us the ability to rise above worries and frustrations; rise above health, finances, or other upsets in our lives. At the center of it all is the reality of God’s love; a love that is fully ours -- empowered only by a loving God. And this love is so amazing, so divine; it demands our soul; it demands our life; it demands our all.

Closing

As we leave here this morning, I certainly hope and pray that each and every one remember that at the center of it all is God’s love.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.

