

FINDING BALANCE IN AN OUT-OF-BALANCE WORLD!

By Annelie Kanis

I am privileged to belong to a Bible study group where members have become close friends and share intimate issues. Over the years many issues have risen and found satisfactory closure, but one issue keeps surfacing: that of living a balanced life. Often most of us feel run over, exhausted and disorientated by trying to juggle ever increasing work responsibilities, parenthood, marital life, friendships, exercise and spending time with the Lord. For many of us our work has become the core of our identities, it consumes all our time, it has become us.



A perfect balance between work and life is an illusion!

While counselling many burnt-out individuals in my practice, I have come to realise that a perfect balance between work and life does not exist. I counsel many people exhausting themselves trying to chase an illusion of a perfect work-life balance. They are looking for a recipe with explicit steps to accomplish this perfect balance, to no avail. The truth is that each and every person is unique. We all differ with regards to personality, the amount

and type of stress we can handle, our work realities, personal circumstances, support networks and the life phase we are currently in. Before being able to achieve any kind of balance in our own lives, we firstly need to gain awareness of our own processes and, secondly accept ourselves. One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to compare ourselves to others and think: "Well, if she can work twelve hours a day, and cope with it, so must I."

Biblical principles for gaining balance in our lives.

At this point I am reminded of the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42. Like Martha, we all sometimes plan, work extremely hard and want everything perfect. In the process of pushing ourselves to the limits, we forget to sit at the Lord's feet to hear His purpose for our lives and to receive nurturing. What a vicious sad cycle! As Christians it is so important for us to do all things that Christ has called us to do. But how will we know what His purpose for our lives are if we do not make time to sit at His feet and listen? A central Biblical principle in finding a balanced life is to seek God first (Matt 6:33). This is also the example Jesus sets for us in the Bible, to pull away when tired and stressed, to pray and seek God.

Another Biblical principle related to work-life balance is that of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is a rhythm set by God in creation with the discontinuation of work as a central theme (Ex 20:8-11). The Sabbath represents one day in our week to become quiet and gain perspective on what is really important. Dorothy Bass believes that the Sabbath is a way of drawing boundaries around work and all powers threatening our lives with disintegration such as worry and anxiety. Are we as Christians living by this principle or does our Sabbath show no difference to the rest of our week?

A Few Practical Tips:

1. **Establish clearly what really matters in your life.** Knowing what is important will help you to set priorities and draw boundaries when unrealistic demands are being made by employers and others.
2. In the same way as you set goals at work, also **set goals for other areas in your life.** For example, building relationship with your teenage daughter.



3. **Learn to say “no”.** It is easy to fall in a habit of wanting to please everyone around you. There is a difference between going the extra mile, being helpful, being kind, being a good Christian and allowing yourself to be exploited. Before allowing yourself to immediately say “yes” to a request, take a

few seconds to think what the implications will be if you agree, for example will it mean you have to take work home and miss out on family time?

4. **Do not overbook your diary.** Rather schedule some time to manage crises every day. Research shows that in most situations we only achieve 50% of what we set out to achieve each day.
5. **Protect your private time.** If you have set out time for hobbies, family, Bible study or just time alone, protect it and don't feel guilty doing it.
6. **Schedule time for fun and relaxation in your diary,** as well as all other non-work related activities. We are living such busy lives that in many instances we do not think ahead, especially concerning fun in our lives.
7. If you have experienced a stressful time or traumatic event, such as a pregnancy, divorce or robbery, be patient with yourself and don't feel guilty to **take time out to work through your emotions.** Remember, you are not a light switch than can be turned on and off instantly.

If you experience difficulty in any of the above areas it may help to talk to a Christian counsellor. 🙏

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