



Balancing Life's Challenges

Bible study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, pens or pencils, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Opening: Sing "Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me" (verses 1-3) LSB 722, LW 512

Prayer: (*pray together*) Lord, we come before You with humble hearts, and we ask that Your Presence be here with us. You are our life source, and You promise that Your Word will do what You send it to do. Work in us now as we contemplate life's balancing act, the necessity of balancing time spent with You with the demands of life here on this earth. And we ask that You work in us a cheerful heart to serve others that they may see You in all that we do. In our Savior Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Balancing Acts Of Four Women

Woman 1:

Our first woman's story serves as an example of the variety of choices and everyday challenges many women face. She is a young married mom of two young children. One of her children has Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and needs nebulizer treatments at specific intervals. Because of this, and because she sleeps with an ear open to hear any sounds coming from her son's room, she is exhausted. To further challenge her, she works the early shift at her job, so she must rise daily at 5:30 a.m. She is a supervisor at her job and deals with stressful situations on a regular basis. Because of the stress, she makes certain she exercises daily. When she gets off work, she picks up one child at school and the other from daycare. Then she makes a nutritious supper for her family. When the yard needs to be mown, she does that. After supper, she posts on her "business-on-the-side" website. At church, she is a member of the LWML and volunteers to help serve refreshments for fellowship time.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman has two children to care for, one of whom has special health needs. She also works outside the home in a stressful job. She lacks sleep. She strives to find time to exercise. She has many household chores. She is an LWML member and volunteers as a refreshment server at church.

Woman 2:

Our second woman, in her mid-fifties, has been the main caretaker for her mom for 23 years. Her mom now requires more care, and her dad needs help to remember to take his medications and to take care of their finances. They reside on a farm and raise beef cattle. Our second woman also works in town three and a half days a week in a work environment that can be volatile. She has sacrificed many of her own needs to care for her parents. She lives exhausted most of the time, but her love for her parents and for her Lord spurs her on each day.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? Woman two is a caretaker for her parents. She works outside the home three days a week in a volatile work environment. She is often exhausted.

Woman 3:

Like Woman 2, our third woman is also a caretaker for her mom who has dealt for decades with difficulties resulting from a severe stroke. Two of her adult children face challenging marriages and the third is angry with her because she did not join her at an important doctor's appointment for her daughter. In addition, her house needs to be cleaned, the laundry basket is overflowing, the garden needs to be weeded, and produce must be canned. Her children and grandchildren have school activities that she wants to attend, and she wants to make time to teach them God's word. Her husband is a pastor who has led five funerals in the past three weeks and he definitely needs her support and encouragement as he cares for grieving family members. This woman also serves the Lord in many ways in her congregation, including making compassionate care visits to families. The families she visits are dealing with a variety of losses.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman takes care of her mother who has health difficulties. She is dealing with tough situations with her adult children. She has household chores. She has school activities to attend for her children and grandchildren. She is a pastor's wife who knows her husband needs her support and encouragement. She visits grieving families in her congregation.

Woman 4:

A fourth woman's life chronicles other challenges. Both she and her husband are elderly. It seems that about all of their outings are for doctor appointments. Their bodies don't work like they used to, and their days are filled with aches and pains. Everything takes much longer to do than before. They both need medication, extra care, medical equipment, and a lot of fortitude. Their mental faculties are slipping and they are concerned that they may have to give up their drivers' licenses. They may even need to move into a different living situation. Financial concerns are real.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman and her husband face health and aging challenges. They may have to give up their freedom to drive places on their own. They may have to move to a different living situation. They also have financial concerns.

Each of these women face different challenges. What about you? Jot down some challenges and situations which you are currently trying to balance in your life. If you feel comfortable, share these with your group. Other challenges participants may face include job losses, adult children living with them at home, cancer and other health issues, loss of a spouse, re-entering the workforce. Encourage those who feel comfortable sharing their challenges with the group to do so.

How does balancing these challenges make you feel physically? Responses may include exhaustion, tension headaches and stomach aches, insomnia, lack of appetite or overeating due to challenges. Emotionally? Responses may include angry, depressed, sad, distracted, or impatient.

How have these challenges affected your walk with God? Responses may range from being drawn closer to God and their dependence on Him to neglecting worship and time in God's Word.

We Live Lives Of Busyness

We live crazy, busy lives filled with others' needs and desires, our own needs and preferences, church and community needs and opportunities, ministry choices and challenges, political turmoil, and the list goes on. Too often we find ourselves gridlocked by activities and schedules. When the busyness gets out of hand, we feel frazzled, trapped, fatigued, and even ineffective. We may lose sight and control of what we believe should be priorities in our lives. Our mental, spiritual and physical health may even decline and suffer.

How in control of your schedule are you? Allow participants a chance to share. Responses will depend upon how much of their schedule is of their own making or is set by the needs of others.

At this time, are you able to balance your priorities? Why or why not? Encourage willing participants to share their balancing experiences.

Voluntary Commitments

Some 'demands' of life are voluntary. We choose to serve in areas we enjoy, with the gifts God has lavished upon us. What opportunities are you involved in by choice? List them and share with your group. If service in these areas is fulfilling for you, tell your group why. Participants' responses will likely include both church-related service and school or community volunteer commitments.

Uninvited Invasions

At other times, life's challenges invade our lives uninvited. Death, an incurable disease, health issues like a stroke or heart attack, the loss of a job, a financial crisis, a divorce, family friction, abuse, strained relationships, a geographical move, and the like force us to serve in new and demanding ways. Hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados, earthquakes, and other disasters smack us in the face and render us helpless, at least for a time.

Which involuntary realities/demands in life are affecting you negatively, and why? Encourage participants to share some of the uninvited and unexpected challenges they currently face.

It's not easy to balance the challenges in our lives so that we can keep our most important priorities front and center. All of us have our own ideas and goals regarding how we want to live and serve. All of us are also faced with the unexpected. Our life in service to others in God's kingdom is just as valid and necessary as our spending time in God's word and in prayer. Many other facets of our lives including taking care of our families and homes and working at jobs outside the home are also a part of Christian living. Instead of a matter of what *ought to* be done, the issue becomes, what is *possible*? Since our humanity limits us, reality begs the questions, "What *can* we do, and what must we leave undone? What are our prime responsibilities and what are our limitations?"

God Helps Us Keep Our Balance

In His Word, God offers us cautions and directions so that we can balance life's challenges in ways that glorify Him.

Read Matthew 13:15a and Galatians 5:16–21. What can happen to us when balancing life's challenges disconnects us from our life source, Jesus? Matthew 13:15 warns that we may close our eyes and ears to what God wants to tell us. Our hearts may become dull as we no longer seek the will of God in our lives. Galatians 5:16–21 lists the desires of the flesh that can take over our lives when we disconnect from God. These include fleshly desires, sexual immortality, impurity, idolatry, strife, jealousy, and anger.

Read Exodus 20:1-8. How do God's first three commandments guide us as we balance life's challenges? In The First Commandment of His Law, God reminds us to put Him first above anything else. The Second Commandment reminds us not to misuse God's name, but rather to "call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, p. 67. In The Third Commandment, God reminds us of the importance of the Sabbath day as a time set aside "to worship and to ponder the power and goodness of God in His work of creation [as well as] the graciousness of God's work of redemption." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, pp. 74–75. This commandment warns us "not to despise or neglect worship or to reject or disregard God's Word." God wants us to "treasure His Word as sacred and to devote ourselves to His Word (in private devotion and public worship)." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, pp. 75–76.

According to the Scripture references below, what promises does God give us to encourage and help us in our daily balancing acts?

Isaiah 41:10: God promises to strengthen us, help us, and to uphold us.

Isaiah 43:1–3a: God has redeemed us. We belong to Him. He promises to protect us from danger.

Philippians 4:6–7: God invites us to come to Him in prayer with all of our concerns. He promises to give our hearts peace in Jesus, our Savior.

1 John 2:15–17: The world and the things in it are temporary. Those who love the world do not love God. But whoever "does the will of God abides forever (v. 17).

Which of these promises encourage you and give you hope? Why? Provide ample time for participants to share.

Relief, Rescue, And Redemption

We need not be knocked off balance by life's challenges, invasions and busyness. God gives us His Word as well as His means of grace (Holy Baptism, Holy Communion) to keep our focus on Him.

As you seek to balance the challenges in your life, how can each of these truths from God's Word keep your focus on God and on His gracious will and work for you despite your missteps?

Psalm 37:3–8: When we trust in God and commit our way to Him, He promises to give us what we desire according to His will for us and to act on our behalf. Trusting in God means that we wait patiently for His response as well as refrain from anger and worry.

Proverbs 30:5: God's Word is truth and we can trust in it. God shields us from troubles and dangers.

Psalms 119:9–16: Following God's Word keeps our way pure and helps us to know what is sinful. When we are in the Word, our focus is on our Triune God. This focus brings us joy.

Isaiah 35:4: We do not have to be afraid for God has saved us through Jesus and will guard and protect us.

Matthew 6:25–34: God values us more than anything He has created. He promises to take care of all our needs.

Matthew 11:28: In Jesus, we find rest from all of our difficult life challenges. We can trust in His power and strength because He died and rose to save us from our sins.

Matthew 28:20b: We are never alone for Jesus promises to be with us always.

John 15:5–12: Jesus is the "vine" and we are the "branches" (v. 5). Those who have faith in Him will bear much fruit" (v. 5)—good works done in Jesus' name. Our God loves us and commands us to love others as He loves us.

1 Corinthians 10:31: Whatever we do, God directs us to do it to His glory.

1 Corinthians 11:23b–26: Whenever we partake of The Lord's Supper, we remember and proclaim Jesus' death for our sins. Through this means of grace, God forgives our sins and strengthens us to live for Him.

Ephesians 4:32-5:2: Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving ...as God in Christ forgave you (v. 32). Imitate God and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us (v. 2). God works in us to help us to show this kind of sacrificial love to others.

Titus 3:5–7: We have been saved from eternal death through Holy Baptism. Daily God forgives us and renews us so that we may follow Him and His will for our lives.

Read Romans 8:31–32, 35–38. Whatever challenges may come your way, on what can you be certain when you trust in Jesus as your risen Lord and Savior? We can be certain that God always loves us and that there is no challenge that can separate us from His love for us in Christ Jesus.

Look back at the challenges faced by the four women at the beginning of this study. What truths from the Bible that you've explored today could you share with each of these women to help them balance the challenges they face? Allow time for participants to share.

God, in His grace for us in Christ Jesus, enables and empowers us to learn, practice, and change. This does not depend upon our resolve. Instead, it is sealed in the redemptive work of Jesus. What a wondrous gift He gives us! May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you to do God's will.

Closing Prayer: Merciful God, help us to make You our priority, even in the midst of life's busyness. Help us daily to set aside time to read Your Scriptures and to pour out our hearts to You in prayer. Empower us, by Your Holy Spirit, to believe Your promises and to carry out Your

commands. Work in us a willingness to share Jesus with our family, our neighbors, our community, and our world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen

Sing: "Fight the Good Fight," (verses 1-4) LSB 664, TLH 447, LW 299

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