

BALANCING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

BY VICKIE EMERY

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

Prayer: 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. 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 Two Women

Jane is in her mid-fifties and 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. Jane 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.

1. What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

Like Jane, Brenda 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. Brenda's husband is a pastor who has officiated at five funerals in the past three weeks. He definitely needs her support and encouragement as he cares for grieving families. She also serves the Lord in many ways in her congregation, including making compassionate care visits. The families she visits are dealing with a variety of losses.

2. What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

3. 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. _____

4. How does balancing these challenges make you feel physically and emotionally? _____

5. How have these challenges affected your walk with God? _____

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. 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.

6. How *in control* of your schedule are you? _____
7. At this time, are you able to balance your priorities? Why or why not? _____

Voluntary Commitments

Some demands of life are voluntary. We choose to serve in areas we enjoy, with gifts God has lavished upon us.

8. In what opportunities are you involved by choice? List them, and share with your group. If service in these areas is fulfilling for you, tell your group why. _____

Uninvited Invasions

At times, life's challenges, uninvited, invade our lives. Death, health issues, a financial crisis, divorce, strained relationships, a geographical move, and other life changes force us to serve in new and demanding ways.

9. Which involuntary realities/demands in life are affecting you negatively, and why? _____

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 with regard to how we want to live and serve. All of us are also faced with the unexpected. Spending time in God's Word and in prayer is vital; our life in serving others in God's kingdom is valid and necessary. 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?"

10. What are our primary responsibilities, and what are our limitations? _____

God Helps Us Keep Our Balance

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

11. 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? _____

12. Read **Exodus 20:1-8**. How do God's first three commandments guide us as we balance life's challenges? _____

13. 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 _____

Isaiah 43:1-3a _____

Philippians 4:6-7 _____

Which of these promises encourage you and give you hope? Why? _____

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.

14. 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?

Psalms 37:3-8 _____

Matthew 28:20 _____

John 6:53-58 _____

1 Corinthians 10:31 _____

Titus 3:5-7 _____

Romans 8:31-32, 35-38 _____

15. Look back at the challenges you listed at the beginning of this study. What biblical truths from today's study could you remember and share with women to help them balance the challenges they face? _____

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.

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

Vickie Emery lives in Fairbury, Nebraska, with her pastor husband Glen, and they attend Grace Lutheran Church. She has a heart for women's ministry and hopes to do more Christian writing.