

Balance vs. Centeredness

Dr. Greg Bourgond

When I talk with men it isn't long before we get around to how little time we have to do what we would like to do. I hear a version of the following...

"I'm jammed, I don't have enough time."

"Hobbies? What hobbies?"

"I'm barely keeping my head above water."

"If I could only bring balance to my life."

Sound familiar guys? Many of us wouldn't admit it but we feel like we're on a treadmill, running faster all the time but not getting anywhere. We know we need to make room for the important things but there is no distance between our load and our limits. We're living in a herniated environment, compressed on every side. Yet, yet we always seem to find the time for what we really want to do--go to that game, spend time with the guys, work on that truck, etc. So what's the problem?

We know our priorities but seem to lack the will to act on them consistently. Oh, how we long for a balanced life. Many of us feel out of control. We barely have enough energy to make it through the day it seems. We race through our days trying to fulfill our responsibilities and obligations only to find we lost ground. Some of us are so tired of fight the current of our lives we give up and go with the stream.

Over the next few postings I would like to address this struggle. Is a balanced life possible? Can we find order in the chaos of our lives? Can we determine the significant from the tyranny? Is it possible to maintain equilibrium in the midst of our topsy-turvy world? Let's find out.

Don't you hate surveys? I do too. But the wonderful thing about being the teacher is that you get to ask people to do what they hate to do. Let's take a survey.

1. What percent (%) of your time is spent of the following activities?

- Your daily responsibilities?
- Other people's demands and crisis?
- Recreation and escape?

- Personal planning and development?

2. What percent (%) of your time is spent with the following people?

- Work associates?
- Friends?
- Self?
- Family?

*“Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” **Ephesians 5:15-16***

Time is a precious resource. It cannot be saved or stored; it can only be used. Time that is not used is lost forever ... it can never be recovered. Everyone has 24 hours per day.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*

- a time to be born and a time to die,
- a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- a time to kill and a time to heal,
- a time to tear down and a time to build,
- a time to weep and a time to laugh,
- a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
- a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- a time to search and a time to give up,
- a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- a time to tear and a time to mend,
- a time to be silent and a time to speak,

- a time to love and a time to hate,
- a time for war and a time for peace.”

QUESTION: What one gift could you give to your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, your friends they would appreciate the most? ***Your time!***

QUESTION: If you had more time what would you do with it?

QUESTION: What determines how you use your time?

QUESTION: Who determines how you use your time?

BALANCE VERSUS CENTEREDNESS

Is a balanced life really possible? Does life happen to us in a predictable manner? Is all of life under your control?

Life comes at us in unpredictable ways. Sometimes, we see it coming. Other times it takes us by surprise. Sometimes we're prepared. Other times we are not prepared.

Question: What has happened in your life that caught you by surprise and threw you for a loop – something you didn't know was coming, something that knocked you off balance?

Picture yourself on a tightrope. What would your mind be on? What would be the state of your body? What would happen if a gust of wind hit you from the left? From the right? Would you be able to relax? What would be your primary focus?

Maintaining balance in the midst of life's circumstances is difficult if not impossible to achieve. Life happens to us in very unpredictable ways that can knock us off balance.

*For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. **Ecclesiastes 8:6***

Christ was never in a hurry ...

When we look at the earthly life of Jesus we don't see a harried haphazard and reactive lifestyle. No, we see a proactive centered life. Crowds pressed in on him, people clamored for His attention. His disciples urged His involvement. The Bible says that He often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:16). He was never harried even when his friend Lazarus died (Luke 11:6). He

commended Mary to her sister Martha for choosing the right thing to do while she was distracted by many things (Luke 10:40-42).

Christ was centered because He knew His priority – to do the will of His Father and to finish His work (John 4:34).

He knew His priorities and ordered His life to fulfill those priorities.

We have a choice!

... to live reactively or proactively,

... to live in accordance with God's plans or our plans.

... to live in alignment with His purposes for us or others purposes for us.

... to live by the clock or live by the compass.

Time Management Matrix

Quadrant II Time Management Matrix

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I Ministry Crises Personal Crises Pressing Problems Deadline-driven Projects Job Responsibilities Important Meetings Some Phone Calls	II Prayer Spiritual Renewal Values Clarification Relationship Building True Re-creation Visioning, Planning, Training Preparation
Not Important	III Interruptions Some Mail, Some Email Some Phone Calls Other People's Crises Some Meetings Drop-in Visitors Popular Activities	IV Trivia, Busy Work Irrelevant Mail, Irrelevant Email Some Phone Calls Time Wasters Busy Work Excessive TV Escape Activities

Stephen R. Covey 1994

Steven Covey popularized a matrix depicting four types of activity (click on image at the beginning of this posting for a more visible viewing).

Quadrants I, II, and IV are reactive activities while quadrant II is proactive. Too much time spent in I, II, and IV results in a fast moving treadmill existence. Spending sufficient time in IV limits and controls the effects of the other quadrant activities.

If we spend too much time in **Quadrant I** we are susceptible to stress, burnout, crisis management, and always putting out fires.

Too much time spent in **Quadrant III** results in short-term focus, crisis management, reactive leadership, little time or patience for goals and plans, feeling victimized, feeling out of control, and produces shallow or broken relationships. Too much time spent in **Quadrant IV** results in total irresponsibility, being replaced or fired from jobs, and an unhealthy dependence on others or institutions for basics.

When sufficient time is spent in **Quadrant II** the results are quite different: vision, perspective, centeredness, discipline, few crises, and control. Covey states that “In a successful company 20-25% of time is spent on Quadrant I activities, just 15% of time on urgent but not important (Quadrant III) activities, and 65-80% of time on Quadrant II activities. Quadrant II activities - important but not urgent activities, are present wherever success is present.”

How does a “spinning top” maintain its equilibrium against opposing forces? When it is hit it momentarily knocked off equilibrium but soon regains its upright posture. It instinctively finds its center of gravity.

A balanced life is fraught with anxiety and tension because life doesn't happen to us in an even, predictable, and balanced way. The quest for balanced living is an honorable pursuit but an impossible one.

A life of centeredness, on the other hand, is entirely possible. Christ is our model for centeredness.

What does a centered life look like?

What is your spiritual center of gravity? Is it so strong that you're able to find your equilibrium no matter what life throws at you?

A. Four Essential Elements

What do we know about this “spiritual center of gravity?” It has four essential elements the build on one another.

1. The first essential element is a personal relationship with Christ.

2. The second essential element is biblical beliefs and values.
3. The third essential element is a Christian worldview.
4. The fourth essential element is pure motives.

B. Spheres of Impact

It influences all life's activities and interactions.

1. Physical
2. Emotional
3. Intellectual
4. Relational
5. Professional
6. Spiritual

Once we know our personal "spiritual center of gravity" we should order our lives accordingly.

What is the foundation for our spiritual center of gravity?

We are "wired at birth" for God's Purposes!

The book of Psalms and Ecclesiastes offers some clarity on the issue. Psalm 139 dispels the notion that life happens by chance, that it is unplanned, a matter of fate and circumstance. We are not here by mistake or by chance but by decree and deliberate intention.

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. **Psalm 139:13-18***

Secondly, Blasé Pascal, the 17th century philosopher, scientist and inventor, described a phenomenon we are born with called a "God-shaped void". Because each of us possesses a so-called "God-shaped void", we are compelled to ask fundamental questions about life. Ecclesiastes 3, brings this idea into biblical focus by informing us that we have been embedded with a sense of the eternal.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11

From this embedded sense of the eternal arises the uncontrollable necessity to find answers to three (3) fundamental questions about life. These questions are asked in every culture and every generation.

1. Why am I here?

2. Where am I going?

3. What is the significance of my life?

The Bible gives us a clear picture regarding these fundamental questions.

- God DOES have a purpose for our lives.
- We ARE here for a reason.
- Our life CAN count for something of lasting value.

So far we identified four essential elements necessary to a centered life—our spiritual center of gravity: a personal relationship with Christ, biblical beliefs and values, a Christian worldview, and pure motives. In this posting we'll expand on the first two essential elements--a personal relationship with Christ and biblical beliefs and values.

1. Personal Relationship with Christ.

A personal relationship with Christ is initiated when a person receives Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Such a commitment recognizes that apart from God's activity salvation is impossible. Jesus Man is born into this world with a sinful nature. It compels him to act contrary to the nature and will of God. Until this rebellious spirit surrenders to God by receiving His provision of atonement and forgiveness we live as a prisoner to this nature." The "good news" is that through Christ we have received forgiveness. This forgiveness must be personally appropriated before eternal salvation is possible. See Biblical Solutions for Life for more information on how to establish a personal relationship with Christ.

2. Biblical Beliefs and Values.

Beliefs - what we trust in, rely on and cling to.

Our central beliefs are the foundation for all behavior. The Greek word for believe means what we trust in, rely on, and cling to. They are more than verbal affirmations of beliefs. In other words, at our deepest core, they are what we

really believe. So much so, that they are a part of our being. They determine our values, affect our attitudes, and influence our motives. They ultimately determine how we behave in a given situation.

A word of caution is necessary at this point - what we verbally affirm as our beliefs may have little relationship to how we behave. What we say we are does not always align with who we really are. In many instances, what we say about ourselves bears little resemblance to what we actually do. Talk is cheap, as the saying goes.

We have become very good at rhetoric that has little or no relationship to who we are at the core of our being. We use skillful verbiage to hold others at a distance because, if they get too close and observe our behavior over time they'll finally know what a fraud we are.

So the verbal statements we make aren't proof perfect. If our behavior was observed over time, disregarding what we say about ourselves in the process, a pattern would soon emerge that would give us a clearer picture of who we really are and what we really believe. Behavior observed over time will reflect who we really are at the core of our being.

Hebrew scholars attest to the fact that real faith is beliefs in action. They see no separation between one's beliefs and one's actions. More specifically, a belief doesn't become an ingrained belief until it's acted upon. Repeated application of one's beliefs indicates what one really believes. If there is a disconnect between the two, one's beliefs and one's actions, than they are not really beliefs but simply affirmations or aspirations.

Biblical belief systems might include the 10 Commandments, loving others as yourself, we are created in the image of God, man is sinful, human nature is corrupt, God loves us, apart from God life is meaningless, salvation is the only means to wholeness, God has plans for our lives, man's chief purpose is to demonstrate God's excellence in all that we do, human life is to be cherished, widows and orphans are to be taken care of, Christ is the only means of salvation.

Corrupted or distorted beliefs might include homosexuality is genetically determined, truth is relative, my body is my own, there is no God, there are no absolutes, power is success, all lifestyles are to be accepted, performance is all that matters, the ends justifies the means.

Proverbs 6:20-23; John 8:31-32; James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-6; 1 John 3:18-19; 1 John 5:2-5; 1 John 5:9-12; 1 Peter 3:15-16.

Values - what we hold in esteem, the principles we live by.

Values are the hills we will die on; the principles we live by. They comprise our moral system, our morality. It is the filter through which life is processed and decisions are made. Values are what we esteem and find hard to understand why others may not. Related terms would include morality, virtues, ethics, principles, rules, standards, and norms.

A humanist and a Christian can value truth. The focus and outcomes of living by the value of truth are very different. For instance, a humanist might adopt the value of truth because it is good for business or they want the esteem of others. Its usefulness is determined by how it furthers the self-interests of the individual. In other words, the humanist is primarily concerned about themselves or how they are perceived. A Christian might also embrace truth but defines the value from a biblical point of view—God's truth sets us free and releases us from the bondage of uncertainty. Living by God's truth produces qualitatively different results than one who lives by truth as they perceive it.

The incorporation of a biblically-centered belief goes through several stages.

First, for many of us, we **aspire** to values that are not in any way reflected in our behavior. We might esteem them but they have no influence over us. They are an interest but little more.

Second, for some of us, we have a distinct **preference** for one or more values over others. For instance we might value loyalty over honesty, or mercy over justice. But in either case they are simply preferences having little impact on our behavior.

The **third** level of resolve is **respect**. We respect certain values to the degree that we can't understand why others don't respect the same value. When we see examples of these values played out in the lives of others it immediately gets our attention. Yet, respect for a certain value is no guarantee it will influence our own behavior.

The **fourth** level of resolve is **affirmation**. This level may produce public proclamations of affirmation of one or more values. We 'go on record' that this value or these values are important to us. We are willing to declare it and defend it. But still, this level of resolve might produce little consistent and repeated reflection in our behavior.

The **fifth** level of resolve is **commitment**. It is at this stage that we are willing to act on a value we esteem. We proactively decide to intentionally live by this value. The evidence of commitment is in the number of instances we can testify to its influence in our behavior. Habitual acting out of the value becomes a high priority to the degree that we are willing to be held accountable for it.

The **sixth** and final level of resolve is when the habitual practice of a particular value becomes a fixed part of our character and is now a **virtue** in our lives. Again, virtues are “specific dispositions, skills, or qualities of excellence that together make up a person’s character, and that influence his or her way of life.” A value becomes a virtue when it is an ingrained habit which one applies without really thinking much about it.

Biblically-informed values might include centered living, devotion to God, family first, loyalty, justice, mercy, honesty, fairness, hard work, punctuality, self-discipline, courage, submission to the authority of God's word, being a man of integrity.

Corrupted values might include any form of sex is permissible, self-satisfaction, cunning, euthanasia, deception, my race is superior to all others, if it feels good do it, pornography is art, tolerance first and always, cheating is O.K.

Proverbs 4:7; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 8:10; Galatians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:5-9.

3. Christian Worldview.

Attitudes - what we think, our perceptions and worldview.

Each of us has a set of perceptual attitudes that help shape our outlook on life. If beliefs are the foundations for our behavior, and values are the filters through which we process life's decisions, then attitudes are the lens through which we observe life around us. Our perceptions about life are shaped by our attitudes. Our system of attitudes is also called our worldview. The term worldview refers to any "ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, and man's relations to God and the world."

Our set of perceptual attitudes or worldview determines how we perceive and interpret our observations of the world around us! Dan Taylor, in *The Myth of Certainty*, states that "every person has a way of making sense out of the world. We have a compulsion for ordering and explaining our experiences. We belong to communities of belief which help shape, whether we are conscious of it or not, our views of the world and our actions in it... Most people thoughtlessly adapt an inherited world view, or one absorbed from their surroundings. Even those who explicitly work one out often operate in daily life by a different, less conscious system than the one they carefully construct."

How we interpret events, draw conclusions about what we read, evaluate what we observe, assess what we hear, process arguments, depends on the worldview we hold at the time.

Critical Elements of a Worldview

According to Dr. David Clark, dean for the Center of Biblical and Theological Foundations and professor of theology for Bethel Seminary, five essential issues must be addressed in the formation of a 'worldview.'

- 1. The nature of ultimate reality.**
- 2. The nature of human personhood.**
- 3. The basic human dilemma.**
- 4. The solution to the human dilemma.**
- 5. Our human destiny.**

For instance, let's compare two worldviews, secular humanism and Buddhism. With regard to the nature of ultimate reality the secular humanist views the natural world as the ultimate reality. The Buddhist on the other hand sees nothingness as the ultimate reality – that is, what is true reality.

When it comes to a theory about personhood, the secular humanist sees mankind as highly evolved animals. The Buddhist sees mankind as non-distinct, a simple part of a complex whole. Self-actualization is completely out of the picture because self-identity is an anathema (a taboo) to Buddhists.

The human dilemma (the essential problem of making it through life) is a lack of knowledge for the humanist. The Buddhist' perception regarding the essential nature of the human dilemma is the problems that arise from human desires.

When it comes to the solution for the human dilemma, the humanist believes that education will solve any problem. The Buddhist believes we must experience enlightenment that presupposes an elimination of human desires.

Finally, the concept of our human destiny is 'living the dream' for the humanist. In other words, taking full advantage of what the natural world has to offer requires knowledge that can only be produced by proper education. For the Buddhist, our human destiny is met when we reach Nirvana, a euphemism for 'nothingness.'

Ronald Nash (quoted earlier), professor of philosophy and theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, suggests consideration of seven major elements for a "well-formed" worldview: God, ultimate reality, knowledge, ethics, humankind, a set of ideals that lays out how he or she thinks things should be, and an explanation for the disparity between the ways things are and the way they ought to be. "Christianity attributes the discrepancy between the ideal and actual

existence to the pervasiveness of sin. An inadequate (or corrupted) worldview, like improper eyeglasses, hinder our efforts to understand God, the world, and ourselves.”

Nash also states that each worldview has a ‘cardinal’ or ‘hinge’ presupposition – a ‘touchstone’ overarching presupposition that acts as an ordering influence for all other presuppositions – “a fundamental truth about reality (that) serves as a criterion to determine which other presuppositions may or may not count as candidates for belief (and values).” In the opinion of Nash (and I wholeheartedly agree) the following presupposition is the ‘touchstone,’ overarching, ordering belief.

“Human beings and the universe in which they reside are the creation of God who has revealed Himself in Scripture (and Christ).” (pages 51-52)

The Christian Worldview - Simplified

1. **The nature of ultimate reality** – God exists and is active in our lives.
2. **The nature of human personhood** – humans bear the image of God.
3. **The basic human dilemma** – the image of God is marred by sin.
4. **The solution to the human dilemma** – the person and work of Christ.
5. **Our human destiny** – eternal life or eternal damnation.

Some Key Beliefs of the Christian Worldview

(Adapted from chapter 2 of Worldviews In Conflict by Ronald Nash, 1992).

- All human beings carry the image of God in their person. This image, marred by sin, makes us creatures capable of reasoning, love, and God-consciousness. It also explains why we are moral creatures.
- Universal moral laws exist and are ordained by God
- The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever
- Sin alienates us from God and enslaves us.
- All human beings long for purpose, progress and permanence.
- Human beings have a need for forgiveness and redemption.
- Christ’s redemptive work is the basis of human salvation.

- Receiving Christ as Savior and Lord brings a new birth (John 3:3-21), a new heart (Galatians 2:20), a new relationship with God (Hebrews 8:10-12), and a new power to live (1 John 3:1-2).
- The Christian has God's nature and Spirit within and is called to live a particular kind of life in obedience to God.
- The Bible is the Christian's ultimate authority for faith and practice.
- Physical death is not the end of our existence.
- What we do in life echoes in eternity.

Biblically-informed worldviews might include the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), God is involved in history, humans bear God's imprint, something good can be found in every human being, all things work together for good, theism, all creation is divinely inspired, the world is corrupted by sin, pro-life.

Corrupted worldviews might include white supremism, humanism (man is the final authority), post-modernism (there is no absolute truth), racism, pro-choice, sense of entitlement, predatory mentality (strength rules), pluralism (all views, values, and practices are equally correct and acceptable), "the world is my oyster", relativism (situational ethics), hedonism (pleasure is pre-eminent).

Matthew 5:3 – 12; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 4:12; James 3:15; James 3:14-16.

So far, we have discussed three of the four essential elements necessary to a centered life—our spiritual center of gravity: a personal relationship with Christ, biblical beliefs and values, and a Christian worldview. The fourth and final crucial element is pure motives.

4. Pure Motives

Motives are what stimulates our activity, mobilizes us to act, and stimulates our behavior! Daniel McGuire, a biblical scholar, suggests that "motive gives essential and constitutive meaning to human action. Webster defines motive as something, such as a need or desire that causes a person to act. It might take the form of an impulse, inducement, a goad, something that 'spurs' us on. It can be seen as a driving force arising from our predispositions, biases or habitual inclinations. Motives compel us to take action and may arise from an external stimulus such as an opportunity, circumstance, or event. Motives provide the bridge from thoughts (temptation) to action (behavior). Some people, for instance, are motivated by greed or jealousy. Others are motivated by love or desire. Still others might be motivated by idealism or self-interest.

A motive is a stimulus to act. Words that have the same or nearly the same meaning include impulse, incentive, or inducement. Webster's suggests that a motive implies an emotion or desire operation on the will and causing it to act. Impulse suggests a driving power arising from personal temperament or constitution. Incentive applies to an external influence inciting to action. Inducement suggests a motive prompted by the deliberate enticements or allurements of another.

The number 1 godly motive is unconditional love. It is a love that is others oriented, a love that is action not emotion, a love that seeks the better of the one loved, a love that desires another's well being and welfare even if they are unlikable. God commands us to love others. We do so by setting aside our interests and acting in the best interests of others. We don't have to "feel" love to do what is best for others.

The following passage describes what love is, what love is not, and what love is regardless.

Love is ... patient, kind, rejoices in the truth, and unflinching.

Love is not ... envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered. It keeps no running list of wrongs nor does it delight in evil.

Love is always ... protecting, trusting, hopeful, and persevering.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13***

The following verses further expand on this kind of love.

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." **John 13:34-35***

*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. **1 John 2:3-6***

What motivates you? Be honest. Is it achievement, advancement, recognition, status, honor, success, wealth, significance, meaning, purpose, survival, perseverance, power, influence, control, dominance, discovery, knowledge, improvement, growth, personal development, notoriety, acclaim, attention, danger, excitement, perfection, proficiency, excellence, pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, uniqueness, newness, experiences, acquisition, possession, increase, spirituality, or Christlikeness? Some are honorable, others are not. Can you tell the difference?

Is your love conditional? How do you love your wife? How do you love your children? How do you love others? Do you love them if ...? Do you love them because ...? Or do you love them in spite of? God expects us to love them as He loves us...unconditionally?

The greatest motive that should compel us to act is unconditional love.

Biblically-informed motives might be unconditional love, commitment to God, a vow, Christ-centered desires, commitment to a certain value, devotion, diligence, love of others, self-preservation in the face of danger.

Corrupted values might include greed, lust, self-gratification, gluttony, hatred, domination, conquest, anger, pride, blind ambition, conditional love, control, destruction, domination, jealousy, meanness, possessiveness, self-centeredness, self-protection, sense of entitlement, sexual gratification, superiority, or vengeance.

John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; James 4.3; 1 John 2:3-6.