
CITY CENTRAL CHURCH WEEK 1 DEVOTIONAL

January 2 | Stay In Balance

“Don’t...lose your balance.” 2 Peter 3:17

If you are an “all-or-nothing” person, the word for you today is “stay in balance.” Serve God fervently, but don’t forget to love your family and spend time with them. Work hard, but don’t forget to play, relax, and smell the roses. Think regularly about heaven, your permanent residence, but maximize every moment you have here on earth for God’s glory. The Bible puts it this way: “You must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 18). To live a balanced life you must learn to exercise grace in your dealings with others, and deepen your knowledge of God’s Word. If you strive for one but neglect the other, your life will be out of balance. The best way to stay in balance is to develop these two habits:

- Get regular feedback from the right people
“Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said” (Malachi 3:16). We are meant to grow together, not separately. “As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve each other” (Proverbs 27:17). Only as you interact with the right people and get regular feedback can you become the person God wants you to be.
- Check yourself regularly
The Bible says: “Don’t drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. If you fail the test, do something about it (2 Corinthians 13:5-6). To be spiritually healthy you must regularly check up on such areas as your stewardship, fellowship, ministry to others, character, Bible reading and prayer.

You’ll be amazed how these two habits will help you stay spiritually balanced.

Consider: When is the last time you had the “right type of person” speak into your life? Spend some time this week allowing the Holy Spirit to give you a check up. Specifically ask Him to speak to the areas underlined above.

January 3| Fight for Your Marriage

“Marriage should be honored by all.” Hebrews 13:4

When asked the secret of his long, happy marriage, Henry Ford replied, “It’s the same formula I’ve used in making cars: stick to one model and never quit trying to make it better.” Pretty good advice, right?

Read the following words carefully: “It wasn’t one action or one word, but a series of little unresolved spats and quarrels that now makes TV the solution to the problems of a hard day, and silences us when we should say, ‘I’m sorry,’ or ‘Thank you,’ or ‘You look really nice.’ Today I no longer tell you I love you because the sound of those words mocks the special meaning they once carried. Now it’s too painful to remember that those feelings we said we’d never lose were, tear by tear, left in the past.”

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What happened? He gets wrapped up in his job, hoping to shore up his self-esteem by being impressive at work. She gets wrapped up in the kids, and may have a job as well. So, they pass each other in the driveway and the hallway, but it doesn't have to be that way! You can decide to fight for your marriage. It will take time and you'll have to give up certain activities that are important to you. It will require some practical vehicle such as setting a date night, taking a walk, pulling the plug on the television, or just sitting at the table and talking to each other after dinner. But if you're willing to change your schedule and your ways and, if necessary, start from scratch believing that a good marriage is worth it, you **can** win.

Consider: Consider fasting from media this week and take that time to pour into your marriage. Ask questions, listen attentively, give your spouse ALL your attention. If you are not married, consider fasting media this week and giving that attention to someone who needs it. Cultivate and grow your relationship with others. Fight for your relationships!

January 4 | How Soon We Forget

"They soon forgot his many acts of kindness to them." Psalms 106:7

The story of the Israelites is a lot like our own story. God blesses us, and then we forget Him— not totally, just until we get into the next mess. Then, we call for His help again and He intervenes on our behalf. Now, you would think we'd see the light, change our ways and give God His rightful place in our lives. But often we just repeat the pattern, keeping God in the basement like a janitor and calling on Him when we've another mess to clean up.

The Israelites were no different. "He rescued them from their enemies and redeemed them from their foes...Then his people believed his promises. Then they sang his praise. Yet how quickly they forgot what he had done! They wouldn't wait for his counsel! In the wilderness their desires ran wild, testing God's patience" (v.10-14). Someone has said, "We're not slow learners, we're just quick forgetters." Why do we forget God so easily? Busyness. We don't take time to read His Word and pray. Compartmentalization. We keep God in a Sunday morning slot or a brief devotional time. Selfishness. "Their desires ran wild, testing God's patience." We refuse to govern our minds by the principles of Scripture. Realizing his tendency to forget God, the Psalmist wrote: "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing...I will praise the Lord who counsels me...I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices" (Psalms 16:2, 7-9).

Consider: Make a list of 20 things that the Lord has taught you or done for you in the last year. Spend time thanking the Lord for His ongoing goodness to you and caring for you like a tender Shepherd.

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January 5 | Make Prayer a Habit, Part 1

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Luke 5:16

Habits are powerful things. We form our habits, and then our habits form us. So this year, decide to stop talking about it and make it a habit to spend time with God in prayer each day. If your desire is truly to be like Jesus you must pray regularly, for He “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Don’t let the word “lonely” intimidate you. Once you cultivate an awareness of God’s presence, you’ll prefer His company to that of anybody else. Don’t let the word “withdrew” intimidate you. Just shut off your TV, your computer, and your phone and you’ll make a wonderful discovery: “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalms 16:11).

John Wesley said, “I have so much to do that I must spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.” Martin Luther said, “Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.” The hymnist wrote, “Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer—that calls me from a world of care. And bids me at my Father’s throne, make all my wants and wishes known. In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found relief. And oft escaped the tempter’s snare, by thy return, sweet hour of prayer.” When the disciples asked Jesus about prayer, He began by saying, “When you pray...” (See Matthew 6:9-15). He assumed they’d have a regular time for prayer. Could He assume that about you?

Consider: Diagnose your prayer life on scale of 1-10. What is your action plan to see it increase? Consider designating a daily time you pull away to pray. Schedule it into your daily routine and mark it on your calendar.

January 6 | Make Prayer a Habit, Part 2

“He knelt down...three times [a] day, and prayed.” Daniel 6:10

Peter, whom God used to help build the church, and John, whom God used to write the book of Revelation, made time in their daily schedule for prayer. “Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1). The apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, said, “Never stop praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Daniel’s habit of praying was so well-known that his enemies used it to trap him. “He knelt down on his knees three times [a] day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying” (Daniel 6:10-11). End of story? No, Daniel’s prayers shut the mouths of lions and caused a heathen king to say: “Men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God...His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed...He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So... Daniel prospered” (v. 26-28). The Psalmist wrote, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalms 91:1).

Once you identify your “secret place” and begin to use it regularly, a kind of aura surrounds it. You will grow to love it, and eventually it will become the most important place in your life. The power

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of prayer defies calculation. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer, except that which lies outside the will of God.

Consider: Do you have your own “secret place”? If not, what area of your daily life can you turn into your secret place? Do whatever it takes to establish this spot and make it somewhere you look forward to being.

January 7 | Make Prayer a Habit, Part 3

“God has surely listened and heard my...prayer.” Psalms 66:19

The Psalmist wrote, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my...prayer” (vv. 18-19). The character flaws you are working on and your tendency to stumble from time to time don’t disqualify you from God’s blessing. The sin you “cherish” does that! In prayer, the first thing God will want to talk to you about is usually the last thing you want to talk to Him about—namely, the sin you don’t want to let go of. It will actually keep you from the place of prayer. When Adam sinned he hid from God, saying, “I heard Your voice...and I was afraid because I was naked” (Genesis 3:10). Billy Graham said: “The Christian should have an appetite for prayer. He should want to pray. One does not have to force food upon a healthy child. Exercise, good circulation, health and labor demand food for sustenance. So it is with those who are spiritually healthy. They have an appetite for the Word of God and for prayer. A little girl committed a certain offense and when her mother discovered it, she began to question her daughter. Immediately the child lost her smile and a cloud darkened her face as she said, ‘Mother, I don’t feel like talking.’ So it is with us, when our fellowship with God is broken by sin in our lives. We do not feel like talking to Him.” So, if you don’t feel like praying today, it’s probably a good indication that you need to.

Consider: If your relationship with the Lord feels cool or distant, ask yourself if you are cherishing sin in your heart. When you see it, confess your sin knowing He is faithful to forgive and restore your relationship if your sin harmed another person.

January 8 | Jesus Understands, Part 1

“He faced all the same testings we do.” Hebrews 4:15

The Lord understands what you are going through today because He has been where you are. The Bible says: “This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all the same testings we do...So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (v.15-16). That means:

- Jesus understands your family problems.
He had a family of His own, and on one occasion they said, “He’s out of His mind” (Mark 3:21).
- Jesus understands when you feel overwhelmed.
“Then Jesus said, ‘Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.’ He said this

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because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat" (Mark 6:31). Jesus not only dealt with on-the-job pressures, He had to organize, train, and correct His own followers, including a bunch of uneducated fishermen, a bigot, and a despised tax collector.

- Jesus understands when you feel rejected.

The town He grew up in had no use for Him: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). When Philip said, "We've found the One Moses wrote of...Jesus...from Nazareth!" Nathanael said, "Nazareth... You've got to be kidding" (v. 45). And Jesus' family tree was nothing to write home about either. Rahab was a prostitute, Jacob was a crook, David was an adulterer—just to name just a few. Yes, Jesus understands. He knows where you're at today and He's able to help you. So talk to Him!

Consider: Spend some time thanking the Lord that He understands exactly what you are going through. Bring each situation/person before Him, thanking Him that He knows it all. Pray for His will to be done in each situation.

Devotional resource adapted from Jentezen Franklin, <http://www.jentezenfranklin.org/daily-devotions>