



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

BALANCE

Centered on Significance

Ephesians 1:17-19

February 5th, 2006

By Dr. Matt Hook

Ever since I met her, my wife Leigh has said “Painted toenails are the sign of a well-balanced life.” You see, if you have time to paint your toenails, you must not be too stressed or overcommitted. There’s nothing wrong with painted toenails, but the reason God wants your life balanced is for so much more than that! Listen to this prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19. *“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”*

The past three weeks we’ve been in a series on “Balance.” Do I need to say it? Most of our lives are out of balance and crazy, although many people have shared that they are making decisions differently now. Way to go! Because being out of balance is not God’s best for our lives. So we’ve looked with new eyes at some issues: The idea that saying “no” is as Biblical and good as saying “yes”. The idea that lightening your load means coming to Jesus and taking his yoke, saying, *“Jesus share this with me;”* in every situation, from talking with your kids to meeting with your boss, to changing a diaper. Last week we learned that you and I need margin, which is having time and energy left over at the end of our commitments. God himself rested on the 7th day.

Today, we’re focusing on the purpose behind all this “balance.” Why have balance in your life? It’s not just to have beautiful toenails, or more time with the couch and the remote. It’s to have more time for Christ. Balance is not for selfishness, but for significance. Creating margin is about making time for what matters most in life. We have to stop and think about it, because you and I are in the middle of an out-of-control, high velocity society full of workaholics running at a crazy pace. God breaks into our lives to tell us we were put here for a purpose; if we’d just make room.

God has a plan and He has a purpose for your life. “God’s purpose is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams.” (PDL) Margin is about cutting out the superfluous things, the trivial things that don’t really matter so you and I can begin again with God. Most of us tried so many things for so long to find meaning and purpose for our lives, all we got was busy.

But what’s really happened is that we lost time and energy and resources God gave us. We use up all our energy and strength managing our pace and managing our sin, when God wants us to use our time, talents, and treasure for the things so much bigger, that really matter most in life. That’s significance. Creating margin and balance give us back our time, so we can get back to our core, our center, our purpose, given by God.

There are simply two things to say: First, balance is so that we can center our lives on Jesus Christ. Second,

it's not a big list of rules and drastic changes. It's the smallest of shifts, with significant consequences. In Ephesians 5, Paul writes "*Don't be foolish with your lives.*" Don't waste your life. Don't use it up on things that really don't matter. Make your life count.

FIRST, WHAT WILL BE THE CENTER OF MY LIFE? In other words, who or what am I going to live for? Obviously there are a lot of options. You can center your life around a career, or a sport. What's your center? A hobby, or making money? Your next date, or having fun?

All of these things are fine and good but they all make a lousy center for your life. They're not strong enough, they're not solid enough, they're not secure enough to be the center of your life.

You must decide what is your "center," because if you don't, it will be decided for you. When you become a Christian, a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ, the center of your life changes. **Being a Christian means Jesus Christ is at the center of your life.** The Bible says "*Christ's love has the first and last word in everything we do. Our firm decision is to work from this focus center.*" Here's a big myth we've got to debunk: A lot of people imagine their life as a pie with the different pieces representing different segments of their life: the work segment, the retirement segment, the financial segment, the relationship segment, and the faith in Jesus segment. We compartmentalize. But Jesus isn't a piece of the pie. He is the whole pie. He's your next breath. He's the pie *tin* that holds you together, and He's a part of every piece of your life.

One of the ways you know that Jesus is at the center of your life is **you worry less.** Worry is a sign that something has replaced Jesus Christ at the center of your life. Any time I start worrying, any time you start worrying, it should be a red flag. We're trying to center on something or someone we know will falter. Some of us here received bad news this week, and some are really worried. Try checking on your center. Are you expecting someone other than Jesus to take care of you? Your center should be something that can never change – your relationship to God. So the number one stress reliever is to put Jesus Christ at the center of your life.

When you make Jesus the center, God grows you into the character that Jesus Christ has; the kind of interests that He has. **God wants to help you become more like Christ.** God is working to do that in us to make us like His Son. If indeed you believe Christ might be the center of the universe, the One holding it all together, then why wouldn't we center everything on Him?

SECOND, THE SMALL SHIFT TO BALANCE CREATES SIGNIFICANCE. There's one thing we all have in common. I believe every one of us is doing the best we can. Everybody here wants to make a difference with our life. Deep down, you'd like to leave a legacy. You'd like to make a difference in this world. Where do you think you got that desire? You got it from God. You were not put on this earth just to take up space, to breathe, to use resources, to retire and die. No, God put you here for a very unique reason. And God has uniquely shaped you so you can make a unique contribution.

You say, "My contribution would be small," but if you read the Bible you know that God uses the little things to make significant differences. Why? So we can witness his power! If you know anything about history, you know history has been changed by seemingly insignificant events. **Who would have guessed that a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem would lead to hospitals, universities, and eventual abolition of slavery in many countries? Nobody.** And often you never know how one little thing that you say to somebody or one little thing that you do may not only change their life but change all of history.

The Good Samaritan, in Luke 10, is a great example of somebody who had margin in his life in order to make a contribution in the Bible is the Good Samaritan. Remember the story? Jesus said there was a guy walking from Jerusalem to Jericho and he gets mugged. They beat him up, rob him of all his stuff and leave him for dead at the side of the road. The first guy comes walking by. He's a religious leader, a priest, and he has no margin in his life. He's in a hurry and says "I don't have time to help this guy," and he walks on past him. "I've got a meeting to make, a deadline to meet. I can't help a hurting person beside the road. I've got to keep going." So he does.

The second guy walks by. He's also a religious +leader, a Levite. He says, "I'm not going to have anything to do with that. I've got my own agenda. I've got my own goals and ambitions. I'm too busy. I don't want to be associated with that guy anyway." And he actually switches over to the other side of the road. He changes lanes and drives on past. He totally ignores the guy in his pain.

The third guy comes along and he's a Samaritan. Now the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. They are two different ethnic groups and did not like each other at all. This guy had every reason to pass. He was a stranger and there was Middle East racial conflict between these two people. But he stops. He helps the guy. He gives him something to drink. He bandages up his wounds. He puts this total stranger on his donkey, takes him to the nearest "Holiday Inn", leaves his "American Express" card and says "I'll be back later. I'll cover all his bills. You feed him, you clothe him, you restore him to health and I'll pay for it."

When was the last time you did that for a stranger? Maybe never. Why? You don't have any margin in your life. This guy did. First he had time margin. He had time to stop. Evidently he planned to get to wherever he was going early enough that he could stop along the way to help somebody in desperate need. Second, he had financial margin. He actually had some money to give to help this guy. Some of you, if a stranger needed money, you couldn't help him if you had to. You're so in debt that every penny goes to pay off your own debt. You're in way over your head. You couldn't help a person if you wanted to. You have no financial margin. He had energy margin. He wasn't so stressed out – "I can't deal with this guy! I've got my own problems!" And as a result he was able to help.

Every day of your life you walk by people who need you, people who you could help. But if you're so focused on your life, your thing and your load, you can't stop to help anybody. You can't make a contribution. When you boil it all down in life, there are only two kinds of people – **givers and takers**. What are you going to be? You make a living by getting. You make a life by giving.

When you boil it all down, the Balance series is all about the message of your life. If I get more sanity, more balance, more margin, what will the message of my life be?

In the business book The Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell studies minute things that cause wide spread epidemics of ideas, products, or societal trends. He notes that crime in New York City decreased over 75% during the '90s, despite the city's flat economy, welfare cuts, and increase in males age 18-24. The little change that made the big difference? Stopping fare-beating, graffiti, and panhandlers on the subway. It was a tiny change, and it led to great results. It's called the Broken Windows theory. Criminologists argue crime is an inevitable result of disorder. The idea is "no one cares and no one is in charge." The graffiti and broken windows led to more crime and less acts of caring and humanity.

Giving yourself margin and moving Jesus to the center of your life does the same thing. It may be a small shift, but the results are startling. Our out-of-control living leads to all kinds of problems and stress. We become paralyzed, unable to make a difference, unable to leave a legacy. Equally devastating, being off-balance also prevents us from having time to share the love of Christ with our neighbors, because we're too stressed out to do anything and too busy to build the relationships. But if you move from out of control living to in-control living, centered on Christ, you make that subtle, small shift that creates the kind of environment in your life that allows for amazing God-events to happen, just like the Good Samaritan. Your motivation is gratitude for what Christ has done. Your insight is that every person you meet is worthy of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. You realize you've got a part of caring for God's creation. And you've got the time and energy to do it. It's around the margins, but it makes a difference down to the core. No matter what your career, interests, or abilities, a life focused on Christ, lived out for His sake, is the only thing that will make your legacy eternal. "One life twill soon be past. Only that done for Christ will last."

Let's pray together...The purpose of margin is not so you can live a life of selfishness but so you can live a life of significance. It's about making time for what matters most. There are probably some things you need to add into your life. Do you have a way to serve people? Do you have any time with the Lord? What is at the center of your life right now? Why not Jesus Christ?

Father, we spend so much of our lives living without focus. We confess we waste time and energy on things that really don't matter. From this day forward, I want to center my life around You, Jesus. I want to be God-centered not self-centered. Please use my life to communicate Your love to those around me. In Your name, I pray. Amen."