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Manages Life Wisely and Accountably

Luke 2.52

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“So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact. And remember that Life's a great balancing act.” Dr. Seuss, Oh, The Places You'll Go!

Today we begin week eight of our Becoming a Healthy Disciple series and the theme is **a healthy disciple manages life well and accountably**. Every week we witness the opposite of this way of living – we see and hear about people who are not managing their lives well; they lack wisdom, grace, honesty, integrity, spiritual maturity, self-discipline and accountability. These are qualities that are present, hopefully in an increasing way, in someone who is truly pursuing a life of disciplined discipleship. They are part of a well-balanced life. Balance has several meanings.

Balance (noun); **an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady;**

Stability of one's mind or feelings

A condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions;

In Art: harmony of design and proportion.

An apparatus for weighing, especially one with a central pivot, beam, and a pair of scales. A counteracting weight or force (as in a clock or watch)

Verb: **keep or put (something) in a steady position so that it does not fall.**

When it comes to living a well-balanced life, I've been motivated for the last 6 ½ years by a quote I read in an article called *Why You Need to Make Your Life More Automatic* by Tony Schwartz in Harvard Business Review, (March 6, 2012). ***“How different would your life be, after all, if you could get yourself to sleep 8 hours at night, exercise every day, eat healthy foods in the right portions, take time for reflection and renewal, remain calm and positive under stress, focus without interruption for sustained periods of time, and prioritize the work that matters most?”*** Trying to have a day like Tony Schwartz describes has become my “white whale” that I'm pursuing and will be chasing for the rest of my life. In the Bible there is a

verse that has motivated me since my early 20's to try and live a wise, well-balanced life and it's Luke 2:52 which describes **Four areas we need to pay attention to:**

Luke 2:52 (NRSV), *“And Jesus increased in **wisdom** and in **stature**, and in **divine** and **human favor**.”*

Wisdom: is knowledge applied to life. This speaks to our intellectual life which includes reading, learning, the stimulation of new experiences, continuing education, travel, challenging our assumptions, perhaps participating in a book group. People who are not learning are, frankly, boring to be around. To grow in wisdom often means slowing down to take time to read, think, and reflect.

To slow down in a culture that is speeding up is very difficult to do. It can appear to others to be laziness or selfishness. **Speed is the enemy of reflection, understanding and intentionality.** When we slow down, we can begin to notice both what's driving us, and how to take back the wheel of our life.

What are you doing to stimulate your mind and grow in wisdom? What is one thing you'd like to do in this area in the next year? What is book you've read or a TED talk you've watched recently that has impacted you? What are you learning? How are you changing because of what you're learning?

Stature: speaks to our physical life.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”* Have you ever heard someone say, “I'm my own man.” Or, “It's my life, I can do whatever I want.” Those statements are not true for us if we're Christians. Paul says we've been bought with the price of God's very own Son. We are not our own anymore. We belong to God. These verses don't mean we should go out and have liposuction, plastic surgery, or Botox; it's not advocating a superficial focus on our physical appearance. However, we're being told to glorify God by how we treat our body and in the life we lead in the only vessel that God gives us. Later in the same letter, Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *“Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.”*

How do we live in a wise and disciplined way in regard to our body? First, don't regret what you eat. Eat for health and energy today and every day.

“It is scarcely news that inadequate nutrition, exercise, sleep, and rest diminish people's basic energy levels, as well as their ability to manage their emotions and focus their attention.” Tony Schwartz in Harvard Business Review, Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time, October, 2007

I know my disposition goes downhill rapidly if I'm tired and hungry. The term “hangry” conveys how some of us feel and act when we're both hungry and tired. Many people now have Fitbits or other devices that track how many steps they take. Why is wearing such a device helpful to get us moving – because it provides accountability. A pastor friend who lives in Arizona told me that he and his wife are in a group that enables them all to see how many steps each person is taking. Dave told me his wife would stay up late to see how many steps their friends in Detroit got in before they went to sleep because the devices reset at midnight. If she was behind she'd get up and march around the house to get her steps up higher than her friends.

What steps are you taking or can you take to better care for yourself physically when it comes to diet, exercise, sleep, managing stress and your weekly routine? What is working for you?

Divine Favor: Speaks to our spiritual life, our relationship with God.

Jesus moved from solitude to multitude to small group and back again. That was the rhythm of his life. He spent time alone with the Father in prayer, solitude, fasting, and

meditation. We need to practice these spiritual habits even more than Jesus did.

Richard Foster identifies Twelve Spiritual Disciplines:

The Inward Disciplines of Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, and Study.

The Outward Disciplines of Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, and Service.

The Communal Disciplines of Confession, Worship, Guidance, and Celebration.

Which one of these is really working for you and helping you right now?

Which one do you think God might want you to try a little bit more in the coming year?

Human Favor: Speaks to our relationships and roles with family, friends, colleagues, church members. How can we nurture healthy relationships including confession and forgiveness?

In his book *Sacred Companions*, David Benner discusses five interrelated elements that appear in healthy spiritual relationships: love, honesty, intimacy, mutuality (offering reciprocal care) and accompaniment (taking an active interest in each other's journey). Steve Macchia shares a sixth characteristic which is the willingness and desire to listen.

Identify a relationship in your life where you feel these six elements are present – what relationship is that and how might you strengthen it even more?

Think of someone you recently were in conflict with – imagine reflecting and acting on these six elements to help prayerfully resolve the conflict. What would your prayer be for that person/relationship?

Blessing

1 Kings 2:1-3, When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. *“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of*

Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go.” While there are several stories of death bed blessings in the Bible, we don’t have to wait until we’re dying and our life is over to use the power of our words to bless other people.

Consider one of your key roles and primary relationships. If given the opportunity, what words of blessing would you like to speak to that person? (You may want to repeat this exercise with other roles and relationships in mind)

Appreciation: A powerful ritual that fuels positive emotions is expressing appreciation to others, a practice that seems to be as beneficial to the giver as to the receiver. It can take the form of a handwritten note, an e-mail, a call, or a conversation—and the more detailed and specific, the higher the impact. As with all rituals, setting aside a particular time to do it vastly increases the chances of success.

Identify at least one person to whom you can express appreciation when you return home and do it.

Emotions & Attitude

When we learn to recognize what kinds of events trigger our negative emotions, we gain greater capacity to take control of our responses. One simple but powerful ritual for defusing negative emotions is “buying time.” Deep breathing is one way to do that. Exhaling slowly for five or six seconds induces relaxation and recovery, and turns off the fight-or-flight response.

If you want to be happy take joy in the success of others.

We can cultivate positive emotions by learning to change the stories we tell ourselves about the events in our lives. Becoming aware of the difference between the facts in a given situation and the way we interpret those facts can be powerful in itself. We have a choice about how to view a given event and to recognize how powerfully the story we tell influences the emotions we feel.

The Beneficial Value of Rituals

*Tony Schwartz in Harvard Business Review, Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time, October, 2007: “Defined in physics as the capacity to work, **energy comes from four main wellsprings in human beings: the body, emotions, mind, and spirit. In each, energy can be systematically expanded and regularly renewed by establishing specific rituals**—behaviors that are intentionally practiced and precisely scheduled, with the goal of making them unconscious and automatic as quickly as possible.”*

Take Time Off – even God did. Fatigue leads to bad decisions, interpersonal conflicts, resentment, & even death. Light a candle, watch a sunrise or sunset, observe a bird or an animal, turn off the tablet, television & radio; put down the cell phone and go out in nature.

Henri Nouwen said, *‘Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you are not occupied, & certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create space (margin) in which something can happen you had not planned on or counted on.’*

Take care of yourself – mentally, physically, spiritually, relationally, in every way. We won’t lead anyone else effectively if we can’t lead our own life. Keep learning, exercise regularly, eat for health and energy every day, get some rest, stay close to God through spiritual disciplines, and make healthy relationships a priority.

Blessing: Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Discuss or ponder the following: *“How different would your life be, after all, if you could get yourself to sleep 8 hours at night, exercise every day, eat healthy foods in the right portions, take time for reflection and renewal, remain calm and positive under stress, focus without interruption for sustained periods of time, and prioritize the work*

that matters most?” from *Why You Need to Make Your Life More Automatic* by Tony Schwartz in Harvard Business Review

2. What are you doing to stimulate your mind and grow in wisdom? What is one thing you'd like to do in this area in the next year? What is book you've read or a TED talk you've watched recently that has impacted you? What are you learning? How are you changing because of what you're learning?
3. What steps are you taking or can you take to better care for yourself physically when it comes to diet, exercise, sleep, managing stress and your weekly routine? What is working for you?
4. Which one of the spiritual disciplines is really working for you and helping you right now? Which one do you think God might want you to try a little bit more in the coming year?
5. How can we nurture healthy relationships including confession and forgiveness?
6. Think of someone you recently were in conflict with –imagine reflecting and acting on these six elements to help prayerfully resolve the conflict. What would your prayer be for that person/relationship?
7. Brainstorm as a group or personally how you can manage life more wisely and accountably. What steps will you be taking?

Suggested Books:

Crafting a Rule of Life by Stephen A. Macchia

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg

Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, & Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives by Dr. Richard Swenson

Be Excellent at Anything: The Four Keys to Transforming the Way We Work and Live by Tony Schwartz