

CHAPTER ONE:
THE BALANCED LIFE – LIVE IT
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Inspirations as you focus on living a balanced life:

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13)

In this chapter I will give you an overview of how you can begin to live a balanced and joyful life. In subsequent chapters, we will tackle each of the areas of your life that make up that balance and joy one by one, so that you can create a template that will be personalized to your needs and goals.

Three Key Factors

There are three key factors to accomplishing your goals and living a life that is both satisfying to you and those in your life who are very important to you. If you are aware of and concentrate on these three key factors, you will be on your way to balancing your life and living the life of your dreams. *First*, you need to establish and solidify your center or core essence. *Next*, it will be important to get in touch with your fundamental values. *Finally*, you will need to carve out time to dedicate to yourself, others, and your future goals. This will entail making a plan and organizing your time. The balanced life you will create will assist you in meeting your needs and the needs of others on several levels (e.g., spiritually, emotionally, and physically). Let's start with key factor #1:

Key Factor #1: Your relationship with God (your center or core essence)

It is my belief that if you strive to have a solid relationship with God, operate in every area of your life based on faith in His promises, and allow yourself quiet time to listen patiently for the messages God will send you, you will be able to handle any challenge life brings you.

Imagine having a faith so strong that you *know* deep in your soul that you and those you love will ultimately be okay. Just thinking about this is likely to relieve stress and bring a peaceful feeling to you.

In whatever way you choose to get closer to God (through meditation and prayer, scripture reading and prayer, or setting time aside to go to church while sitting amongst others in community worship), you are likely to find a peace that enables you to approach every area of your life with new meaning. For He has said, “Remember I am with you, even to the end of the age” (*Matt. 28:20*). Trust His promises. We will return to this topic in chapter 2.

Key Factor #2: Your Fundamental Values

Have you taken time to discover what your basic values are? What principles are essential for you to live a life that is fulfilling and rewarding? Many people think they know what is important to them, but they have never really taken the time to create a solid list to work from.

There are many ways to find out what your significant values entail. When I worked in career counseling, we used several inventories and assessments designed to assist individuals in finding out about their major values in life. The following is an

example of a simple way to prioritize your top values. Please note that this list is not all-inclusive and that some will have more meaning to you than others.

First, consider some core values:

- Family - peaceful and harmonious relationships, love, spending quality time with your partner and/or children.
- Service – making a positive impact on those who need assistance
- Leadership – becoming an influential leader in the workplace or community
- Achievement/Accomplishment – experiencing success in a career, parenting, or other chosen aspects of your life.
- Fulfillment – feeling love, contentment, pleasure, joy, and appreciation with your life.
- Security – having a stable home/work environment
- Independence/ Autonomy – to act in terms of your own priorities
- Financial Security – wealth and/or earning the amount of money that will allow you to be financially independent.
- Friendship - peaceful and harmonious relationships with friends and spending quality time with them.
- Loyalty – to be seen as a responsible person of good character to the significant people in your life and to have this loyalty returned.
- Acknowledgment- recognition and gratitude.
- Self-realization – gaining knowledge or education, or other things that are personally challenging and allow you to reach your highest potential
- Health – physical, emotional
- Location – your surroundings and environment.
- Your position in life (status, reputation, prestige, uniqueness)
- Diversity and/or variety in your daily life
- Predictability – consistency, reliability or stability in important areas of your life.

If there are important values to you that are missing, feel free to add them to the list. Next, make cards for each different category or write them all out on paper. Finally, consider each area of the list, and when you are ready, imagine that you *must* remove four (you don't have a choice) and then do so. Do the same with the remaining categories,

until you are left with your top seven or eight values. This gets difficult, but don't give up!

When you are done, you will know what your top values are at this time in your life. You can use these values to assist you in making important decisions, for example in considering the people you choose to surround yourself with, or your choice of a profession. In short, it is very probable that you will find that knowing your core values will assist you in creating goals for each area of your life. These goals are vital for living a satisfying and balanced life.

Keep in mind that values change over the lifespan, based on an individual's current needs, maturity, the status of important relationships in their lives, and changes in their environment. Therefore, the inventory you create will need to be updated every so often.

Key Factor #3: Planning and Organizing Your Time

Finally, let's discuss key factor #3, planning and organizing your time, so that you can concentrate on yourself, others, and your goals. This will entail making a plan for yourself in each significant area of your life and creating time to devote to each one. A wonderful reference for organizing your time (and other areas and places in your life) can be found in the book *Organizing from the Inside Out*, by Julie Morgenstern. Morgenstern makes the point that you should organize your space and paperwork first, because that naturally frees up time, and at that point you will know how much time you actually have available to devote to the many components of your life.

While we're on the subject of organizing time, you do realize there are only so many hours in a day, right? There are twenty-four hours in a day, to be exact. Keep this in mind as you are attempting to fit everything you want to accomplish in every area of your life into a daily routine. In other words, you will again need to prioritize and be realistic about what you can fit into each day. Sleep is not optional; you will need it for your overall health, concentration, and energy. Meals are not optional either, for the same reasons. So that means you will have to subtract chow time and snooze time from the twenty-four hours you have to work with each day. I'll talk more about organization in chapter 11.

Once you have organized your living space and your paperwork (This will take some time for most of us, so remember that patience is a virtue, but it will feel *so* good when you are done!), you can begin the task of getting an idea of how many hours you *do* have to work with each day and on a weekly basis (Those weekends come in handy!) so that you can give each important area of your life the proper attention it deserves.

Keep the three key factors we just discussed in mind as you move forward to reach your goals within each important element that makes up the life you desire to live. These factors are crucial. You will use them to spring into action to achieve your dreams in each facet of your life.

The Process of Balancing Your Life

In her book, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, Susan Jeffers describes what she calls a "life grid," which sets out each vital component of one's life. She explains how giving attention to multiple facets, as opposed to keeping our lives one-dimensional, allows us to

live richer, fuller lives. I highly recommend this book, not only for this concept of the life grid but also for the wise and thoughtful manner in which Dr. Jeffers inspires, educates, and provides concepts on living a fulfilling and successful life.

For the purpose of this book - living life as a Joyful Soul and realizing your dreams - I will use this concept of the life grid as a template for each of the following chapters. I will encourage you to construct goals in each area as we take an in-depth look at every one.

The first thing to keep in mind as you make up goals for yourself in each area of importance in your life is that you will most likely not accomplish them if you don't write them down. Extant research shows that when goals are written to include HOW and WHEN they will be met they are achieved more often than when goals are written without this information (or not at all). Researchers aren't sure the reason this is so, but perhaps it keeps us accountable to our goals. With that in mind, prepare to write your way to a joyful, balanced life of accomplished dreams!

Next, remember to be realistic during this process. As I discussed earlier, there are only twenty-four hours in each day. Therefore what you will strive for is to make time to work on each facet of your life regularly and systematically (not necessarily daily, maybe not even weekly!) to accomplish your dreams. I also encourage you to remember that *any movement forward is progress*. Therefore, if you make progress in one area of your life in which you have been stagnant for quite some time, you are on your way to meeting your goals. Stay in motion, and do not get discouraged when there is a smaller degree of movement forward than you expected. Tap into your faith in God and in yourself, and

get back in the race. Believe in yourself. Whatever your dreams and goals for your life are, I encourage you to express them and set them into motion. I believe these goals are connected to our destiny. They are expressed in our longing to achieve them, and we won't rest until they come to fruition. These gifts are different for each of us and make each one of us unique.

The Areas of Focus

As unique as each of us is, with distinct differences and individual traits, the fact is that most of us would feel our life was on the right track if we felt in control of a few particular facets of our lives. I call these facets **AREAS OF FOCUS or AOF's™** and have itemized them. There are eight of these areas of focus that, if realized to your fullest potential, will allow you live a balanced and joyful life. They are as follows:

Spirituality, Mental and Emotional well-being, Physical Health, Intimate Relationships, Relationships with family, friends, and co-workers, Career and Education, Giving, and Rest and Relaxation. I will go into detail on each of these areas in the following chapters, followed by a discussion on coping with what life brings you, and finally how to maintain your newly balanced life by keeping your life organized. It is important to remember that these areas of focus are not mutually exclusive – they overlap and influence one another.

When you excel in one area, it will usually have a positive effect on the other areas.

Focusing on each of these areas gives you the opportunity to live life holistically. You will find that if you focus on each AOF in reasonable increments, you will be able to look back at what you've done in each area and feel a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Each AOF will have its own chapter devoted to it, in order to assist you along your journey.

As you read through this book, you might find that there are some areas that are getting more attention than others, and you would like to balance out the equation. You might also find that you've been doing better than you thought you were. Or perhaps that you still have a long way to go. If you learn anything from reading this book, please take this message away with you: take your time, and enjoy the journey of growing, learning, and improving the precious life you have been given.

Having What it Takes to Live a Balanced Life

What do you need to live a balanced life and make your dreams come true? Well, there are five features that will put you well on the road to making certain you will succeed. These five characteristics, if nurtured in yourself, will assist you in virtually every area of your life. They are: tenacity, discipline, goal setting, approaching each AOF from a place of power and love, and eliminating fear. Let's take a brief look at each of these:

Tenacity

Another word for tenacity is stubbornness. However, that word can have negative connotations, so although I think there is nothing wrong with being stubborn when a balanced, joyful life is at stake, I prefer to use a few other terms that get the job done just as well. How about resolve, persistence, drive, and determination? If you approach each and every goal you have for yourself in all of the areas of focus needed to obtain a balanced life with tenacity in mind, you will find that doors open for you. "Ask and it

will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives, those who seek find, and to those who knock, the door will be opened” (*Mt 7:7-8*). This is a promise worthy of trust.

Discipline

If you are purposeful in your efforts to move forward in each of the areas of focus, you will indeed move forward and feel confident in doing so. To approach this process with discipline, you will need to be flexible at times. That means you will need to exercise restraint if those around you are not moving at the pace you would like them to so that you can, for example, obtain what you view as the healthiest intimate relationship. It means maintaining order and control within yourself...in other words, employing self-control and trusting yourself to accomplish what you say you will, in good time.

Set Goals for Yourself

As you recall, I spoke of goals earlier – specifically the importance of writing down how and when you will accomplish them. This does not mean that you will accomplish every goal exactly when you say you will. Keep in mind that God may have other plans for you and if you are listening in faith, you will adjust. What it *does* mean is that you will have a baseline to work from, adapt, and fine-tune. For each chapter in this book dealing with an AOF, I will guide you in writing down concrete goals for yourself. This will make the whole process appear very real to you, and you can even chart your progress and enjoy each success along the journey.

A Spirit of Power and Love

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7). These are beautiful and empowering words. I encourage you to use this and the other verses from scripture incorporated into this book for purposes of strengthening you and encouraging you along the way.

When you acknowledge the power you have and the love you carry within you, something wonderful happens. You become aware of your effect on all the people in your life. Not just those closest to you but also those who are acquaintances or even strangers! You also realize how much you are capable of and how much you can achieve. Susan Jeffers writes much about this in her book, *Feel the Fear, and Do it Anyway*. Use her words, “I am powerful and I am loving,” and witness fantastic changes in your outlook on life.

Toss the Fear

As you work on many of these areas of focus, you might feel a sense of trepidation or fear that stops you from proceeding. Perhaps you are worried about how others will take to the new way you are handling your life and those around you. This is a normal and natural occurrence. In psychology, we use a term called *homeostasis* that might help you to move past the fear and worry. Homeostasis describes what happens to individuals and those closest to them when they begin to make changes in their life. Inevitably what will happen is those closest to the individual will attempt to move the person back to his or her original manner of being. In other words, they will try to maintain the “status quo.” This might also transpire for the person making the

changes. It makes sense, doesn't it? If you make a major change that will improve your life but it affects your children, they will naturally fight to keep things going the way they always have been, if there was a payoff for them. For example, if you decide that you are going to maintain a healthy diet and begin to present dinners of broiled chicken and green beans to your kids instead of the macaroni and cheese they have been accustomed to, they will most likely attempt to sabotage your quest for good health. They got a payoff when you didn't take care of your physical health: macaroni and cheese dinners!

Most of us struggle with change, and if you are going to put your life in balance and be a joyful soul, you will be making changes. Lots of them! So be prepared for the "pull" you feel to go back to "life as usual" and also for the pull you might experience from others to bring you back there, too. It is interesting that homeostasis occurs when any change is made, positive or negative. So even if you are making things infinitely better in your life and for those around you, you might run into some hassle. Know it for what it is and move forward anyway. You and everyone you care about will be better off in the long run if you do not revert to your old patterns.

You are on Your Way!

So there you have it, a guide to use before we get started on tackling each AOF on your way to being a Joyful Soul, living a balanced life of fulfilled dreams. As a way of giving you an example of a balanced life in which dreams are realized, I offer you a slice of my daily life:

I wake up in the morning at 5:30 AM. As soon as the alarm rings I have a spring in my step and I'm raring to go! I begin by meditating and praying and being grateful for all that I have been blessed with in life. I'm never late and follow my structured routine to a "T" – First I have coffee with my husband and we read scripture together and have

meaningful conversation. After he leaves for work I put on my exercise gear and leave to work out. When I get back home I shower, get ready for work, and maybe finish a few more tasks at home. At work, my performance is top notch. After a workday wherein everyone gets along (mostly due to my prowess at handling others) having accomplished all tasks, I make my way home (but not before running 2-3 errands and visiting my Mom). Once home, I make dinner, tidy up and get organized for the next day. This includes “business” phone calls (you know, like making appointments for the doctor, hairdresser, accountant, repair technicians, veterinarian, groomer for the dog, etc.). Then I feed the dog, make coffee for the next day and go over the next day’s schedule so I can accomplish it all perfectly, get some study or professional development time in, have dinner and then clean up. Then I do some laundry. I spend quality time with my husband and kids. I end the day in relaxation, either reading or watching some TV for about an hour before drifting off to blissful sleep. The dog is perfectly behaved and groomed, and everyone always gets along at home. I’m continually checking for emotional dysfunction or stress in my household, so that I can take care of any issues that come up immediately.

NOT!!!!

Nobody is that perfect! I wrote all of that because I wanted to get a point across to you. Sometimes I just “get through the day” – other days are a mixture of accomplishments and setbacks. What is the message here? Lighten up! Give yourself a break sometimes. As long as you are making progress toward your goals you should feel proud. Of course, if you are consistently (daily?) falling short of your goals then I suggest you re-evaluate and take time to figure out how you can trust yourself enough to follow through. Re-assess what is important to you, and for what reasons. Make changes if necessary, but remember to keep your eye on your long-term goals and values. You will be richly rewarded if you do! So, are you ready to become a Joyful Soul? Let’s go!