

Whatever Happened to Moderation

Philippians 4:4-8

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When I was a junior at Samford University, I saw a student riding a unicycle across the campus. I was instantly hooked. Before long I had one and I was learning to ride down the long hallway of the dorm where I was a resident assistant.

It was a perfect place to learn to ride because I could reach out and touch two walls and balance myself from side-to-side. If I got off-balance from front to back I just let the unicycle fall to the floor. Falling off was never hard. Learning to get on it was the challenge.

The first time my grandfather watched me ride a unicycle I thought he was going to brag on my abilities. Instead, he responded in his typical humorous way, "Son, if I were you I'd start a family before I rode one of those things."

I later found a 6-foot unicycle and I rode it from my house to downtown Louisville, just a few blocks away.

I didn't ride a six-foot unicycle again until I bought one when I was the pastor of Clarkesville Baptist Church.

I had my picture on the front page of the Northeast Georgian Newspaper riding my unicycle in the Mountain Laurel Parade in full clown costume so I thought I'd impress everyone the next year by riding a 6-foot unicycle. And I did—for about half the parade.

Remember, I told you that falling off was never the hard part. Well, that day it was. When I got off-balance that day, I fell sideways and when I braced my fall I dislocated the same shoulder I dislocated a few years before when I slid into third base head first playing church softball. Ministry really is bad for your health.

Right now, can you think of a time in your life when you have gotten things out of balance and it was very costly to you?

Perhaps you put work before your family or you didn't put the time into your marriage it needed. Maybe you did not take care of your body. When you got the credit card bill back it was out of line, but you continued to ignore it until you were in way too much debt.

Have you ever lied to yourself about something that is addictive? Others might have a problem, but not you.

Do you have any time for reflection and solitude?

Do you spend more time with your hobbies than you do with those you love the most?

Do you spend more money on cable or sports than you give to the church?

Maintaining balance has been a metaphor for me throughout my life. I can usually tell when some area of my life is becoming out of balance.

My body suffers and migraines become more frequent. Anxiety increases. My relationships with my family suffer. I become distant from God.

The quality of my work drops. I usually am starved for laughter and play. My diet needs to be adjusted.

If people would learn how to maintain balance and balance the right things in their lives, they would discover more contentment and happiness.

There is a German fairy tale about a fisherman who caught a talking fish that begged the man to let him go because he was really a prince.

The fisherman willingly did so, but when he told his wife about it, she made him go back and ask the fish for a nice cottage to replace their shack.

Despite not wanting to do so, he did, and the fish granted his request before he could even return home.

He and his wife were thrilled, but after a week, she demanded that her husband go back to the sea and ask the fish for a palace. He was not happy with her request but she demanded that he do so.

So the man went to the sea and found the fish and said,

“Oh, man of the sea!

Come listen to me;
For the woman that is my wife,

The plague of my life,
Hath sent me to beg a gift of thee!”

When he told the fish she wanted a palace, he told the fisherman that she was in one already. When he returned, he found it to be true.

But not long after that, the woman wanted to be queen. When she became discontent with being queen, she wanted to be the Pope.

I know, I know, a woman can't even be a priest and she wanted to be Pope, but this is a fairytale and the fish granted it.

But before long she was still not happy with being the Pope. What more could one want?

She could not go to sleep thinking about that and as the sun came up one morning it came to her. She wanted to rule the sun and so she made her husband return to the fish and make the request.

This time, however, the fish told the fisherman to return home where he would find his wife in her original shack where they would now have to live out the rest of their days.

Because she never could be happy and content with anything, she had ended up with nothing in the end.

(<https://www.reference.com/art-literature/moral-fisherman-his-wife-6a2ebfd14fe5708d>)

I am afraid it is that way with so many of us who live “from sea to shining sea.”

Our lives are so out of balance and in our desire to find what will give us more, we build bigger barns, we climb up higher unicycles, and we want more, bigger and better everything.

“More” is one of my granddaughter’s favorite words. I love giving her more. I love to make her happy and see the smile on her face.

When she’s hungry for more, PePaw wants to give her more.

Once I was hopping on the ground like a frog and she wanted more hops but after about six hops I knew I was about hopped out.

As much as I wanted to give her more I have to say to her,

“No more,” because whatever we are doing or whatever she is eating, there is a limit. To keep giving or to keep doing would not be good.

Hoping like a frog would eventually kill me. But more than that, we would go from giving something good to things being out of balance.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,
 whatsoever things are honest,
 whatsoever things are just,
 whatsoever things are pure,
 whatsoever things are lovely,

whatsoever things are of good report;
if there be any virtue, and
if there be any praise, think on these things.” Philippians 4:4-8

That Greek word e-pē-ā-kā's that the KJV translates as moderation literally means “what is reasonable.”

There is a great disparity among us these days about what seems reasonable.

The reason for this is that we are trying to reason by the wrong spirit. That's what gets us off balance.

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, “So I tell you: Live by following the Spirit. Then you will not do what your sinful selves want. Our sinful selves want what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against our sinful selves. The two are against each other, so you cannot do just what you please 5:16-17.

Paul is teaching us to discipline ourselves to live by the Spirit of God, which will keep our lives in balance.

Our lives get out of balance when we convince ourselves that more is reasonable when the more we have reached for is outside the scope of what is healthy for our mind, body, or our spirit.

We will always be tempted to have things we should not have, to do things we should not do, to go places we should not go, to see things we should not see, say things we should not say, buy things we should not buy, see people we should not see, text things we should not text, and to think things we should not think.

There is a saying, “All things in moderation,” but that saying is a lie.

The Apostle Paul said, “Let your moderation be known,” or “be reasonable with your lifestyle.”

However, there can be no moderation in underage drinking, premarital sex, watching porn, or doing drugs. You cannot gossip, lie, cheat, steal, overeat, binge drink, have an addiction of any kind, commit adultery, hate people, or seek revenge in moderation.

If I told you I was drinking poison but I was just drinking it in moderation, what would you say to me?

There are some things we cannot do at all and have balance.

There are other things we must do if we are to have balance.

Paul said that we are to concentrate on whatsoever things are true, honest, just, whatsoever things are pure, lovely, good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

This requires self-discipline. There can be no moderation without self-discipline.

The strength for moderation, the strength to move completely away from those things which we should stay away from completely comes from the Spirit of God.

Because Christ lives within us, we have Christ working for us.

Not far from here is the site of one of the greatest tight-rope walking feats in history.

On July 18, 1970, 65-year-old Karl Wallenda performed a high-wire walk across a quarter mile span of Tallulah Gorge. An estimated 30,000 people watched Wallenda perform two headstands as he crossed the quarter-mile-wide gap.

Wallenda used a balancing pole which helped lower his center of gravity and helped him keep his balance. In other words, the pole helped keep him grounded, even though he was suspended hundreds of feet into the sky.

Christ living within us works this way. Christ keeps us grounded and balanced. Otherwise, we would be chasing after the world, seeking everything that cannot possibly satisfy us.

As Christians, we can still get things out of balance if we stop the disciplines of our faith. When we step out on that tightrope of life without the balancing pole of truth, honesty, stewardship, integrity, and God's Holy Spirit surrounding us, we are no longer grounded. We lose our balance.

Like Peter walking on the water, if we take our eyes off Jesus because we want more, more, more, eventually, and all we see is the effect of the wind and the fear of the waves crashing around us causing us to fall.

Jesus said, "But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." (Luke 12:31) What things? All the things we need to bring balance to life.

So whatever happened to moderation? We sacrificed moderation to a world that says you can have it now.

You can have it often. There are no consequences. Pleasure overrules everything. I am the center of the universe. I live to make myself happy.

It is extremely important to teach moderation early and to teach that there are many things for which moderation is not the answer at all.

We learn that there is such a thing as too much of a good thing.

Temptation comes in many forms. Balance in life is important.

Learning balance means we do not depend on our own compass, but that we depend on the Spirit of God.

As we do that we learn to discern what is true, honest, just, whatsoever things are pure, and lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. Whatever and whenever we find any virtue, we should think about these things. Philippians 4:4-8

We bring balance in our lives by keeping Jesus present with us always to help us discern these things.

Is your life out of balance today? Think about your mind. Think about your body. Think about your spirit.

Where does God rank? Where does your family rank? Do you need some moderation? Are there areas where there should be no moderation, but you've given into temptation?

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