

Real Kids

Both my 3-year-old adopted Chinese daughter, Jessica Meilan, and I love clothes. As a stay-at-home mom, I'm always looking for a bargain, especially since I buy for my daughter first.

One Saturday I came home from a yard sale with three denim jumpers, two shorts sets, and a princess-waisted floral dress of pastel pinks, yellows, and blues—all for only \$13!

I could hardly wait to wear my “new” dress to church the next day. Usually the church women notice new dresses, and I waited, expecting compliments. But none came my way.

The Balanced Life

I once heard a message in church on “the balanced life.” The speaker made the point that we need to give equal time to each of the most significant areas of our lives so we don't get out of balance.

I felt prompted to do a search on the word “balance” in my small computer Bible to find scriptural backing for the message. The only reference given that contained the word was a verse in Proverbs, and that had to do with a scale—in other words, with weights and measures, not with the way we use our time.

What I found did not convince me that the preacher was right. I asked the Holy Spirit to show me the truth, and He replied, “The truth is that being wholehearted for God is the key to balance.”

Lillian Hunt Thrasher

THE NILE MOTHER

She was called the greatest woman in Egypt and was recognized by national leaders for her humanitarian work. About 6 feet in height, Lillian Thrasher stood tall in both body and spirit. Throughout her 51 years of ministry she fed, clothed and sheltered thousands of orphans, widows and blind women.

She was born in Florida in 1887 and was converted in her teenage years. At the age of 18, Lillian sensed the call of God on her life and briefly attended Bible school. She left school to work in an orphanage in North Carolina. Later she left the orphanage to pastor a church and then traveled on the evangelistic circuit.

A Divine Appointment

When I was 37, I began experiencing symptoms of menopause. But it wasn't until I turned 43 that I found a doctor who would take me seriously. By then, I was beginning to think I was crazy.

Once my doctor prescribed hormone replacement therapy for me, the symptoms disappeared, and I was able to enjoy a normal life again. Unfortunately, a few years later this doctor closed her practice, and the next physician I saw treated me

as though I were exaggerating and changed my medication. This threw me into a tailspin.

At times I felt suicidal, a sentiment which is not in keeping with my personality at all. I could not muster the desire or the energy to do daily tasks.

The Ingredients of the Anointing

Under the old covenant, the anointing oil had one exclusive purpose. In a symbolic act of consecration, it was poured out on prophets, priests and kings and on the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant and all the individual utensils that were employed in the worship of God.

It was compounded according to strict instructions, and although its ingredients were earthly, everything about it was rich in sacred symbolism. Any vessel thus anointed was set apart for a holy purpose and calling unto the Lord.

Change the Atmosphere With Praise

Praising the Lord has ever been to me one of the most inspiring and exalting of themes. Oh! How I love to praise Him and hear Him praised.

It has been my privilege, on several occasions, to witness the never-to-be-forgotten scene of 1,000 saints standing on their feet with uplifted hands, tears streaming down their faces, praising the Lord with all their might until the great volume of thunderous praises blended into a sound like rushing mighty waters as it rolled majestically heavenward. It went up as one voice, of one people who were one in heart and adoration of the most high God and His glorious Son, Jesus Christ.

It is when praising the Lord in this way, as at no other time, that my spirit catches the greatest revelation—the greater vision of the mighty, omnipotent King of the Ages, high and lifted up. It is then that the very atmosphere seems electric, charged with the mighty power of the great God, and I catch the sound of His chariot wheels leaping over the mountains, ever coming nearer as His saints continue to adore Him, till I hear the stately steppings of the King in the midst of His holy tabernacle—then, as the cloud of glorious adoration still rises from the hearts of the people, I see Him robed with honor, crowned with glory, seated upon the jewelled throne of adoration that His people have built for Him by their praises.

The Lord inhabits the praises of His people. Where real praise is, there God is.

It is impossible to overestimate the power, victory, blessing, healing, encouragement and inspiration embodied in this wonderful secret of praising the Lord.

PRAISE THE LORD AT ALL TIMES “Oh! but you know that I could never put anything on, I could never praise the Lord unless I feel like it,” someone exclaims.

Unless you feel like it! Oh! Is that the gauge by which you measure your offerings of praise? Is that the foundation upon which your Christian experience is based?

My dear sister, feelings are a poor and very uncertain guide upon which to rely when it comes to praising the Lord or any

other Christian experience. Only one man in the Bible that I know of went by feeling; that was dear old Isaac, and you remember how he felt the hands and arms of Jacob, his son, and how deceived he was.

Oh, dear hearts, I encourage you to praise Him at “all times” and let His praise “be continually in your mouth,” not because you happen to feel like it, but because He is worthy. Praise Him whether you feel like it or not, and you soon will feel like it.

Why, it is impossible for me to lift up my hands and begin to praise and adore my Master without a downpour of His blessing that is as rain to the thirsty fields and flowers or as the anointing oil upon my head, running down to the borders of my garments.

“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.” Why, according to David, the only excuse you have for not praising the Lord is being out of breath!

Some may claim, “Oh, Sister, I praise Him in my heart. I could never shout aloud or be demonstrative. It is not my make-up or disposition.”

Beloved, when you have put on your beautiful garments of praise, you are lifted above your own “make-up” and “disposition” and swing far out into the realm of the Spirit. As for praising the Lord in your heart, why, your heart is no different from anyone else’s. When it gets full of glorious praises and adoration and He becomes so real, so fair as to be altogether lovely, the chiefest of 10,000 to your soul, your heart will run over, and you will shout His praises, and your voice will be blended with the voices of all the other redeemed ones and soar upward to the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

THERE’S POWER IN PRAISE Besides blessing you and ministering to the Lord, your praise has the potential to clear the

spiritual atmosphere in a meeting. Let's look at an example. Two saints attend the same meeting. One enters with a long face, takes her seat, looks solemnly about, and if the meeting seems a little stiff, in need of a blessing, lacking in praise or "tied up," this dear one begins to be burdened and sigh:

"Oh, Lord, what is the matter here? There is such a binding spirit, such a power of darkness. It seems as though the room were filled with demons. Help us, Lord!" Immediately every eye and every thought are directed to the devil, to darkness and to binding spirits and are no longer on Jesus.

When we advertise and meditate upon the strength of the devil, we underestimate the power of the great I AM, the Mighty Conqueror who never lost a battle. Such despondency and burdened agonizing is contagious, and soon everyone is moaning and crying and miserable, and it is not until someone begins "seeing and praising Jesus" that the cloud lifts.

The other saint enters the same meeting, where it seems that not one breath of heavenly gales is stirring, feels the same pressure upon the meeting, and refusing to look at or recognize the enemy, says:

"This is the time to praise Jesus. This is the time to see God arise and scatter His enemies. He has told us that we will do great and mighty things if we will but praise Him, and we know that the enemy cannot lodge or abide in an atmosphere that is filled with the praises of the Lord." This saint straightway begins to shout:

"Hallelujah! We rejoice in You! We glory in Your might, O King! Victory and honor ever attend Your troops. Power and dominion envelop You. Your glory and presence fill the heavens and the earth. It fills my heart just now. It overflows and fills the room. Why, glory to Jesus! Beloved, the Lord is in our midst. Do you not feel Him? Why, this atmosphere is like that of heaven!"

Such faith and praise is contagious. The fire of unwavering confidence in God that burns within this temple soon leaps over its parapets, spreads first to those in the seats nearby, then on to the farthest corner of the room, inspiring, encouraging, lifting up drooping heads and strengthening feeble knees, and in a moment every eye is fixed on Jesus, His praises fill the tabernacle, souls are blessed, vessels are filled to overflowing, the Latter Rain is heard pattering on the roof, the dry ground is saturated and the wilderness and the desert places are blossoming as the rose!

What was the difference in the two saints? The one recognized and saw the power of the devil and began to bemoan the sad state of affairs, depressing everyone who listened, while the other saw only Jesus in His all-conquering, invincible might and splendor, riding on to sure and certain victory.

VISION OF DEMONS AND ANGELS The Lord taught me a wonderful lesson some time ago that demonstrated the majesty and power of praise. I was seated on the rostrum in my tent during the evening meeting. Every seat in the big tabernacle was filled, the aisles were packed, and outside the tent hundreds and hundreds stood closely packed together.

It was one of the first days of the camp meeting, and conviction had not yet taken the place of curiosity. A great many of the onlookers were Roman Catholics, and the balance were unused to any demonstration of the power of God, so the air was filled with unbelief, skepticism, scoffing and ridicule. The people would listen as long as we sang. But as soon as anyone endeavored to speak, the whisperings and the murmurings would begin until another song was started.

As I stood there on the platform with my eyes closed, I saw the entire tent surrounded by great black demons, with huge, bat-like wings. Each demon seemed to stand about 10 feet tall, and as they stood in a circle, completely surrounding the tent, they were so close together that their wings touched,

tip to tip.

With my eyes still closed, I began to cry out silently to the Lord, "Oh, Lord, what shall I do?" He replied, "Just begin to praise Me. I will do the fighting. You do the praising." So I began to praise Him.

"Praise the Lord!" The first time I said it I noticed the demons seemed to tremble.

"Praise the Lord!" The second time I shouted it. I am sure my voice was heard above every other sound, and I saw each demon take one step backward, away from the tent.

"Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Each time I said, "Praise the Lord," the demons took a step backward until I lost sight of them in the distance.

"Praise the Lord!" The next time I said it I saw in the distance a circular band of angels standing around the tent.

"Praise the Lord! PRAISE THE LORD!" Each time I praised Him they took one step nearer, another step nearer, still another step nearer, till at last they stood at the very border of the tent—such tall, wonderful-looking angels, with their beautiful, white wings spread so wide that the wings of each touched, tip to tip. Father had sent one of His legions of angels to guard the tent.

Perhaps not another person in the tent saw the vision of this great shining band of angels, yet everyone inside and out must have sensed the presence of the divine, for not only did a great peace steal over my soul, but the whole audience was hushed. When I opened my eyes I could see only the people watching in rapt attention, but when I closed them again I could see the angels just as plainly as I could see the people.

Is it any wonder I believe that the power of praise drives

back the enemy and brings down the blessing?

Read a companion devotional.

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) was a Pentecostal evangelist and founder of The Foursquare Church, formerly the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG). She was widely accepted by many different denominations and always held an interdenominational view.

Whatever Happened To the Ten Commandments?

MANY PEOPLE TODAY CAN'T EVEN LIST THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. WE MUST TEACH YOUNGER BELIEVERS THAT GOD'S MORAL LAWS ARE AS IMPORTANT TODAY AS THEY WERE WHEN GOD GAVE THEM TO MOSES.

A few months ago I read an article in a national newspaper that surprised me. A television talk show commentator had interviewed a number of people in nightclubs and other places on the street. He asked each the same question, "Can you name one of the Ten Commandments?"

I was deeply grieved to learn that no one he interviewed could quote any of God's laws. The ones who tried were way off base.

4 Ways to Feed Your Spirit

Even in the midst of difficult challenges, busy schedules and awkward moments, God wants us to enjoy our time on earth. He promised His joy would be our strength (Neh. 8:10); He personally participates in our lives, eager to see us face each day with grace and confidence, holding us up when the hard places on our journey threaten our ability to stand. The good news of Christ is that God has not left us alone.

Neither has He left us to figure out life on our own. Scripture provides signposts for the journey, helping us live active and balanced lives in Christ, keeping us from falling along the way and enabling us to partake of the feast of life as He intended.

Just as the four basic food groups help us live a healthy physical life, so the four spiritual food groups God has defined produce an energetic, balanced faith that help us live a vibrant spiritual life.

We need solitude with God to restore and direct us. From that comes a natural outflow of compassionate service to others. Community—challenging, supportive relationship with other believers—sustains and encourages us on the road. Contemplation renews our minds so we will live effectively. If we don't keep our spiritual equilibrium by spending solitary time with God, if we slide past the joy of serving others, if we avoid grabbing someone's arm for stability or if we fail to consider each step we take, we will fall.

1. Solitude

Several years ago, I visited some old college friends. While they prepared dinner, I followed their three children into the family room. Three-year-old Rachel showed no interest in the Disney cartoon her siblings chose to watch. She found another fascinating source of amusement: my face.

For 15 minutes, Rachel knelt on my lap and searched every part of my face. Her tiny hands pushed part of my cheek or jaw into strange shapes, and she giggled until it was time to try another shape. When this became dull, she traced my eyebrows and forehead with her index finger and giggled again. Nothing distracted her. Rachel was intent on studying my face.

That day, Rachel showed me what our relationship with God should look like. We need to learn to “get into God’s face,” tracing His eyebrows and squeezing His cheeks until we know what He looks like. We must not allow our attention to be diverted; instead we need to intensely gaze into the face of God.

To be balanced Christians, we must seek solitude with God. Jesus often retreated to “lonely places,” and we too must protect our “alone” time, when we can be still and know God. Too often we stay in overdrive and eventually burn out. But in solitude, we learn the value of waiting on God while resting in His presence.

2. Service

Soon after Dorothy Day (1897-1980), co-founder of *The Catholic Worker*, first encountered Christ’s love, she decided to spend her life among homeless men and women, caring for the poor through soup kitchens. Her legacy of service to those on the fringes of society can be seen today in countless communities across the country. Through her intimate relationship with God, Day developed an attitude of service and nurtured it in her lifestyle.

Service kept Day from a life of self-pity and despair during difficult times, and service helps us keep our spiritual balance by causing us to look upward and then outward. When we care for the needs of others and share God’s love with them, we stand firmly in the place we’ve been called to, our feet anchored in the hope we’ve discovered in Christ.

When God takes up residence in our hearts, He longs to express His compassion outwardly through us. We don't all have to live among the urban poor like Day did, but we can serve as the Father tells us to. He will direct us by His Spirit to those activities that He has preordained for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

3. Community

If service is the fruit of our fellowship with God, then community is its backdrop. Serving apart from the fellowship and encouragement of other Christians can cause us to burn out and do little good for God's kingdom. On the other hand, if we stay in a place of solitude, withdrawn from the presence and support of others, we can be overcome by the paralyzing ache of isolation and loneliness. We need people to spur us on in our faith and to help us maintain our balance on the road to abundant living.

The word *community* is derived from the Latin *communitas*, which means "fellowship." To understand the importance of community for a balanced, vibrant life, we need to examine other words with the same root: *communion*, *communication*, *commune*, *commute*. All these words imply a joining together.

When we partake of the communion elements, we symbolically join our hearts with God's; when we communicate with friends or family, we join our speaking and listening with another's; when we think of a commune, we think of people who have forsaken the ways of the world to join their lives together. And when we commute from the suburbs to the city, we join the two "worlds" together.

Community is a coming together—but not coexistence without interaction. When sprinters are lined up for a race in a track meet, they are not in community with one another. But if the runners embrace and congratulate one another at the end of the event, then something that looks like community begins.

To be balanced Christians, we must nurture relationships by sharing a common vision, bearing each other's burdens, seeking reconciliation and forgiveness, playing together and showing the world that we are His disciples. Without community, we wither away and never fully taste the joy of the fellowship of the saints. As Romans 12:4-5 says, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (NIV).

4. Contemplation

As much as a balanced Christian life demands our commitment to solitude, service and community, it is still not completely anchored without the final spiritual food group called contemplation. We can spend hours in prayer, serve at a local mission and spend time building relationships in the body of Christ—and still run the risk of leading a lopsided life. We need contemplation to keep us balanced, honest and real. But thinking is hard work, and it's all too easy to try to avoid it.

When we become contemplative—that is, when we really reflect on our ways, our motives and our purpose—we begin to display a wholeness of faith. Integrating the practice of contemplation into our lives enables us to become the people God has called us to be. We need to use our brains, and that requires nurturing an agile mind and developing a contemplative, reflective intellect that spurs us on to new places with our Maker.

But contemplation is not the same thing as acquiring information, Christian or otherwise. True biblical contemplation moves beyond information to insight, beyond knowledge to the wisdom of application and change. It is normal equipment for the normal Christian who wants to live a balanced life.

Contemplation forces us to abandon the busyness of life so we may reflect on its purpose. Contemplative time is essential for our personal growth, and our growth affects our relationships with others. Notice how the psalmist continually calls us to meditate on God's wonders, to remember His works and to consider our ways.

Jesus' constant use of parables, hard sayings and sermons challenged His listeners to think about the truth of His message. It is never a waste of time to reflect on the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6); such reflection pushes us deeper into a relationship with our Creator and spills over into all that we do. Paul prayed for the church at Philippi that their "love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [they might] be able to discern what is best and [might] be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11).

Perfect Peace

Integrating these four ingredients into our lives produces an energetic, balanced faith in the midst of daily demands. We need solitude with God to restore, refresh and direct us. Out of that time comes a natural outflow of service to others.

Community, or supportive relationships with other believers, helps us reflect Christ's character and witness to the world. And contemplation of truth renews our minds so we will function effectively and honestly in this Christian life. Imagine what happens to the balanced Christian who takes seriously the words of the prophet Isaiah: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You" (Is. 26:3).

Learning to love God and receive His love is an ongoing process that occurs in a multitude of ways. The four

ingredients for a balanced spiritual life simply provide helpful priorities to keep us going. They help us experience the abundant life Jesus promises us in Himself (John 10:10).

Balance brings to our souls much-needed rest (Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9-11), peace (Prov. 14:30; Col. 3:15), grace (Rom. 5:17), mercy (Lam. 3:22-23) and hope, which is “an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Heb. 6:19). These gifts keep us from turning to the left or the right, guarding our hearts along the way and infusing us with the necessary strength to “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

Bon Appétit!

The influence of our balanced Christian lifestyle extends far beyond our own little sphere. Indeed, our righteous lives hidden in Christ not only protect us from sin’s slippery slope but also bring the sweet aroma of Christ’s good news to a world that has lost its sense of purpose.

When we fail to keep our spiritual balance in this spinning world, we run the risk of blending into the crowd rather than shining like lights in front of it. On the other hand, when we stay active and balanced in our faith, when we partake of God’s eternal feast, the rewards—for everyone—are great.

These four spiritual food groups lead us into a closer walk with the One who is always inviting us to a feast, an eternal banquet that begins today. When we accept the invitation, we come to a table so glorious and exhilarating that we are forever changed, a place where the One at the head of the table looks into our eyes, smiles and reminds us that “‘no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him'” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Jo Kadlecek *is a freelance writer and journalist who has co-authored a number of books, including Resurrecting Hope and I Call You Friend. She has taught communications and English*

courses on both secular and Christian campuses and currently resides with her husband in New York City.

Celebrate Diversity in Worship

Because of the music ministry with which God has blessed me, I have had the privilege of worshiping in countless churches. I have praised the Lord with people of numerous races and denominations. As a result of my experiences, I have come to the conclusion that, regardless of doctrinal differences, racial preferences and varying worship styles, the body of Christ has more in common than it has differences.

Time and time again, I have seen the love of Christ as it has been demonstrated to the lost and hurting. I have seen the church in action as its members became agents of healing and wholeness.

Love And Roses

I'D RESIGNED MYSELF TO BEING SINGLE FOREVER. SO WHY WAS GOD PROMPTING ME TO THINK ABOUT MARRIAGE NOW?

Fourteen years ago I was living with a roommate in an apartment close to where I worked and attended church. I had come to the conclusion that God was going to be my only

husband for the rest of my life since there were no good men left in the world. I was content with that, but I hadn't always been. For years I'd harbored the dream of being swept off my feet by Prince Charming.

By the age of 28 I had seen lots of toads and not one prince.