

The season of Lent is quickly flying by and we have looked at various aspects of spiritual strength, including strength of convictions and the ability to manage doubt and fear,

endurance for sticking with faith and practice for the long run, speed for making moral decisions when faced with a dilemma, building wisdom through study as well as experience. One aspect that often gets overlooked in both physical AND spiritual fitness regimens is balance.

Physically, balance is its own system, located in the inner ear and processed in the brain, but is equally dependent on our core strength—muscles in the back and abdomen—for the final result of our being able to move about without toppling over. Balance is a strength and skill that can be improved with consistent practice and a little effort. Finding a spot to focus our vision helps with balance a great deal. It is rather surprising how quickly our balance can improve, and compared to other areas of strength, it is relatively easy. The opposite is true too, however. It is a strength and skill that erodes as quickly as we stop using it. While we are improving our balance, leaning on or holding on to something or someone is often helpful in the beginning.

Spiritually, balance is equally essential. As we go through our daily lives, we are faced with decision after decision. We often have to choose between things that are good. There are lots of options for what we might do, how we might serve, who we might assist, what we might study. The key is to discern what we are called to do and then concentrate on that. It is all too easy to get distracted from our highest and best by other good options. Keeping our inner vision focused on God is an important part of keeping our spiritual balance. The challenge is, that highest and best has to be supported by good over-all spiritual strength. So, let's say as an example, you are called to be a pray-er. You are consistent in prayer, you find meaning in having a long list of people and concerns to lift to the Lord, you rejoice when prayers are

answered the way people hoped and you are persistent when situations have not yet been resolved. But if all you ever do is pray, you will eventually deplete your ability to pray. You need to be regular in study of the scriptures and biographies of the giants of the faith. You need to be consistent in worship of Word and Sacrament. You need to be active in service in at least one other way besides intercessory prayer. It is important for you to stay in fellowship with other believers. To be able to manage all that, a person needs to be well-balanced.

Physically, balance happens when all the muscles hold a steady and equal amount of tension and the body remains erect. Spiritually, balance happens when we can hold an equal amount of value on the fundamentals of practicing and maintaining the faith in support of one's particular calling. The problem is, spiritually, we can never truly stand on our own. We always need to be holding onto God. A person that gets out of balance is in danger of falling for any number of temptations and getting their priorities out of order. It happens all the faster when we quit leaning on the Lord.

It is troublesome to fall. One of the words we use for a loss of balance is "burnout." A person gets burned out when they give too much without replenishing themselves. Another way a loss of balance happens is when the person has been "pushed" too far. Things happen, usually troublesome and painful things but not always, that cause a person to lose touch with God. We fall, it hurts, and we usually don't even realize what happened. All too often, we blame God for letting go, when really it was the other way around. Finally, we can lose our balance by leaning too hard one way or the other. A person can become "Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good" when they lean too hard away from service in the world. A person who tries too hard to impress their non-Christian friends or acquaintances can fall away from supportive faith relationships and topple out of the church. Any way you fall, it is bound to hurt.

I wish you well in maintaining your balance in the life of faith. Let me know if I can help.