

A Balanced Life

Text: Deuteronomy 6: 4 - 9; Mark 1: 35 - 38

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On a recent summer night . . . I fell completely under the spell of my television. Mind you, it's a very rare occasion when that happens! In fact, most often I watch TV with just "a-half-an-eye," so to speak, and the general quality of programs consistently confirms that it's only worth a very small slice of my attention.

But, this time was different and quite to my surprise. It was a real-time broadcast featuring a thirty-four year old acrobat and aerialist, who many have come to call "The King of the Wire." He is Nik to his friends, a seventh generation member of the famous family known as The Flying Wallendas. His most recent accomplishment was to walk a high-wire over the Grand Canyon without benefit of harness or safety net.

I was absolutely amazed at his discipline. His nearly twenty-three minute walk was something that required the power of unflinching concentration and the very best training: body, mind and soul all working together in the synchronicity of balance. To watch his feet on the two-inch cable; to see the cable flex and sway in the wind; to hold my breath as he stopped and squatted to ensure his balance; and then to watch him sprint the last ten feet - I was spellbound!

And this, too: to know that every moment of that walk was upheld by his faith piqued my interest all the more. The microphone he was wearing revealed each step was a breath prayer. I thought of Paul's admonition: "pray without ceasing!" He never lost sight of that. And, although my style of praying is quite different, I was inspired by the way that his faith was so integral to his every move.

A day or so later, Nik was on the talk-circuit and was asked about his faith. This is what he said: "I don't believe that God's invisible hand held me up on the wire. But I do believe that I am strengthened by the steadiness of my own faith. And that belief allows me to go beyond my apprehensions and what might otherwise feel like my limitations."ⁱ

We bear this much in common . . . with Nik. Life can be a balancing act in each of our own personal venues. And living life well demands a very deliberate sense of integrity - and in a daily, every step kind of way. It doesn't just happen. More: striking that balance and finding the right stride requires some measure or standard of truth - however we come to define it - to keep us grounded in the things that matter most.

Just last Sunday, the New York Times ran a story about a very unique summer camp. It's called Camp Grounded and is in Navarro, California.ⁱⁱ It's not for kids, as many camps are. No, instead, it's a place where adults otherwise consumed by an escalator of increasing demands can go to push the reset button and find themselves again. The article talked about some rather fascinating discussion groups: "digital-detoxification,"

“technological addiction,” and “disconnecting-to-reconnect.” The article even posed the question: “Does it ever feel like your iPhone is an extension of your nervous system?”

“The rules at Camp Grounded are very simple: no phones, no computers, no tablets, no watches, no texting, no blogging. Not even a sneak check. And work-talk, discussion of people’s ages, and other forms of positioning, such as talk about titles, were prohibited. It’s a place where people who are completely tied up can get untied.

One woman said, “I did a lot of listening to my own self. Authenticity and openness became the new normal. I really needed something like this. One night, I found myself lying on my back, gazing at the night sky. The only other time I’d seen the constellations so clearly was when I glanced up at the ceiling in Grand Central Terminal.”

The point again: balancing life requires something of us. Feeling whole and grounded and good and alive exacts a kind of attentiveness that we often unwittingly lose along the way for a lot of reasons. Sometimes, we outright need to step away and go back and look to the plumb-lines and wisdom that the ages give us for balancing life.

So, here’s the pitch for today . . . abundantly plain and immeasurably simple! Summertime gives us permission to lean back just enough to find our own internal “Camp Grounded,” locate the reset button, and push it! And the Bible gives us a small pocketful of metrics on which to start.

The great narratives of creation give us a perfect place to begin. However you interpret those stories, God created the multi-verse in all of its splendor. Genesis hints that it was a six-day job ó however you choose to understand that. But it wasn’t done until the seventh day, when God created something more mysterious and amazing yet called rest! Let’s call that the pause of the seventh step. The scriptures call it Sabbath and none of us in the human family can ever find balance ó let alone survive ó without rest!

Another. Moses gave us the *Shema*, a Hebrew word meaning “Hear.” As if to say “perk up your ears and listen, this is important!” This is core to both Jewish and Christian faith, and provides a traceable measure of balance: “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all your might.” The New Testament writers tweaked that slightly to say heart, soul, mind and strength. And then Jesus added a few more variables: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But, in whatever form, it’s all about tending to the core variables that make life wonderful and full.

One more. Early in the day, while it was still dark, Jesus would find a quiet place to pray. I suspect that he had learned that the demands of his day would require no less. And so he developed his own style, his own rhythm: a step aside with the Maker before getting to the tasks at hand. Other passages reveal that he maintained a daily practice of prayer like that, such that he and the heart of God were as one.

Hold them all together now . . . quiet time in each day . . . tending the core variables of heart, mind, soul, God, neighbor, selfí and the pause of the seventh day.

Let me return to something Nik said . . . and he is absolutely right: "I am strengthened by the steadiness of my own faith." He also teased with the reporters as he said, "It isn't all that hard, but please do not try this at home!"

I'll turn that last one around! When it comes to the art of balancing life: "Please practice your faith daily! And by all means, try this at home!"

In the Living Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

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ⁱ Internet interview and article on: World: Today's Christian News, June 24, 2013.

ⁱⁱ Matt Haber, "Coming Clean at Camp" in the New York Times, Sunday, July 7, 2013.

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