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Life in Balance (The President's Page)

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T H E P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E



Jiri Moskala

Before my first biblical message, I want to thank Jo Ann Davidson for her outstanding leadership as president of the Adventist Theological Society during the past two years. She had a great loving heart, good understanding of different issues, balanced theology, and excellent leadership skills. It was a real joy to work with her. All members of ATS and readers of *Perspective Digest* were blessed by her advice and gentle uniqueness. Jo Ann, a million thanks for your contribution! I pray that God will continue to lead us in the future by his Word and Spirit!

As humans, we tend to live one-sided lives. It's easy to be immoderate, fall into extremes, be narrow-minded, and concentrate only on something we like in our spiritual life. God's promised abundant life teaches us to live in balance. To demonstrate this harmony, I want to elaborate on one element in the Gospel according to Luke.

Bible authors were theologians. The way they arrange material in

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their writings reveals their theology. They were, of course, inspired by the Holy Spirit; and God helped them in the process of writing while respecting their choices of material, their style, and personality. We can clearly recognize their own specific intentions, background, emphases, message, and purpose.

In Luke, three interrelated passages reveal three crucial characteristics of the disciples of Jesus that can prevent us from falling into a one-sided life.

The first is the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Even many non-Christians know the story: A traveler is robbed and beaten. He desperately needs help. A priest passes by without helping. A Levite likewise offers no compassion. Then a hated foreigner arrives on the scene and unselfishly helps the despairing traveler. Though not a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he has a practical religion. A fellow human being needs help. He acts, and Jesus commends this loving response.

The purpose of Jesus' story is to show how essential is the unselfish, practical help of his followers; it must transcend all religious, social, or ethnic prejudices. Confession of faith is crucial but useless if it is not accompanied by service for the needy. The key word in the passage is the verb "to do." This term appears three times in verses 25, 28, and 37. "Doing" things out of love for those who need our help is a must. But if we had only this story in our Bible, we might conclude that true religion is only doing, performance, work for others. Why not then spend our life in such efforts?

The second episode finds Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). His travels have wearied Jesus. The very practical Martha sees that their guest needs rest, food, and friendship. She acts—opens her home to him, prepares food for him. She works for Jesus and is rebuked by him! What a surprise! "Martha," he says, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed" (NIV). We are puzzled! Martha is "doing" things for Jesus—exactly what Jesus commended in the previous passage, and she is rebuked! Why? Doing things is not enough. Why not?

An answer to this pertinent question lies in both in Mary's attitude and "action." She sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to him. His words are a potent correction to the possi-

bly distorted understanding of the previous episode—that service is all-important. No riddle! It's easy to be burnt out in work for our Lord—in church business, in helping people. Doing can be absorbing and tiring. Not only what we do, but how we do it is significant. The spirit in which we offer service makes all the difference. Only where there is right motivation can there be a corresponding blessing, with new energy springing from listening to the Word of God!

The third passage describes Jesus' teaching on prayer (Luke 11:1-13). His disciples come to him with a special request: "Lord, teach us to pray." They had observed the ministry that followed his prayers. They felt the power in his prayer and realized that his communication with his Father was deeply meaningful. Jesus gave them the model prayer, "Our Father," and added a story about a man who awakened a friend in the middle of the night to get bread for his visitors. This midnight foray must have been an acutely embarrassing and humiliating act for him. The story emphasizes how significant it is for us to cultivate—persistently, boldly, and shamelessly—a confiding relationship with our heavenly Father. Prayer is a conversation with God. It should open new dimensions in our lives.

Each of these three passages brings a unique perspective and cor-

rects a possible misunderstanding. Prayer, studying the Bible, and diligent work for others is revealed to be a package; one activity should not exist without the other. Distinct but inseparable, these three pertinent characteristics of the disciples of Jesus are equally valuable and provide life in abundance and balance when in the right sequence.

We should not live in extremes of even good things. Satan masterfully engages us in “good” works in order to prevent us from spending time with our loving God. Our adversary slyly provokes us to major in dry theology, biblical debates, theoretical studies, and monotone prayers so that we forget the essentials of real life, real people, real relationships, and real ministry. Or, other decep-

tions unavailing, he prods us to work so hard that we find no time for prayer, reflection, study, and fellowship with God—the one-sided life in extreme. But activity—substantial and lasting activity—is meritorious only when characterized by balance.

The sequence of these three passages in Luke reflects the order in Hebrew thinking. First the evangelist speaks about visible activity, and then about the inner motives for those actions. He goes from effect to cause. Thinking today more often goes from cause to effect. Only when we start every day with God—listening to him, speaking to him—can we be rightly motivated. Then it is that we shall be qualified to succor the afflicted on the highways and byways of our day.

A T T L E T O B E C O V E T E D

The Pharisees inadvertently paid Jesus one of the highest compliments he received while on earth when they scowled, pointed an accusing fingers at Him, and labeled Him “a friend of sinners.” Christ’s love is like the sun. It shines on us with full intensity no matter how terribly we behave, no matter how many times we fail. We can choose either to open up to its life-giving warmth and be made spiritually whole or to turn away.—Kim A. Johnson in the April 1999 *Signs of the Times*, p. 21.