



### Summary of issue:

My life seems to consist of mentally and physically running from one urgent task to the next. I feel I am always “running on empty”. I know I need to take time for physical, emotional, and spiritual “self-care”, but I seldom find the time. The “urgent” always seems to deflect me from getting to the “important”. In many ways, I feel that life is controlling me, rather than me controlling my life.

### Making it personal (take turns answering each question):

How does my life compare to the above paragraph?

What “urgent things” are always vying for my attention?

What “important things” am I neglecting?

Provide feedback to your spouse on what they said.

### Suggestion for improvement:

The concept of “balancing life” is generally considered a good thing. For this to be accepted as good advice we need to understand exactly what “balancing life” means. The commonly accepted meaning is to properly “juggle the urgent” within our limited available time. Is “juggling the urgent” really a good idea?

Let’s look at three reasons why balancing life by juggling the urgent isn’t a good idea. First, balancing life in this way requires a predictable life, which few of us have. Second, excessive “balancing” will limit the Holy Spirit’s ability to redirect our carefully organized life. And most importantly, Jesus did not appear to “balance His life” in this way. In fact, Jesus appears to be highly unbalanced, with no apparent schedule or strategic plan. We have no record of Him writing anything, setting up a seminary, or planning regular big meetings. Jesus seems to have just walked around, talked to people about God, and addressed needs as they presented themselves.

So, how did Jesus change the world with so little “balance”. Jesus had focus. BALANCE is about the URGENT but FOCUS is about the IMPORTANT. Jesus kept the important as his only true priority, regardless of how many urgent things fought for His time. And Jesus’ “single important focus” appears to be spending time with the Father. We have every indication that Jesus repeatedly walked away from the urgent in order to make time for the important. This is witnessed by Jesus’ loosely translated statement “we will always have the sick, I need to get away to be with my Father”.

The time Jesus had with His father was life-giving and tank-filling, resulting in energy to accomplish the urgent.

Most of us intuitively know that life-giving, tank-filling activities should stay at the top of our priority list. The problem is the urgent almost always floats to the top of our priority list, both because they are urgent, but also because they are easier to do than the important. Having a single very long priority list is not the answer.

Proposed here is having two priority lists. Our single priority list is probably very long, with the important dutifully placed at the top, but those life-giving important items seldom stay up there. In this lesson you are asked to create a second priority list, which contains only life-giving, tank-filling, important items. If this important list is religiously accomplished prior to starting on the urgent list, you will have the spiritual and physical energy to do the urgent list more effectively.

### Homework:

Come up with a list which has no more than four items on it. This is the IMPORTANT list, and nothing from the URGENT list can migrate unto this list. The important list needs to only contain activities that fill your tank and give you life.

Consider life-giving activities in the areas of spiritual (required), physical, emotional, and relational. For each activity, specify a length of time to be invested, and the frequency at which it will be done. Make this list easily doable. The last thing you need is yet another failure in the area of prioritizing life. Again, remember that nothing from the urgent list is allowed to impose on the important list.

To help clarify this assignment, here is an example of the author's important list.

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>When</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Daily	30 min.	5:30am	In office	Time in God's word and prayer
Daily	10 min.	10:06pm	Living room	Focused connecting time with his wife
Weekly	All day	Wednesday	Home	Full day of being "re-created" (not recreated)

Notice that the list is very doable. It only takes 40 minutes out of every day plus one day dedicated to "super-filling" the tank. Your list may not be quite this exacting, but clear achievable and measurable goals need to be specified. This list should address the areas of spiritual, relational, and physical. Exercise makes the important list for many people.

You may have noticed that children and grandchildren are not on the important list. Although those times are incredibly enjoyable, for the author these activities empty his tank just a little bit. Children and grandchildren are always at the top of his urgent list.

Your tendency will likely be to go beyond four items, and to make the items very aggressive. Avoid that tendency. The final list needs to be doable on a year in year out basis. Don't be fooled, this is very hard homework but well worth the effort.

### Follow up (discuss at next marriage mentor session):

Describe the "important list" that I've come up with.

How committed am I to keeping these items as my only "important" priorities?

If comfortable, invite your spouse to make comments and suggestions on your important list.

Discuss whether either of you want spousal encouragement regarding your important list commitment.