



WEEKLY STUDY

WEEK 5: Counter Culture - Balance

As we continue in our series, “Counter Culture”, we are exploring some of the values that our culture celebrates while asking ourselves the deeper question - “What does God actually say about these things?” This week Pastor Jake is speaking about “Balance”. After you’ve listened to the message...let’s take a deeper look together at what God says about the idea of balance.

MONDAY: Mark 10:17-25

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” **18** “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’ [a]” **20** “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” **21** Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **22** At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. **23** Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” **24** The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is [b] to enter the kingdom of God! **25** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” **24** “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. **25** Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

Since the moment we left the place of perfect peace (Shalom) in the Garden of Eden, we have been searching for balance and peace in our broken & very un-peaceful world. Throughout history we can see this quest take on many different forms. From ancient civilizations to modern times, philosophers and scholars have tackled this subject and written countless books, studies, and even developed entire cultural practices around it. Today, in our American cultural context, it has moved into a place of emphasis on the balance of work and life. If we could just balance our need to work with our desire to live, then we would have success, peace, and freedom. However, even though this is our cultural emphasis - 77% of Americans report being burned out in their careers at some point, 74% report that they feel like they don’t have enough free time, and 78% report having either physical or mental symptoms of stress at least once a month. It doesn’t seem like this cultural emphasis of simply balancing our neat little boxes of work, family, church, hobbies, self care, etc...is getting us to a place of perfect peace. Interestingly enough we can read this same struggle in the book of Mark. Here is a man that in the worldly sense has everything. He has wealth, he has friends, and he even sounds like a good person. He says he’s honest, he honors his family, and he’s doing all the right things. In our culture, and even in our churches, we would most likely look at this man and say “he’s got it all together”. On the outside it looks like a perfect and well-balanced life. Despite all this, He runs to Jesus and throws himself at Jesus’ feet. He must have known he was missing something. However, instead of asking Jesus what that was, the man thought he had the answer. He thought all he needed was the promise of eternal life, and he would be at peace. Jesus knew that wasn’t the whole answer. He knew that what the man needed in that moment was true surrender. Jesus knew that the man’s wealth and illusions of self-provision

and self-righteousness stood in the way of a heart fully surrendered to following God. This is why Jesus asks him to fully give up everything before coming to follow Him. Sadly, the man could not fully let go of this false illusion of control and receive the peace that comes from following Jesus. Some have misinterpreted this story to say that ALL of us need to go sell everything we own, but this is not the point of the story. There is no one-size-fits-all pathway that we can check off to receive peace and balance in our lives. Only God knows our hearts and what things we may need to fully surrender to Him in order to begin a life of Shalom following Him.

Take a moment to pray, and imagine yourself falling on your knees in front of Jesus just like the man in the story. What would Jesus ask you to surrender to Him today? What would be harder than a camel going through the eye of a needle for you in your life? If you aren't sure, pray and ask Him. Ask Him to reveal to you this week what things in your life you are holding tightly onto that might be keeping you from a balanced life of following Him.

TUESDAY: Mark 4: 35-41

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" 39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. 40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Many of us can easily relate to this story in Mark. Even if you've never been on a boat in the middle of a storm, you have most likely been in a situation when you were scared and exhausted, and calling out to God in distress. It's in moments like these that our cultural view of balance & peace starts to fall apart. No matter how good or successful the disciples were at navigating a boat, no matter how prepared they were, and no matter how "balanced" they were by taking a moment to rest...the storm still came. Quite literally, in this moment, Jesus was taking a break and resting. Our culture would applaud this as a method to achieve a peaceful and balanced life. However, instead of peace, the wind and the waves came and they were anything but peaceful. The world would tell us that we will have peace and balance by taking time to rest, organizing our schedules, being prepared, taking long walks, breathing right, or just trying harder with whatever the latest trendy pathway might be. Just like the disciples, we need to ask ourselves, "What happens when the storm comes?". What happens when you lose your job, when you receive a devastating diagnosis, when your kid pukes in the car line or the dog eats a sock and you're at the emergency vet at 3am? How do you organize and plan enough to prevent the inevitable storm that will smash any perfectly color-coded spreadsheet and beautifully planned org chart into a thousand pieces? For so many of us, even as believers, it's in that moment that we finally lay down our "trying harder" and call out to God. It's in these moments that we realize the world's view of peace and balance isn't sustainable or permanent, it's purely circumstantial. Over and over in scripture God tells us that we will have trouble, and we will have storms. In, John 16:33 says "In this world you WILL have trouble". Jesus never promises us a life without storms, even if we follow Him. Some churches misinterpret scripture to preach that if you follow Jesus, then you will have an easy life. This is never promised in the Bible and it was not even true in Jesus' own life here on earth. If anyone knows what it's like to go through storms and suffering, it's our savior! The good news is that when we cry out, He answers. Jesus is our peace. As soon as the disciples gave up trying to save themselves and called out to God, Jesus immediately said "be still". Those words "be

still” in these verses literally mean to “cease” or “stop fighting”. In the middle of our storms God calls us to stop fighting, and to trust Him to lead us towards an unconditional permanent peace in the storm.

Maybe you are in a storm right now, maybe you can see one on the horizon, or maybe you just came through one and are in a season of recovery. Call out to God this week. Even if you’ve made a mess of things, even if you’ve been trying so hard to get to a place of peace and balance on your own...call out and “Be Still”. Read Psalm 46:10 this week, maybe even write it on a notecard as a reminder. Pray and ask God to show you the places where you need to stop striving and just be still.

WEDNESDAY:

Matthew 7:24-27

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

What happens when we are tempted by our culture to place the burden of creating peace and balance on our selves? As in this story of the builder in Matthew, this is a great example of building our houses on sand. If we can’t control the storms and the circumstances around us, what makes us feel that we can be balanced or sustained in it? Naturally as humans we try to control and we like to think that we have much more power & wisdom than we actually do. However, when we attempt to do this, we are actually putting ourselves in the place of God in our lives. We were never meant to carry the burden of peace. Only Jesus is the Prince of Peace. There is such freedom and strength in that admission. Building your house on the Prince of Peace is building your house on the rock! Nothing will be able to take down your house. There will be peace and balance no matter the storms and circumstances. Think about Pastor Jake’s story of Yellowstone Park. Even if one animal or species is missing, those delicate ecosystems are put into jeopardy. We can trust God who created heaven and earth, and who balances all things down to the cells in our bodies and the molecules all around us. We can trust that He can give us balance and peace in our lives too. God knows our hearts, He knows what’s in front of us and behind us, and He knows exactly what we need. A life of balance is actually much more simple than following a long list of check-boxes, scheduling apps, or wellness pathways that will lead you no where. As it says in the verses above, all we have to do is follow Him. He will be our balance, our rock, our peace and our strength.

Where have you been putting yourself in the place of God in your life? Where are you trying to build houses in the sand? Have some of those houses already started to crumble & sink under the wind and storms? Even if you feel like they are sinking, there is still time to give it to God. Spend some time in prayer asking God to reveal your houses in the sand and pray about how you can begin to build them on solid rock!

THURSDAY: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

*2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

3 he refreshes my soul.

*He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.*

*4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]*

*I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;*

*your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

At first glance, this Psalm seems to illustrate a postcard worthy moment of green pastures and quiet water. This certainly fits our cultural picture of peace and balance. However, let's take a closer look at what David is actually illustrating here. David, as a former shepherd himself, calls God his shepherd. David is following God as He leads him into a place where he can rest and be refreshed. Until verse 4, this looks like a beautiful peaceful place in his life. However, Verse 4 takes an abrupt turn and reveals that he is actually in the darkest valley. Some translations call this the "valley of the shadow of death". This seems very contradictory through our cultural lens of balance and peace. How can David find refreshment, peace and provision in a valley of death? As we keep reading, David says that the "rod and staff" comfort him. Since God is portrayed as the shepherd, the rod and staff would have been used for the correction and protection of the sheep. When we think about being corrected by a rod, or needing to be protected from lions or wolves, that doesn't exactly seem like a place that refreshes our souls. Then David speaks about a table before his enemies, and an anointing that is symbolic of God's calling and purpose on his life. Many of these verses could confuse us when we look at it through the lens of our cultural definitions of peace and balance. How is David finding rest and refreshment for his soul in a time of darkness, trials, correction, protection and enemies? How do we have a life of permanent and lasting balance and peace like David? David not only has peace, but he says that he "lacks nothing", his cup is overflowing, and he proclaims that goodness and love will follow him always. Wow!! Talk about counter cultural! David has peace in the storm because he's following the shepherd, allowing the shepherd to guide his paths with correction and protection, accepting the anointing and purpose for his life, and proclaiming God's present and future goodness. The key is following God! This should provide comfort and encouragement for all of us. When we follow God instead of our culture, or ourselves, we can have peace and balance even in the most difficult of life's circumstances. This is true unshakeable unconditional peace that can only come from following Jesus!

Write this Psalm down, put it somewhere this week where you can read it over and over. Where do you need to allow God to be your shepherd? Where do you need to allow His rod and staff to comfort you? Where do you need to follow His anointing and calling on your life? Where do you need to praise Him in the Valley of Death?

FRIDAY : Galatians 5:22-23

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

When we attempt to achieve balance and peace it is good to remember that peace is a fruit of the Spirit. It is an outward expression that shows we are following Jesus. True lasting peace cannot be achieved apart from God. Below are a few steps to pray about this week as we work towards a life of following Jesus and receiving His peace and balance no matter the storms around us.

1. SURRENDER: Matthew 16:24-26

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to save their life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. **26** What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Just like the story of the wealthy man in Mark 10, we are asked to surrender anything that we hold higher than God. Pray about what surrender looks like in your life. What is God asking you to give over to Him? Where are you acting in the place of God? What are you hanging tightly onto? As it says in these verses in Matthew, whoever wants to save their life has to loose it first. Surrender to Him and trust Him fully with your life, your peace, and your soul.

2. PRIORITIZE: Proverbs 19:21

*Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*

We may think we know what our priorities and plans should be. We might be like the man in Mark 10 who thought all he needed was eternal life. However, God knows best. Trust in God's purpose and provision. If we want to be sustained in the storms, we need to build our house on the rock. As it says in these verses in Proverbs "it is the Lord's purpose that prevails". Pray and follow His lead as you prioritize your life.

3. DAILY BREAD: John 6:35

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 10:27

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Every day we need bread, and every day we need Jesus. In order to surrender, prioritize and follow Jesus we have to know Him. As these verses in John speak about, and also in the Psalm from this week, the only way the sheep know their shepherd's voice is by spending time together. Pray about spending intentional, daily, intimate time with Him. When you write out your priorities, be sure this is #1 on your list!

4. CONTENTMENT: Philippians 4:11-13

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. **12** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **13** I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

As Paul says in these verses, he learned to be content in all circumstances. He didn't do this alone. As he says at the end, this is only achieved through God's strength. Paul knew where his hope, peace, strength and provision came from. He gave God all the glory for that. Pray about where you need to seek God's strength to reach a place of contentment no matter the circumstances in your life.

5. GRATITUDE: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Finally, rejoicing and giving thanks in all circumstances. Pray now for the places in your life that you need to rejoice and worship even in the storm. Trust that God will bring peace and balance to your life no matter what is going on around you. Rejoice and worship because of who God is, and what He has done for you!