

# *A Balanced* **Life**

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A LIFE TOOL



LIFE FAMILY TRAINING

# Introduction

*A Balanced Life* is a points and rewards system. It was created as a tool to help any person create greater balance and achieve excellence in their life. It can also be a very effective tool for parents to implement with their children to help them create balance and achieve excellence too. Finding balance in life can be tricky. There are so many different things vying for our attention that it is easy to let our priorities slip and for our overall wellbeing to suffer. With *A Balanced Life* you'll find that tracking points and rewards is easy and effective. So, whether you use *A Balanced Life* for yourself or for your children, you will find peace of mind knowing that the fundamental bases are being covered, thus setting yourself up for success on a daily basis.

## Do “The Best You Can”

“The best you can.” It’s a cliché, a canned response. It is overused, glossed over, and superficially understood. I concede that the intention behind it is always good. Most often it is shared from teacher to student, master to apprentice, or parent to child to convey that sometimes you’ll fail and that’s okay. As long as you are doing “the best you can,” that is all you can control, and there is no sense beating yourself up over things you can’t control. I get it and I agree with the sentiment. It has calmed my frustration many times, but it has also caused me to stop and wonder what it means. I ask myself, “Have I really done the best I can?”

What does it mean to do the best you can? Does it mean you set a goal and put all of your focus and effort into that one thing? Does it mean you spend every waking moment scheming and strategizing and planning your next move towards your objective? No! Life isn’t about being excellent at just one thing. Life is about doing your best in all areas of your life. This requires balance. That is what makes it tricky to decide whether or not one has done their best.

There are plenty of people that find great success in business but have failed marriages, and athletes that excel in their chosen sport but fail to make the grade academically or to manage their money financially. For much of my career I have specialized in helping save marriages. Countless times I have worked with a couple that is struggling because either the husband or wife or both have been neglecting their relationship. At the same time they have both developed successful careers. In our quest to do our best, we can’t get hung up on one facet of our life. Sure, that endeavor may soar, but at what expense?

Some time ago, I took a group of couples down a river in tandem kayaks. Most of the couples were enjoying themselves, but one couple in particular was not having any fun at all. As I observed their interaction, I could see that he was so determined to finish the trip as fast as possible that his wife had become an obstacle. Consequently, he was steamrolling right over her every step of the way. She had become a casualty of his desire to finish first.

At one point, while carrying the kayak around an obstacle, she stepped away in tears. That is when I stepped in, put my arm around the husband’s shoulder and asked if he was open to some coaching. He welcomed it so I called him by name and said, “If you finish first without your wife, you’ve lost.” Later on, he reported to me that no words had ever brought him down so quickly as those at that time.

So, why did these words influence him so quickly? Well, initially all he was focused on was speed and efficiency. Then I gently reminded him that there is more to consider than just speed and efficiency. Specifically, the thoughts and feelings of his dear wife. To sum it up in one word, perspective. His perspective of what was important changed. And, oh, what a difference it made for him and her. The rest of their trip was spent smiling and laughing.

How often in our lives do we get so wrapped up in one priority that we begin to neglect everything else? We all

fall victim to “tunnel vision” from time to time. Tunnel vision can be very helpful in isolated circumstances, but in excess, it is an enemy to doing your best because it blocks out other priorities.

When I was a young boy, I was very involved in scouting. One of my favorite scout leaders was Mark Palmer, a carpenter. Playing to his strengths, many of our activities were spent in his shop, building things out of wood. On one particular occasion, I was building a puzzle out of wood and rope. It wasn't working right and I couldn't figure out what was wrong. I asked for his help, so he came right up next to me looking at the puzzle. He appeared to be stumped until he literally took a step back to look at it from a further distance. After a quick moment, he stepped forward, corrected my mistake, and said, “Sometimes, you have to take a step back, and take it all in.” While I had been stuck in my own “tunnel vision,” he had the presence of mind to look at the big picture, and that made the difference.

When we get hyper-focused on one thing, our perspective is severely limited and our ability to make good decisions diminishes. This is why we must take a step back and take it all in. As our perspective broadens, our ability to make better decisions increases. Remember, life isn't about being excellent at one thing, it is about doing your best in all areas of your life.

## Focus

While tunnel vision can lead to a very limiting perspective, it can also be a bad thing to step too far back. The reality of being human dictates that we are all limited in our reasoning power. It may vary from person to person, but nobody can consider all variables at once. For this reason, we must be able to find the proper lens through which to focus.

This reminds me of when my oldest son received a microscope for his birthday a few years ago. Being his first microscope, he had to learn how it worked so that he could properly see the samples he had collected. Once the sample was prepared correctly on the glass slide, it was critical that he selected the proper objective and then focused it correctly. (The “objective” is the part of the microscope that determines how much you are magnifying the sample.) He quickly learned that the same objective was not ideal for all samples, and he had to refocus the objective each time the sample was changed. After a period of trial and error, and breaking a few glass slides, he learned how to select and focus the right objective so that his samples were properly magnified and clearly seen.

So, what is the right lens or objective when evaluating your best effort?

Remember, if you focus on just one thing, then you will be neglecting other priorities. And, if you focus on too many, then you will spread your time, energy, and reasoning power too thin.

Unfortunately, there isn't a one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to the behavior of doing your best. Each of us leads completely different lives. We each have our own strengths and weaknesses, career paths, hobbies, relationships, and many other varying things to consider. For me to propose a solution focused just on behaviors that I deem important would be like me trying to fit everyone else into a box that only I fit in, and that doesn't do anyone any good.

The answer is, rather than focus on the things that make us all different, we need to focus on the foundation that we all have in common. It is that foundation that underscores our behaviors. Specifically, in life we all share the same four areas—emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. All of our behaviors can be categorized into these areas, and a proper understanding and balance of each of these areas will lead to greater balance in your life. It is on these four areas that we should focus and establish a firm foundation.

# The Four Areas of Need

As stated in the previous section, we all share four general areas in our life. They are the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. These are the different ways that we experience life. The truth is, however, these four areas are more than simply how we experience life; they are also a convenient way of categorizing our basic, fundamental needs. By focusing on these four areas, not only can we ensure to have a more balanced approach at doing our best, but we can also ensure that our basic, fundamental needs are being met, thus unlocking our full potential for progress and growth.

To understand why it is important to focus on needs, one must understand what needs are and what happens when our needs are not met.

There are various ways that one could define a need. For instance, if something is required to sustain life, like air, food, or water, then that thing is a need. However, those are purely physical, so you can't stop there. What about the emotional, mental, and spiritual areas of life? Do those have needs too? Absolutely! Needs are more than just what you need to survive, they can also include what you need to be healthy, and that is where it gets subjective. What constitutes health? Wherever you draw the line, one thing is certain, we do have needs in all four areas of life and those needs do include more than simply what we need to survive.

Now, what happens when our needs are not being met? Well, remember that what makes it a need is that it is required to maintain a certain degree of health. So, if certain needs are not being met, then our health is at risk. We can become sick, not only physically, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, too. In addition to becoming ill, a failure to meet certain needs can also create fear. Typically, when people are afraid, they behave irrationally and even destructively.

A great point of reference for the importance of satisfying needs is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs. While there are various levels of this hierarchy, just consider the juxtaposition of the first and last. The first level is comprised of Physiological needs, like air, food, and water. The last level is Self-Actualization, which is the realizing or fulfillment of one's potential. The inference is that before someone can begin to actualize their potential, they first must meet their more fundamental needs.

In summary, needs are things that are required to maintain a healthy life. When we are deprived of needs, we can become ill and afraid and behave irrationally and destructively. If this is all happening at your foundation, as referenced in the previous section, then good luck trying to live a balanced life and actualizing your potential. In order to do your best, you must first make sure that your basic, fundamental needs are being met in all areas of your life.

## Emotional

Life is a deeply personal experience that requires social interaction.

Consequently, the emotional area of life and its accompanying needs can be broken down into two focuses—our social interaction with others, and the way we feel about ourselves. In order to maximize and maintain our emotional health we have to create meaningful social interactions and engage in personal behaviors that promote personal emotional wellness. Historically, people have thought that success led to happiness.

However, more recent research indicates that our happiness leads to success. Start by improving your emotional well-being and success will follow.

## Mental

In the context of the four areas of need, the mental area of life refers specifically to cognitive learning. We need, to exercise our brain. While the brain is not actually a muscle, it is indeed like a muscle. The more you stimulate it in the right way, the more efficiently it will learn new things and recall old things. Also like a muscle, it can atrophy. The less you use your brain in the right way, the weaker it becomes. In a very real way, our ability to survive hinges on our ability to make good decisions, and that ability stems from a minimum degree of mental sharpness. For the foundation of a healthy life, we need to stay mentally sharp.

## Physical

The law of entropy teaches us that everything physical is constantly moving toward a state of disorder. Even living organisms are constantly dying on a cellular level. The only reason we stay alive is because our bodies replace old cells with new ones. However, in order to keep producing new cells to replace the dying ones, we need to take care of our physical body. Obviously, food, water, and air are essential, but beyond that, we must also keep our body safe from injury and even exercise it properly so it can stay strong. If we neglected these physical needs, we would eventually wither away and die, sooner rather than later.

## Spiritual

In 1984, the World Health Organization passed a measure to include a spiritual dimension to their definition of health. It is generally accepted that there are certain things that don't quite fit into the other three areas but still need to be satisfied in order to experience a healthy state of existence. It is important to note that spiritual does not mean religious. While religion can be a means of meeting spiritual needs, spiritual needs can also be met in other ways. A great way to view the spiritual area of life is as the part of life that addresses metaphysical healing. Satisfying spiritual needs helps one feel centered and at peace within the greater context of their life and circumstances. For many, this is their religious faith. For others, it can be connecting with nature, relaxing, or meditating. The bottom line is that we need to feel at peace with who we are, and we need to engage in activities that help to accomplish that.

## Points and Rewards

When I was 27 years old, I was a graduate student at the University of Oregon. I was three years newly married with a one year old baby. I'd say that the reality of adulthood was setting in. Sure, I had done hard things before, but for the first time in my life the limits of my time were being stretched and split by so many important things. With school, work, community, and home responsibilities weighing on me every day, I found it hard to find balance. I often felt exhausted and incapable of excelling in all these demands. I also found myself rationalizing more indulgences. Watching more TV. Eating more junk food. Staying up late. Sacrificing punctuality to get just a few more minutes of sleep in the morning, and then still showing up to my destination tired. There is no question that my overall health was suffering and my performance in each of my responsibilities was compromised as well.

As time went on I reflected more and more on what was wrong. Every responsibility I had was good, so I was very reluctant to slack off or drop any of them. I was determined to find a way to make it all work. I realized that the only things I really needed to improve were my indulgent behaviors and the way I felt about myself. I had initiated a self-perpetuating cycle of indulgence and self-loathing. I needed to break the cycle.

One day I had an idea. My indulgent behaviors were not necessarily bad, but I was doing them too often. That, coupled with neglecting some fundamental needs, made me feel bad. My idea was to create a points and reward system that would encourage me to take care of my basic needs first and then only indulge when I had earned it. It took some research, fine tuning, and trial and error to get it right, but before long my idea yielded marvelous results.

The system I set up was an immediate success. It was simple enough that it only took a few minutes each day to implement, and it was flexible enough to keep variety in my daily routine. I began accomplishing more, excelling with my various responsibilities and I was able to enjoy simple life pleasures, guilt free. Most importantly, the moment I began following the system, I immediately felt better about myself. I couldn't have been happier.

The basic concept of the system is simple. Set four simple goals to accomplish every day for each of the four areas of need. Then, identify a few rewards—things you like to do but run the risk of abusing. Each goal is worth one point. If you accomplish all goals in one day, thus creating a balance in all four areas, then you receive four bonus points for a maximum of 20 points per day. Each reward is worth 16 points, which is equal to the daily maximum minus the bonus. Each day you tally up your points and subtract your rewards to keep a running total. In summary, with this system you simply quantify your accomplishments and exchange their value for rewards.

This system will be explained more in a later section, but let me highlight some of the benefits. First, you will find that many of the points you earn will be for things you already do but have neglected to acknowledge. You will realize that your habits aren't as bad as you think. Second, you will develop a habit of doing more positive things. Third, you will be able to enjoy your rewards with a clear conscious knowing that you've earned them. Fourth, you will feel better about yourself. Fifth, as you feel better about yourself you will begin bringing your best self to your work, school, home, church, sports team, etc. That better self will accomplish more and contribute more meaningfully to society.

Are you ready to begin? I hope so, because the rest of this book includes everything you need to get started.

## Goals Equal Points

As stated previously, you should set four goals in each of the four areas of need.

Sixteen goals may seem like a lot. The key is to select goals that are simple, relatively easy, and that you feel you should be doing everyday anyway. Remember, the purpose is to create a balanced foundation, so these goals are not intended to be the end product of some huge project. On the following page are a few examples of possible goals for each of the four areas of need. You'll notice that many goals could show up in multiple areas. This is because the four areas of need overlap. This is just one way the system can be so flexible. You get to choose what works for you, just be sure to create a balance.

**Physical:**

- Some sort of cardio
- Some sort of weight training
- Crunches
- Pushups
- Pull-ups
- Drink 1/2 of body weight in ounces of water
- Yoga
- Wake up at a certain time
- Go to bed by a certain time

**Spiritual:**

- Meditate
  - Pray
  - Read scriptures
  - Sing a song
  - Spend time in nature
  - Act of service
  - Express gratitude
  - Connect with your ancestors through family history
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**Emotional:**

- An act of service
- 10 declarations
- Play an instrument
- Listen to uplifting music
- Call a friend who's far away
- Call a family member who's far away
- Write in your journal
- 15 minutes of relaxation

**Mental:**

- Read a news article
- Learn a new word
- Read 15 minutes of a book
- Memorize a quote
- Play a brain game
- Do homework
- Study a language
- Review flashcards

## Rewards

For the purposes of this system, your rewards should meet two specific criteria. First, they should be things that you might otherwise try to do every day. Second, they should be desirous enough to motivate you to earn the rewards to do them. The suggested reward value is 16 points. This is so you can be rewarded every day if you want. However, once again, this is intended to be flexible. You get to decide how often you need to be rewarded in order to keep going. Also, you may even decide you want to create a large reward that is worth multiple days' points. I've even set this up with my family so we can pool our points to get one big reward together. Below are examples of rewards you can set with their accompanying point total.

**Daily Reward: 16 Points**

- 1 hour of television
- 1 hour of video games
- A soda pop
- Ice cream
- Donuts
- A candybar
- Eat out
- Rent a movie
- Sleep in
- Chocolate
- Impulse buy

**Weekly/Family Reward: 80-100 Points**

- Go out to a movie
- Go to a sporting event
- Netflix binge watch
- Family fun center
- Waterpark
- Eat out with family

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**Long-Term/Family Rewards: 500+ Points**

- Weekend getaway
- Amusement park
- Big purchase like a TV or game system
- Shopping spree

## Conclusion

*The Balanced Life* worksheet is simple to use. Just take a few minutes at the beginning of each week to fill in your chosen goals and rewards and start tracking your progress. The end Total for Sunday is then carried over to the following Monday so you don't lose any points. On the following page is a sample worksheet that has been filled out so you can see how it works, and there are four blank worksheets on the following pages to last you a month. You can, of course, print out the worksheets for as many weeks or as many people as you'd like.



# A Balanced Life



Mental		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1	Read 1 news	x	x	x	x	x	x	
2	Learn 1 word	x		x	x	x		
3	Read a book (15 minutes)	x	x		x	x		
4	Memorize a quote	x	x		x	x		
Emotional								
1	1 Act of Service	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2	10 Declarations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	Play an Instrument	x		x	x	x	x	
4	Contact a friend	x	x		x	x		
Physical								
1	10 Pushups	x	x	x	x	x	x	
2	10 Squats	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3	20 Crunches	x	x	x	x	x	x	
4	1 Pull-up	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Spiritual								
1	Pray	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2	Read Scriptures	x		x	x	x		x
3	Sing a Hymn	x	x	x	x	x		x
4	Nature Walk	x	x		x	x	x	
Bonus		4	0	0	4	4	0	0
Previous Day's Point Total		0	4	17	29	33	53	15
+ Points Earned Today		20	13	12	20	20	10	5
— Points Spent Today		16	0	0	16	0	48	0
Daily Total		4	17	29	33	53	15	20

Rewards		Value
1	Watch a show	16
2	Dessert	16
3	Drink a soda	16
4		
5		

# A Balanced Life



Mental		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Emotional		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Physical		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Spiritual		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								

Bonus		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
Previous Day's Point Total								
+ Points Earned Today								
— Points Spent Today								
Daily Total								

Rewards		Value
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

# A Balanced Life



Mental		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Emotional		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Physical		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Spiritual		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								

Bonus		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
<b>Previous Day's Point Total</b>								
<b>+ Points Earned Today</b>								
<b>— Points Spent Today</b>								
<b>Daily Total</b>								

Rewards		Value
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

# A Balanced Life



Mental		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Emotional		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Physical		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Spiritual		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								

Bonus		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
<b>Previous Day's Point Total</b>								
<b>+ Points Earned Today</b>								
<b>— Points Spent Today</b>								
<b>Daily Total</b>								

Rewards		Value
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

# A Balanced Life



Mental		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Emotional		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Physical		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								



Spiritual		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
1								
2								
3								
4								

Bonus		M	T	W	TH	F	S	SU
<b>Previous Day's Point Total</b>								
<b>+ Points Earned Today</b>								
<b>— Points Spent Today</b>								
<b>Daily Total</b>								

Rewards		Value
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		