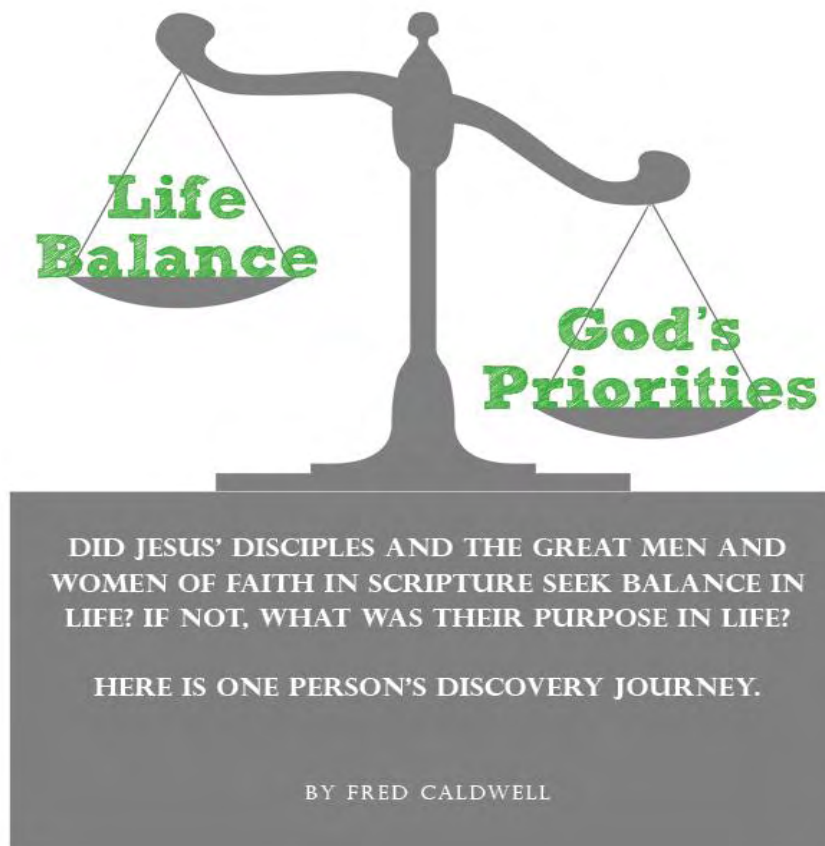


Living Cases

Personal spiritual journeys of men and women in business



What is my purpose in life?

This is a question pondered by perhaps every man. Why am I on earth and what am I here to accomplish? How do I balance my life so that I achieve the most

important goals? In answering these questions, I have found that once we discover our true purpose, the ability to manage day-to-day life is much easier.

When I was four years old, my father was called to enter full-time ministry, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. That calling took the family to Del Rio, Texas where we lived

until I graduated from high school. While in high school, I participated in many sports and at the end of high school, had some desire to continue playing my favorite sport, football. Thanks to a family friend, I was invited by the coaches at Texas A&M University to join their freshman class of football players as a walk-on.

I will always remember my first day on the TAMU campus. I made a comment to my roommate, John, that I wanted to work very hard during the two-a-day practices so I could make the



Fred Caldwell is founder and CEO of Caldwell Cos., a Houston-based commercial and residential real estate development and investment firm. The company's vision, as stated on its website, is "to honor God by stewarding resources, cultivating relationships and creating extraordinary communities that enrich lives."

first away game trip to Kansas. He looked me straight in the eye and told me that few if any walk-on players ever made the travel team. He went on to explain that after several years as a walk-on, he had not even had the opportunity to suit up for a game on Kyle Field. John's comment woke something deep inside me and a determination developed to prove that I could make the team.

But John *was* right about the initial trip. The walk-on journey was challenging at best. The walk-on players wore green jerseys while the scholarship athletes wore maroon jerseys. The walk-on players had their names taped on their helmets, while the scholarship athletes needed no names

on their helmets as the coaches already knew their names. The green jersey for me became a measurement of self-worth and fed a feeling that I would never be of value unless I could become a scholarship player.

My desire to succeed had never been so intense at any prior point in my life. I put every ounce of effort into becoming an athlete that was worthy of a maroon jersey. I grew to have a strong hatred for the green jersey and the walk-on title. I became very determined to fight my way out of the walk-on status.

My football background is a precursor to my discovering the purpose for my life apart from a game and from how others might decide to "clothe" me with their uniforms. Unfortunately, upon entering college my relationship with God was not secure and my identity was rooted not in His purpose for my life but in my ability to perform and achieve.

During the first year of my college experience, three primary focuses evolved for me to the exclusion of all others – weights, school and football. I did these things not out of any real joy but out of a deep need to prove to myself that I was worth more than being a walk-on in a green jersey with my name taped to a helmet. My focus left little room for anything or anyone else. Accordingly, I essentially lived in a self-created cocoon of work.

Throughout the first year of college, I masked the pain of my identity being tied to a green jersey by becoming a very intense young man. I was developing the attitude of a fighter and acquiring the toughness necessary to win battles on the practice field. I determined that the only way to get out of the green jersey was to defeat all scholarship athletes who stood in my way. Thus, my own teammates

became enemies by my narrow definition of purpose.

In the second year, I was given the opportunity to play special teams. I played on Kyle Field, suited up in a game jersey and was even listed in the program. These things were a huge step forward in my pursuit of the maroon jersey. I was fulfilled in some ways by these small steps. In the same year during Spring practice, the head coach, Tom Wilson, stopped practice one day and told me to take off the green jersey and put on a maroon jersey. The other players clapped and showed great enthusiasm in what would be one of the more memorable events in my football experience. I so enjoyed the moment but the desire to press forward and achieve did not subside.

After being given a scholarship that Spring, I made it my goal to become a starter on the team and once again my focus increased, which led in turn to longer workouts in the weight room and on the field. I started my first game as a junior and became a two-year starter in my fourth and fifth years. That fifth year as I carried a full load of graduate classes while competing each day on the football field was perhaps one of the most trying times in my life.

Our new coach put the team through grueling practice schedules in the Spring and Fall. In every practice, we had numerous fights and the game lost much of its interest for me. During a game with TCU, my left knee was planted to the turf and my body pushed in the opposite direction; most of the ligaments in my knee were torn. As I lay injured on Kyle Field, a strange relief flooded over me as I realized I would never play football again. The battle of five years was over, and with the end of that battle came great relief. The hill I had been climbing sud-

denly vanished and I felt some temporary relief from the pain inside me.

I graduated with my Masters in Business Finance in 1983, married my high school girlfriend, Susan, who had stuck with me throughout college and moved to Houston. Unlike my classmates who mostly went to work for accounting and banking firms, I elected to go to work for my father-in-law's home building business. I became a construction superintendent and once again felt I was wearing a green jersey as my peers headed off in suits to downtown Houston or Dallas. I was on construction sites in boots and jeans, at that time feeling like I was wasting time and my education; little did I know then that God was preparing me for a career in the development of residential communities. After two years and the market collapse in Houston, I changed jobs and went to work for a commercial developer and investor.

Simply outworking the competition led to personal achievement but it did not lead to any true satisfaction. In the mid 1980s, the growing insight that I was not destined on earth to have the emptiness left by hard work and success at sports or business led me to make a decision to turn to God. Because of my identity being tied to a sport in college and in the first few years of my business career, I had made some poor decisions that had damaged many relationships. Out of these decisions came emptiness, regret and the realization that there was something better.

Susan and I began attending a church in northwest Houston and the pastor befriended me. His counsel coupled with other things I was reading caused me one day in the midst of a "green jersey" day to simply tell God that I would submit to Him and follow Jesus. From that point forward, God began a healing process

that has been ongoing now for over 25 years.

In 1990, I took a leap of faith and started a real estate company, with the goal of one day being in the development and investment real estate business. For the first five to six years of starting the business, I was seldom home as I worked almost every day. My focus was once again on being “successful.” However, this time around, God was in the equation and although my work ethic was pointedly focused on the business, I also began to have a growing hunger to better know God. The guilt I felt for not being home with my family grew stronger over time and drove me to consider the whole issue of balance and priority. I was in need of healing and God was the solution.

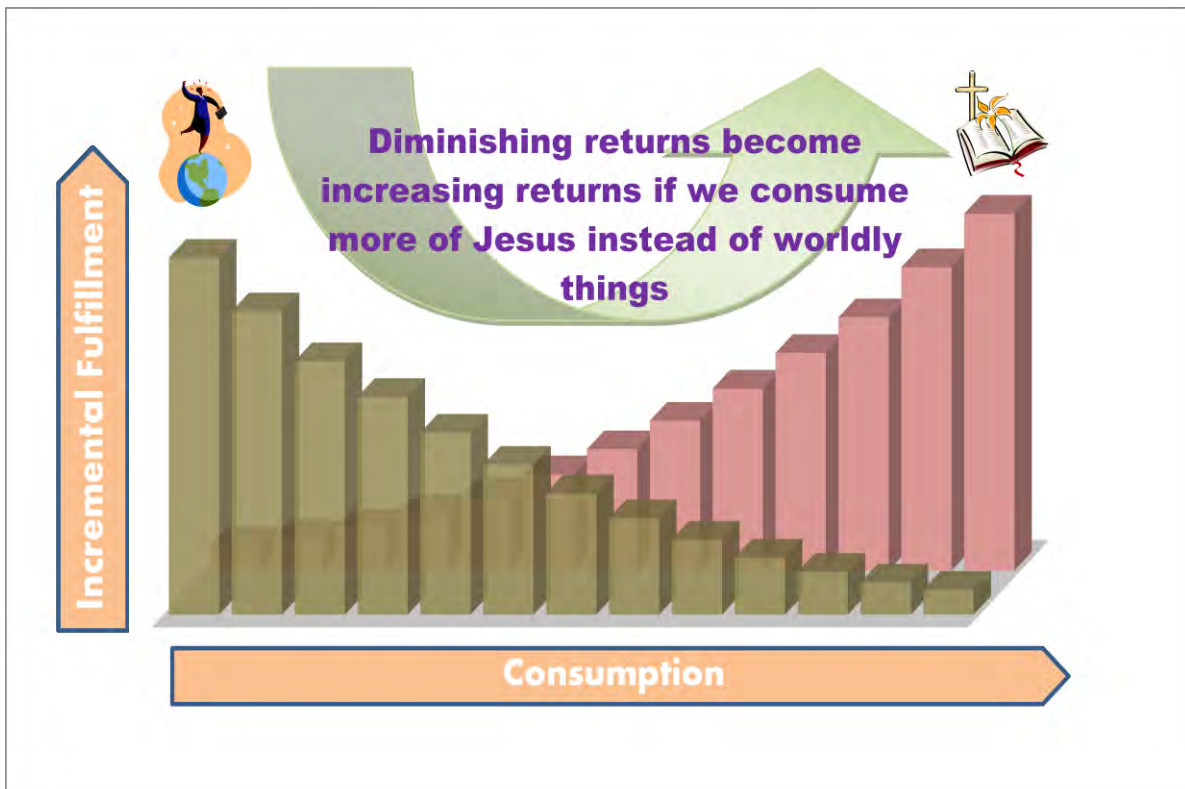
The healing that had to occur started with an understanding of my purpose in life. My purpose had always been defined by achieving goals. My life was built on a platform of goals, each goal leading to the next bigger goal; and when a person

does not truly know God, goals can *become* one's purpose, as was my experience. The only time I seemed to be satisfied was when I was distracted enough by work to not address the emptiness that existed inside.

In 1999, my oldest daughter and I attended a ministry focused on parent-teen relationships known as JH Ranch. This experience was a critical turning point in my relationship with God, my family and my career.

I learned many important concepts, including a better understanding of the “Law of Diminishing Returns”: the more I worked and consumed, the less I was fulfilled. Diminishing returns is an economic principle that, in essence, implies that we are fulfilled less and less by increasing quantities.

As an example, the first scoop of Bluebell vanilla ice cream on a hot summer afternoon is outstanding. The second scoop is very good but not as good as the first, and if you were to eat



four or five scoops, by the last scoop the desire for ice cream would be highly diminished (and you would likely be feeling a bit ill).

Such was my life of moving from one goal to the next, hoping that the next, bigger goal would satisfy. But the return on each goal that is achieved loses most of its value once it is achieved, thus the need to move on to successively larger goals.

The only case for which the Law of Diminishing Returns does not apply is the pursuit of God and His word. In this case, and this case only, the more we consume of Him who created us and His word, the more we desire and thirst for His presence in our lives.

In understanding the spiritual application of the Law of Diminishing Returns, I began to understand that the legacy I leave in this world will largely be through my family and other meaningful relationships rather than through my business. I also began to better understand Jesus' command to love God and people. By so doing, we fulfill all the law and move beyond mere religion.

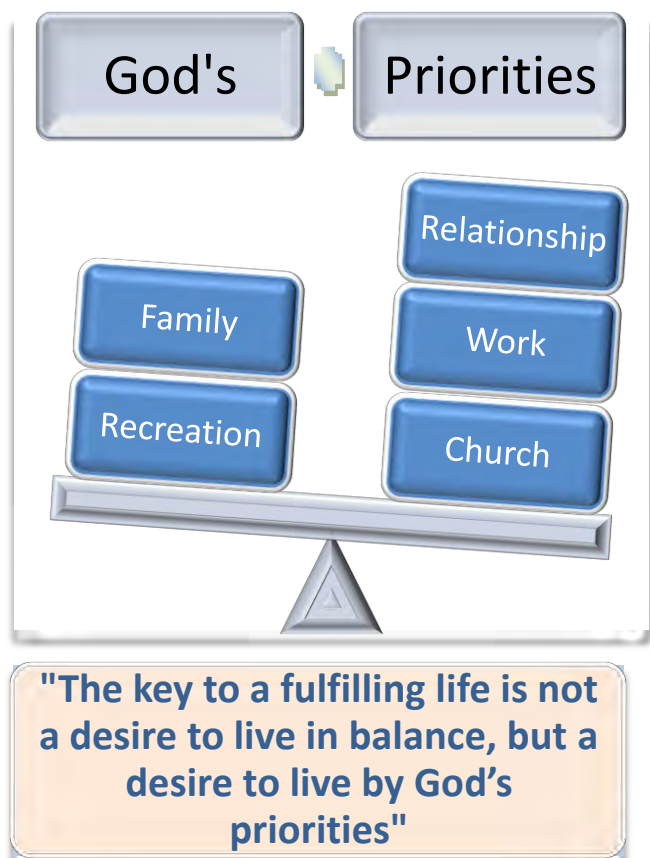
Over the years as I have made the Bible my friend and source of knowledge of God's purpose, I find the meaning of each day to be much clearer. Through study, the men and women depicted in the Bible as examples of faith have become models for my life. Common to all of them is a calling that supersedes the things of this world and a passion to first and foremost glorify God. Looking at Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, the first disciples, Peter, Paul and others, little is said of the work required for sustenance, yet all worked in some manner.

The remarkable part of their lives was their pursuit of God and His calling, not the pursuit of things of temporal value.

They demonstrated that the work of this world serves as a platform for true purpose to be developed. Jesus made it perfectly clear that His time on earth was invested in glorifying the Father. As the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus' actions make it clear that my actions, also, should bring glory to God.

Paul and Peter, especially, give me understanding that God desires our work to be our platform rather than our purpose. Both disciples make it clear to me that a balanced life is not the goal. With much being written and discussed about living a balanced life, it seems apparent to me that Jesus and His disciples did not make "balance" the key, at least not in the way we define the term.

We tend to use it in the sense of a scale, with equal amounts of weight on each side of the scale. The weight we measure is time, and a well-rounded life



balances time equally across the most important things in life. For many, the allocation of time is spread between family, work, recreation and spiritual matters.

If, for example, we are spending too much time at work and not enough time with the family, then we feel guilty and determine to cut back time at work. The problem, as I see it, is that our desire to balance time evenly across the multiple facets of our life is not necessarily in keeping with biblical principles, nor is this balancing act demonstrated by the great men and women of faith.

The principle that removes the guilt comes from the sixth chapter of Matthew, where Jesus states plainly that the things of this world will never satisfy, and that worry and hoarding of material possessions will lead to problems.

He makes it clear that we cannot serve two masters, much less three or four, as we will learn to hate the one and love the other. The remedy is rather to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:33-34 (NIV)).

Thus, the key to life on this earth as God intended is priority. We are to put

God's kingdom and His call first in our lives and then, in an amazing promise, Jesus says we will receive the blessing of life on earth as He intended.

The early disciples and all the great men and women of faith in Scripture did not seek balance but sought God. They did not seek fulfillment by making allocations of time to family, faith and physical needs but by making God their priority and following Him. I believe that the key to a fulfilling life is not a desire to live in balance [as the world defines it] but a desire to live by priority – God's priorities.

Living a life ordered by the Lord's priorities is challenging, to say the least. The world dictates that balance is to be pursued and that we can diminish the guilt we feel from unbalanced lives by simply reallocating time to those areas we have been neglecting.

The real solution, I believe, lies in making Christ the priority each day. As He promises, by focusing on the eternal priorities of God, our temporal priorities will become aligned with the right priorities. Seek God first and He will direct your paths and your priorities and give you full joy and contentment – the kind of balance that God intends. He will clothe you in the perfect jersey, one designed especially for you. ♦♦