



# Finding Balance

by *Melanie Wilson, Ph.D.*

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*Not Too Hard, Not Too Soft: Finding Balance When Life Is a Bear.*)

## Detours

You know the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. Goldi's mother gives her an errand to do, but Goldilocks takes a detour and tries to find satisfaction in the home of three bears. In the end, the bears return and Goldilocks flees the scene.

I have taken plenty of detours on my way to finding a life that is just right. My first year of graduate school in psychology found me twenty-two years old, living in a tiny, roach-infested apartment eight hours away from family and friends. I didn't have the money to repair my car, so I charged my credit cards to the limit. My nights were consumed with homework. During the day, I went to class and worked a thankless job as a research assistant. My boyfriend from back home broke up with me. Everything in my life felt too cold, too hard, and out of reach. Balance seemed like the stuff of fairy tales.

Back then I, too, had to run from the bears' house, but today so much of my life is just right. I had to learn the moral of the story the hard way, and truth be told, I'm still learning! What Goldilocks didn't know is that the perfect porridge, chair, and bed have already been prepared. And that's what this booklet is all about.

## What is Just Right for You?

I have come a long way from the imbalance of my graduate school days but still crave more balance. Sometimes I feel like a balanced life means being happy all the time, giving equal amounts of time to every area of my life, or achieving a perfectly balanced state that will stay the same forever. But deep down I know these are false ideas.

Balance is not the same as happiness. Happiness is a wonderful but short-lived emotion. Balance, on the other hand, is a feeling of lasting satisfaction. It means having a sense of peace that is independent of what's happening to you. Paul, an influential first-century Christian writer and leader, had this kind of satisfaction even though he was repeatedly whipped, beaten, and imprisoned (definitely not a happy circumstance). *"For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,"* he wrote (Philippians 4:11).

Balance doesn't mean perfection; it means doing your best to meet your own and others' needs. Even if there were a perfect formula for managing physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs, I doubt if anyone could follow it. No matter how it looks to you, no one has achieved perfect balance in life. Our goal is to be confident that we have done our best.

Neither does balance mean one way of living that never changes. Your life doesn't have to be predictable to be balanced. In fact, true balance is the ability to adjust to new situations and a willingness to take risks for growth.

If you're ready for a more balanced life, grab a pen and some paper. We're going to go with Goldilocks on her search for just right. Along the way, you'll want to write your own story. Goldilocks made some choices that were not right for her and you probably have, too. Write them down. Sometimes it's hard to think about your mistakes, but you have a better chance of finding what's right if you admit to what was wrong. Goldilocks also found some things that *did* seem right for her. Make a list of your own good choices.

As you write your story, you'll discover some actions you need to take to be a true hero. Make a list of these new directions in which your life must go in order for you to have a happy ending.

## Eat the Right Porridge

### Too Hot

Goldilocks had a job to do, but instead of obeying her mother, she barged into the bears' house and helped herself to their porridge. The first porridge was too hot. She probably burned her mouth as I have when I was impatient for pizza to cool. Is your porridge too hot? Do you have trouble waiting for what is best? Are you greedy like Goldilocks?

After my boyfriend broke up with me, all I could think about was finding another one. Although there were plenty of warning signs that it was a bad idea, I jumped into the first relationship that came along. My impatience gave me a very painful burn, the scars of which I still bear. Refusing to wait for what is best can keep you from finding the right partner, job, or home.

Greed can also keep you from finding balance. Although I was a poor graduate student, I refused to go without luxuries like cable television, going out to eat with friends, and a California vacation. I was greedy for success and recognition, too. Despite being short on time, I volunteered to help with additional projects in order to look good in front of others. Greed can keep you buried in things you have no place for and projects you have no time for. Left unchecked, impatience and greed can become addictive. Goldilocks went right for the food, even though I'm sure her mother gave her a good breakfast before she left home! Perhaps she had a problem with overeating as I did. I didn't want to think about my problems or feel my feelings, so I ate. An addiction is a desire you can't control. Alcohol or drug abuse, workaholism, gambling, pornography, or any addiction makes balance impossible. Addictions consume more of your time, energy, and money than you can afford to give.

### Too Cold

The next porridge Goldilocks tried was too cold. I suspect this was not the first time Goldi's timing was off. Does your porridge leave you cold? Are procrastination and disorganization causing dissatisfaction in your life?

After I was burned by the hot porridge, I let mine go cold. I hated doing laundry so I put it off. I had so many dirty clothes that I started storing them in the basement of my apartment complex. When the basement flooded my clothes were destroyed by mold. The too-hot and too-cold porridge sit side by side on the table. If you have difficulty with self-control, you may be losing valuable time, energy, and money because of procrastination. What has procrastination cost you?

I failed to plan or work ahead, but I had plenty of excuses for my behavior. "My landlord's leaky basement ruined my clothes!" Procrastinators and poor planners love to blame their failures on faulty technology, traffic jams, and family members. True balance is beyond reach until you take responsibility to get to the table on time.

Impatience or procrastination equally lead to a disorganized home and life. The bears were a pretty tidy group! Goldilocks didn't have to move piles of stuff before she could sit in their chairs or lie on their beds. My first home was not so tidy. I didn't know when I moved in that I had messy roommates— cockroaches. Once I found out, I wanted to get rid of them. Instead, I actually made them quite comfortable by leaving dishes in the sink at night and stacks of paper everywhere. When I did clean, it took me days. When I needed something, I spent hours looking for it.

My home was a mess and so was my life. I didn't consistently use a calendar and missed several appointments. Friends had to remind me when tests were coming up or I would have failed my classes. A day late and a dollar short would have been a step up for me.

## Just Right

I came to understand that my porridge would only be just right when I let God control and organize my life. I realized that having more food and more things and more work only helped me cope with my feelings for a little while. I soon needed to eat and shop and volunteer again to feel good. The first step toward a more balanced existence was for me to be willing to let go of those band-aids.

The year I finished my Ph.D., I sought help from the *Weigh Down Workshop* and a group of women at my church who, like me, wanted to control their eating. I learned more about why I was overweight. I began praying for strength and reading the Bible for encouragement. Despite my best efforts, I was still frustrated by failure. I finally gave up because I just could not stop overeating.

That's when God took over and gave me the self-control I had longed for. When I realized I couldn't fix my overeating, I finally stopped trying so hard to be self-sufficient, and God took care of it for me. My life became more balanced and I was content with just the right amount of food. Over time, other areas of my life began to move toward balance, too.

If you're having trouble finding self-control, admit it and get help. Although I was trained as a psychologist, I couldn't help myself gain control over food. I needed the support of others and the life changing power that God could give me. If you need self-control, order the booklet, *Self-Control in an Addictive World* (6BE119). Information on ordering this and other helpful resources is listed at the end of this booklet. Don't delay; you'll never find what's just right until you can stop eating porridge that burns you.

## Getting Organized

Once you have taken steps to rise above the temptations in your life, you're ready to develop a plan for organizing your time and space. I'll tell you how I developed a plan based on the life perspective that has made the most sense to me.

God had a plan when He created our universe: He set aside a day for each part of creation and then He celebrated and rested. *"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good...on the seventh day He rested"* (Genesis 1:31, 2:2).

My creation was not so good. My schedule, my house, and my life were chaos. But now I have a plan for creating a comfortable home. I follow a routine, doing activities in order each day, and that works for me even if I oversleep. I do laundry, wash dishes, and straighten the house even if I don't feel like it. I no longer have a messy home!

If you don't follow a routine, but you do have an e-mail address you check often, I highly recommend [www.flylady.net](http://www.flylady.net). This free system of e-mail reminders and encouragement has changed my life! The FlyLady says the key to finding more time and eliminating clutter is working just five to fifteen minutes at a time on those difficult areas. You can do *anything* if you only have to work five minutes.

Are you so overwhelmed that you don't know where to begin? The FlyLady suggests you start by always keeping your kitchen sink clean. Be completely in control of that one place! Gradually, you can develop morning and evening maintenance routines.

Once you're following routines, you can create a more detailed schedule. I follow the example of creation—one part of creating the world was completed on each day of the week—by assigning certain activities to certain days. For example, Monday is my cleaning day, Tuesday is a day for errands and pampering myself, and Wednesday is anti-procrastination day. Sunday is a day of worship, rest, and family activity.

The key to finding time for work, family, friends, cleaning and organizing, giving to others, exercise, sleep, hobbies, and fun, is to assign a small block of time to each activity. Use a calendar, planner, notebook, or computer program to keep track of your schedule; whatever works for you. I have the most success when I use the same calendar for every appointment, keep my calendar with me at all times and check it at least twice a day as part of my routine.

Though it used to take me hours to find things, today I can usually find what I need within five minutes (unless one of my children has run off with it!). Organizing your space is not complicated, but it does require routine maintenance. That is why it helps to develop routines for maintaining order. If you don't know where to start organizing, walk in the front door and begin to your left. Clean and organize the first area you see and work around your home or office moving clockwise. I clean every area in my home by working clockwise. If you prefer, begin with the area that bothers you most.

When you're ready to organize your space, do it in small steps. For example, if you have a closet that is a mess, choose one shelf to organize first.

Then go through this process:

1. Get ready to organize. Grab your cleaning gear, three containers (for step 4), and your favorite music.
2. Choose a space small enough to finish in an hour, and remove everything.
3. Thoroughly clean the space.
4. Sort into three bags or boxes:
  - Pitch—for things to throw away.
  - Pass on—for things good enough to give away.
  - Put away—for things that belong somewhere else.
5. Put back in a purposeful way the things that do belong there:
  - Keep items close to where you use them.
  - Group items by purpose and use labels if they will help you.
  - Purchase any needed containers, choosing a style that appeals to you. (Measure before you go to the store!)

Organizing the paper in your life requires more thought. The resource section lists excellent resources on organizing paper, reducing clutter, and finding more time for what is important to you. Release the clutter and you'll find more energy and time!

Even the best schedule will fail if you don't plan ahead. Planning ahead, according to organization expert Don Aslett, is the most powerful time management approach. I used to be in a perpetual hurry because I didn't plan.

Now every evening I set out the clothes that my children and I will wear the next day, even if we aren't going anywhere! I put the things I need to take with me in my car or near the door. I look over my schedule for the next day. You can save yourself needless anxiety by taking a few minutes today to plan for a better tomorrow. Give up the myth that you will someday have the time to catch up and start now.

## Sit in the Right Chair

### Too Hard

Goldilocks definitely needed to learn a routine. She not only ate someone else's food, she didn't even have the decency to put her dirty dishes in the dishwasher! Instead, she sat down in a chair that was much too hard for her.

One of the reasons my life was so out of balance was because I spent too much time doing the wrong things. I was exhausted from working all day and all night. I convinced myself that exercise, rest, church, recreation, and having a clean, organized home were not important to my goal of becoming a psychologist. In the process, I lost my passion for what I was doing and thought many times about quitting school.

Sometimes people get confused about what is most important and push themselves to do too many things. Doing too much risks your physical and mental health and destroys relationships. Are you depressed? Do you have a health problem that needs attention? Are you having marital problems or child behavior problems because you're over-committed? Is your chair too hard?

### Too Soft

Goldilocks moved from the chair that was too hard to the chair that was too soft. So did I. Even when I knew the man I was dating was all wrong for me, I kept seeing him. I didn't push myself to face the fear of letting him go. I just sat there, disappearing into that soft easy chair.

Are you sitting in a chair that's too soft? Are you settling for what is easy instead of what is best for you at work or in your relationships? Perhaps you lack a sense of purpose or haven't set clear goals for yourself. Have you failed to dream of all you could do if you got up and tried another chair?

### Just Right

I did have one thing going for me or I never would have graduated: I knew my purpose in life was to encourage people as a counselor, writer, and speaker. Knowing that God had given me this purpose to fulfill is what got me up in the morning. Do you know what your purpose is?

Some people believe there is no special purpose for their lives. I've found purpose in my life through Jesus, who I believe is the Son of God and my Savior from all the imbalance and confusion in my life. He created me and designed a special plan for me. The more I get to know Him, the more I trust His purpose for my life and want to live according to His plan.

Telling you more about that is beyond the scope of this book, except to say that I believe God has a purpose for your life, too. If you want to know more about that, call 1-800-876-9880 and some friendly people whom I trust—associates of the people who produced this booklet—will be glad to talk with you.

### Discover Your Purpose

Life purpose is a passion, a general goal rather than a specific task. Begin to discover your purpose by thinking about what you love. When you're doing what you are created to do, you will usually have peace and joy in doing it.

Use that pen and paper to write down answers to these questions. (There are no “right” answers. Write first; think about what your answers mean when you’re finished.)

**What were your childhood dreams?** *What did you want to be when you grew up? What did you spend your free time doing as a child?*

**If you could do anything and knew you wouldn’t fail, what would you do?** *What dream do you have that you have been afraid to share with others? What would you like to do though it seems impossible?*

**What do you love to do?** *If you had a free day, how would you spend it? Is there something you do that seems to make time fly?*

The answers to these questions will give you some insight into your passion. Since I was a small child, I have loved to have an audience and to encourage others. I read dozens of psychology books for fun and realized that this was my passion.

You can find your purpose by thinking about what you love and what you have. God can use everything about you to fulfill your purpose. Write down answers for the following questions:

**What gifts, talents, or abilities do you have?** *For example, do you have the gift of physical attractiveness, a talent for gardening, or the ability to listen?*

**What financial, material, or relational resources do you have?** *Do you have supportive friends or relatives? Do you own a home or have you saved money that could help you fulfill your purpose?*

**What are your major life experiences?** *What positive or negative experiences have had the greatest effect on you? What are your most vivid memories? What training have you had?*

**What do you care about most?** *What issue excites you? Do you have a great idea for how to do something better? Is there a particular group of people for whom you feel compassion?*

I believe God gave me everything I needed to become a psychologist, writer, and speaker. I can see how my life experiences have prepared me to fulfill my purpose of sharing the encouragement of Jesus—even my out-of-balance life in graduate school. I also believe God has given you everything you need to fulfill your purpose. As one well-known Christian said, “*God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Can you see how your experiences and what you love to do fit together for good?

Positive feedback from people who care about you can help you confirm your purpose. What have your parents, other family members, and friends told you about your talents and gifts? My parents believed I would work in a helping profession and would be a writer and speaker. A friend suggested that I consider a career in psychology because I was easy to talk to. Sometimes God uses other people to make your purpose clear.

Look back at everything you’ve written down in response to the questions above, then try to write your life purpose in one sentence. It could be to create beauty, to create inspiring music, to teach children, or to encourage others. Your purpose or general life goal will help you determine what is most important. You are now ready to set specific goals that will help you fulfill this purpose. Research shows that people are happier when they work toward goals.

Goals should be:

**Specific.** A goal of exercising more is not specific; a goal of working out three days a week for thirty minutes or more is.

**Small.** Rather than starting with a goal of working out thirty minutes a day, set an achievable goal of ten minutes, three days a week.

**Scheduled.** Achieve your goals by making them a part of your schedule. You could choose to exercise on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Write it on your calendar!

**Special.** Reward yourself as you work toward your goals. (Buy a new workout outfit or take a bubble bath on workout days.)

**Supported.** Find people who share your goal and encourage each other. Or ask someone who has been successful in achieving your goal to mentor you.

On a separate piece of paper, note today's date and write down your goals. If you're sitting in a chair that's too hard, potential goals may be: to cut back on your work hours, to make family fun part of your schedule, to establish a regular bedtime, to learn how to say "no," or to schedule an appointment with a psychologist or physician. If your chair is too soft, you may want to set short-term goals: to increase your self-esteem, to take a career evaluation test, or to find a support group for encouragement.

Choose no more than three goals each for this month, this year, the next five years, the next ten years, and your lifetime. Keep this list of goals with your calendar and look at it daily!

## Rest on the Right Bed

### Too High

After a tiring morning of eating and sitting, Goldilocks tried to rest on a bed that was too high. I also reached too high, trying to do everything on my own.

By now you have the idea that my life wasn't exactly a fairy tale! I was struggling. But I did an excellent job of hiding how depressed and overwhelmed I was. I wasn't obese, so no one knew how controlled I was by food. If I had guests in my apartment, I shoved all the mess out of sight. Everyone told me how I seemed to have it all together, but I knew I was falling apart. I needed help with my homework, my love life, my housekeeping and organizational skills. I believed that everything would be great if I could just get out of graduate school. I never asked for help so I suffered alone.

You and I were not created to be completely independent, but pride can make you keep trying to climb into a bed that's too high. Do you need to ask for help? Is your bed out of reach?

### Too Low

Goldilocks left the high bed and fell into one that was too low. We were not created to depend only on ourselves, but neither were we created to depend solely on others. Depending on other people to balance my life was very disappointing. I thought if my professors were more caring and helpful, I could achieve more in school. I believed that if I made some new friends at church, everything would be okay. But no one saved me from my unhappy, unbalanced life. In fact, the more I expected them to, the more disappointed and discouraged I became.

You can't find balance by just sleeping in the first bed you fall into (literally or figuratively!). It's easy to be fooled into thinking that a friend, a relative, or a celebrity has all the answers about living the good life. But balance for you will be different than for anyone else. Only you know if the bed is too low. Are you hoping that someone else will fix your life? Have you been blaming others for your misery? Are you settling for a bed that's too low?

## Just Right

Goldilocks thought she had finally found the right bed, but when the bears came home they chased her away. Like Goldilocks, you need a place to rest. You can rest your body anywhere for a short time, but finding the right place to rest your soul may be a more delicate matter. You may try to rest in your spouse, or in yourself, but I think you'll discover that lasting rest can only be found in God.

It took me a few years to figure out that the real reason my life was out of balance was not because I wasn't trying hard enough, because I didn't have a decent boyfriend, or because I was mistreated by professors. The real reason was that I had not allowed God to take control of my life. It was as though I were trying to swim the length of a pool but didn't trust the water to hold me up. Instead of diving in and swimming away, I held onto the edge of the pool and blamed the lane lines, the other swimmers, and the kickboard for being inadequate and preventing my progress. The real problem was that I didn't know how to swim!

Similarly, I didn't know how I should live. I had found direction at a church in the past, but when I wasn't welcomed at a new church I attended, I felt rejected and decided that God must not love me. Surely I had disappointed Him. I felt very unloveable.

I was missing the fact that God was right there with me all the time, just like the water is all around you in the pool even if you only hang onto the side. It made all the difference when I finally believed that if I let go He would hold me up. I discovered that I was safer with Him in the deep water than I had been on the sidelines.

Eventually I learned, through participating in another church and by reading the Bible, that God had a lot to say about gaining self-control and finding balance. I came to understand that I am a special creature, made by God to find peace and balance in Him.

Maybe you're going through the same thing. Maybe you've been trying to straighten out your unbalanced life by just making more time for yourself, or trying to get more done, or trying to cultivate a more positive attitude. Those are all worthwhile goals, but you'll be stuck on the sidelines until you realize God is right there ready to catch you if you'll jump into His arms.

One way to jump into God's arms is to admit that you can't do it on your own. Tell him in your own words, or speak this prayer to God aloud or in your heart:

*Dear God, I admit that I can't  
do things right on my own.  
I know You are here with me,  
and I need You to help me have  
self-control and balance in my  
life. Please help me live the way  
You want me to. Amen.*

When we give our lives to God, wonderful things start to happen. I can't take credit for even one part of the more balanced life I'm living today. Without God, I don't think I ever could have given up the excess food. Without God, I would not have strength to do the routines that organize my life. Without God, I never would have understood my genuine purpose. Without God, I never would have known true contentment.

## A Balanced Approach

Are you ready to try God's plan for a more balanced life?

**Step 1:** Believe that Jesus saves you from the imbalance in your life and gives you lasting rest with God.

**Step 2:** Pray daily that you will become the balanced person God wants you to be.

Praying is simply talking and listening to God. Ask Him if your schedule includes what is most important. He will answer. When I am quiet and listening to God, He often reminds me of important things on my to-do list. Why not set a goal of just five minutes of prayer a day and see how God responds?

**Step 3:** Read the Bible to understand God's will for you.

God has answered my prayers, instructed me, and corrected me through my Bible reading. If you haven't looked at a Bible in a while, you may be pleasantly surprised to find there are several translations that are easy to read. Bibles you may enjoy are listed in the resource section of this booklet.

**Step 4:** Attend church regularly.

A church is a place to receive forgiveness in a visible way, to worship God, to be inspired, and to make friends. My Christian friends pray for me, support me, and lovingly show me where I'm failing.

**Step 5:** Meet God in heaven as a perfectly balanced person.

Goldilocks ran away from the bears' house, as the story goes, never to be heard from again. Through Jesus, you will be in heaven with God forever—a very happy ending! Until then, take action for a more balanced life today:

- Call 1-800-876-9880 for additional booklets or help finding a church home.
- If you need help, tell someone you trust.
- Find an easy-to-read Bible and start reading. (Try the book of Luke to start.)
- Tonight, spend five minutes praying and five minutes planning for tomorrow.
- Subscribe to [www.FlyLady.net](http://www.FlyLady.net) and go shine your sink!
- Smile because Jesus loves you just as you are!

Life as a stay-at-home mom of three little bears has me wanting to run away screaming some days. I would love to say that I have a perfectly balanced life, but I don't. I will continue to make mistakes as I look for more of what is "just right" for me. Yet I am confident that my life story will have a happily-ever-after ending. Are you?

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