

Session 1

Act Boldly with Balance

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp



Introduction

As we write this, we're 800 miles apart. Ron has accepted a call to be a parish pastor and Sue Ann has resigned her position as parish nurse. Ron has moved to Denver and has begun serving at the church. Sue Ann is still in Minneapolis working at her second job, as a nurse at the Veterans Administration. She is also trying to get the house ready to sell. We have been told that we are in a good location and the house should sell quickly.

During the past 18 months the following things have happened:

- Ron's mother, Levera, died after a long illness,
- Hannah Grace, our youngest, graduated from high school and left for college,
- Ron and Sue Ann led a mission trip to Panama with 26 young people and nine adults,
- Noah, our middle son, has gone to the Middle East to study for six months,
- Nate, our oldest son, has changed jobs,
- Sue Ann ran her first marathon as a fundraiser for stroke victims,
- Sue Ann said goodbye to Tobie, her faithful beagle and running partner,
- Both of us have a parent who is widowed and aging.

So we know what it's like to have balance and also experience imbalance. We know what it's like to act boldly and also to refrain from acting boldly.

Our calendars are full of many things: service commitments, family events, obligations, appointments, celebrations, and times to exercise and rest.

In the midst of all this we are mindful of Jesus' words to Martha, who was "worried and distracted by many things; 'there is need of only one thing,'" (Luke 10:41-42).

We are committed and dedicated to *Act Boldly with Balance*. We know that *balance* comes when we are in harmony with God and one another. It is our hope and prayer that this Bible study will provide you with information and inspiration on how to *Act Boldly with Balance*. In a "multi-tasking" world, how can we practice "uni-tasking" (that is, "there is need of only one thing," in Luke 10:42). Note that "uni-task" is a new word, making its debut in this June issue of *LWT*. It could also be solo-tasking or mono-tasking, or maybe, in recognition of our Reformation heritage, *sola*-tasking, but what we are trying to lift up is the challenge between the many voices that urge us to multi-task and do more and more, and the simple "there is need of only one thing" that Jesus tells us.

Mary and Martha | Luke 10:38-42

The story of Mary and Martha is well known to us. Traditionally, Mary is revered as the heroine of the story and Martha is the one who is rebuked. Most of us can remember feeling a lot like Martha (worried and distracted) and secretly jealous of people like

Mary, who could focus simply on the presence of Jesus. At other times in our lives, we have been able, like Mary, to sit at the feet of Jesus and have been concerned about our sisters and brothers who seem to be overwhelmed by the demands of hospitality and service.

At the beginning of this year we made a resolution to spend about 30 minutes each day attending to balance. So we made a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Trackable). We try to begin the day or end the day by following Bishop Murray Finck's *Stretch and Pray: A Daily Discipline for Physical and Spiritual Wellness*.

As the book jacket tells us, "Finck provides a step-by-step guide to 40 stretches to improve physical and spiritual well-being. He incorporates devotional thoughts and Bible verses to jump-start spiritual reflection and prayer during the movements. Journal pages allow participants to record their physical progress and reflect on their spiritual meditation during the exercises."

As our lives have become more in balance, we seem to find more energy and desire for hospitality and service. We're also realistic about the fact that some days we can and some days we can't.

As we mentioned in the introduction, our house is perceived to be in a good location. Location is an interesting thought. What is the immediate location of this Scripture text? It is sandwiched between the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-5). It, too, is a good location for affirming the tension of balancing the need and opportunities for action and contemplation.

The five verses of the Martha and Mary story, although short in number, are long in meaning. Ron is fond of saying, "Never put Martha in charge of the Bible study and never ask Mary to be in charge of the dinner at the annual meeting." However, there

is something much deeper here. It is all about keeping life in proportion. The Revised Standard Version translates the words of Jesus in verse 42, "one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

Over the years we have both participated in Weight Watchers. One of the things you hear early on at meetings about our daily intake of food is "portion distortion."

Martha was experiencing portion distortion, not in terms of food, but in terms of activity. The text tells us she was *periespato peri pollyn diakonian*, "distracted by her many tasks" (verse 40).

DISCUSSION | Look at the story of Martha and Mary again (Luke 10:38-42). What are the verbs, the action words, in the story? Can you list them?

There are at least 15 verbs in this account. There is no doubt that Martha is busy: she *welcomes* Jesus (v. 38), she was *distracted* by her many tasks (v. 40); so she *came* to him and *asked* (v. 40). The verbs of this text provide another sort of assessment. Think about these words: *sat, listened, distracted, worried, chosen*. We need to ask ourselves who (or what) is the subject of these verbs for us, for our communities, for our world.

We have all heard the expression, "she bit off more than she could chew." It is interesting to delve deeper into the word translated as "distracted." Literally, it means "pulled or dragged away." It is only used in this text in the New Testament. And what exactly is Martha distracted by? The translation of *pollyn diakonian* is "many things," but it is literally "much service," with the word *diakonian* translated as "things." So it is possible to be distracted by too much of a good thing? Can we be doing so much service, so many things, that we become distracted and forget

“there is need of only one thing?” How interesting it is to think that often we have too many things on our plates (literally and figuratively) while others in our world struggle for basic needs like adequate food, water, and shelter.

DISCUSSION | Can you think of times when you or someone you know was “distracted by many things”? Are you feeling that way these days? If you feel comfortable, share a story of what that was or is like for you.

Meanwhile, Mary sits at the feet of the Lord and simply listens. She is able to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Jesus is speaking and Martha comes to him and asks, “Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?” The word *melei* translated as “care” raises the issue of balance. Martha has too many cares and it appears to her that Jesus doesn’t care enough. It also seems to her that Mary has not a care in the world. In Martha’s world, there appears to be an imbalance, and Jesus and Mary seem to be part of the problem.

Later on, in John 11:21, Martha speaks to Jesus and says, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” While trying to multi-task, to keep all the plates spinning at home, work, volunteering at church and school, one can stand in Martha’s sandals and say, “Lord, don’t you care?” Or maybe, “Lord, do you care that I am doing so many things here?”

Jesus assesses the situation with Martha and says, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.” The word translated as “worried” is also used in Matthew 6:25, when Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not *worry* about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or

about your body, what you will wear.” The word translated as “distracted” has the sense of being troubled. (Note that it is only used in this verse in the New Testament.)

Jesus says, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” The first part of this verse, “there is need of only one thing,” is the word of relief for Martha who was distracted by many things. Mary, who has chosen the *tyn agathyn merida* (“the good piece or part”), has peace—and it will not be taken from her. This is the portion that puts all things into proportion.

It is natural at times to be like Martha, who we can see is making molehills into mountains. At the same time, Jesus enters into her imbalance and ours as well and promises that “there is need of only one thing.” This one thing is made clear when he was crucified on a mountain (Luke 23) and rose from the dead (Luke 24). We have the gift and call to *act boldly with balance*.

DISCUSSION | When are you more like Martha? When are you more like Mary? Can you explain?

Wholeness and Balance

Henry Ford said, “There are two types of people in this world, those who *can* and those who *can’t*—and they’re both right!” The question for us is: How do we see ourselves? Quite honestly, there are days when we know we *can* and when we *can’t*. Perhaps you feel the same way. But, with Jesus at our side, we *can*.

The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness has given us the Wholeness Wheel as a very helpful tool to remind individuals, couples, families, circles, committees, and congregations about balance.

The Wholeness Wheel



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At the center of the Wholeness Wheel is the core belief—and ultimate relief—that in baptism, we are a new creation in Christ. Balance is achieved when we realize *who* we are and *whose* we are. Daily reminders of our new life in Christ come from staying “wet behind the ears.” Proper hydration (at least six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day) is necessary to keep one’s physical system functioning properly. The same holds true for our spiritual system. Our *thirst* is quenched (John 4:14) when we drink the living water that comes from Jesus.

Spiritual well-being surrounds or undergirds the five aspects of our lives: social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, vocational, and intellectual. The categories are not delineated with hard lines because many of these parts overlap one another. For example, Martha’s emotional well-being (she was worried and distracted) was most likely connected to her physical well-being (perhaps she was tired), and instead of dealing directly with her sister Mary (which would have represented social/interpersonal well-being), she created a triangle of sorts by going

to Jesus and talking about her sister.

On the other hand, Mary appears to have been nurturing her intellectual well-being and also her vocational well-being, but seems indifferent to her sister’s hard work and her feelings. If that is the case, Mary could have benefited from spending some time developing social/interpersonal and emotional well-being. It isn’t too hard to sense the heat coming from the kitchen when the host or hostess is worried and distracted. Sometimes it is easy to know when our lives are out of control. At other times, it takes an event or a loved one to make us see our lack of balance.

DISCUSSION | List some ways our lives can get out of balance. Next to each entry, write a suggestion on a way to re-balance or ease the imbalance.

Control

One of the truths Sue Ann learned in nursing school is that there are many risk factors in our lives. Some we have no control over, like our family history, genetics, some environmental factors, and our age. But there are factors we can control. These are the factors we focus on when we strive for balance and seek ways to glorify God. So, what are the risk factors that you and I have some choice and control over?

If you take a Health Risk Assessment, it would typically focus on these areas: age, family history, smoking, use of alcohol or drugs, exercise or physical activity, dietary fat and sugar, weight, daily fruits and vegetables, stress, sleep, wearing seat belts, regular visits to a health-care provider.

We invite you to consider these risk factors in your life. A helpful tool for self-assessment can be journaling. Keeping the Wholeness Wheel in mind, along with the key words *balance* and *control*, spend some time this summer writing in a journal about

each of these risk factors. Perhaps focusing on one each day (or one per week) would give you some insight into balancing the areas of the Wholeness Wheel.

DISCUSSION | With confidence we can consider each risk factor and ask ourselves these questions:

1. How much control or choice do I have with this factor?
2. Do I exercise my choice with this factor each day?
3. What does a typical day with this factor look like?
4. Can I achieve better balance in this area? Write about how that might look.
5. Do I need to change something today about this factor?
6. Write a prayer to God asking for insight, guidance, and motivation.

As women of God we can empower one another. Share this journaling process with a trusted friend. We were made to journey with others (social/interpersonal well-being) and are bonded by our baptismal vows to the whole Christian family.

Speaking as a Nurse

All nurses will agree that the nursing process always begins with *assessment*. Self-care and restoration or healing our imbalances also begins with self assessment. It requires some boldness to look at ourselves, but with our core baptismal identity grounding us as daughters of a loving God, we can act boldly to face who we are right now, this day!

Seven years ago we made a major life change, moving just as we are moving now. A fellow parish nurse, Monica, moved six months later. By e-mail

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The ELCA's Social Statement on "Caring for Health—Our Shared Endeavor" states:

Each of us has responsibility to be a good steward of his or her own health out of thankfulness for the gift of life and in order to serve God and the neighbor. This means taking effective steps to promote health and prevent illness and disease (for example, eating well, getting adequate exercise and sleep, avoiding use of tobacco and abuse of drugs, limiting alcohol, and using car seat restraints). It means balancing responsibility for health with other responsibilities. It also means seeking care as needed, recognizing that disability, disease, and illness do occur, even to those who are good stewards of their health.

I sent Monica the lessons I had learned from my move. Last week, Monica "snail-mailed" a copy of that e-mail message back to me. She was gracing my current transition with the very words of support I had given to her. Talk about acting boldly! As sisters in Christ we are not alone on our journey toward wholeness and balance. We can give each other support, encouragement, and understanding, as we share similar pathways.

Sue Ann Glusenkamp is a nurse and Ron is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colo. He formerly served as vice president for church/sponsor relations for the ELCA Board of Pensions where he was involved with their special programming on health and wellness.

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Getting Ready to Lead

Thank you for volunteering to lead your sisters in this summer *LWT* Bible study, *Act Boldly for Health!* Your stepping up to serve in this way is a bold affirmation of how we can take charge of our own wellness in a spiritual way.

There are some things that are useful for any Bible study session:

1. A well-lit, well-ventilated room with enough space, chairs, and room at the table for everyone who wants to join in.
2. Bibles for everyone. We use the NRSV most often, but it's helpful to have different translations at hand. Some other useful modern translations are the New International Version (NIV) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV).
3. Writing materials for everyone.
4. Writing materials for you, the leader: a chalkboard with chalk or easel with easel pad and markers so that you can post things for the group to consider.
5. Name tags for everyone make it clear that new people are welcome to join the group.
6. Hymnals for everyone, if possible. We use *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*.

Overview

At first glance, this Bible study, *Act Boldly for Health*, may seem off-putting to some people. Everyone has

a different experience of life balance and health. Some women who are caregivers to children or elderly parents may not see how they can achieve balance in their lives. Some who live with chronic illness, such as arthritis or heart disease, may feel that good physical health is just not part of their life experience. However, our goal is to help each woman consider what balance and wellness mean in the lives of God's people.

Opening

Greet the women as they arrive, and when it's time, gather the group in prayer. You may pray in these words or your own:

Oh God, you who gently hold our hearts,
in our search for balance,
we look to you and your Word.
Help us ever walk with Jesus
and follow his example.
Guide us as we strive to glorify you
with our bodies, minds, and spirits.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

To introduce this summer study, *Act Boldly for Health*, acknowledge that we all come to the idea of health and balance from a different perspective. We are not going to push anyone to make major changes in their lifestyle; our goal here is to consider what wellness and balance mean from a biblical perspective.

The text we use to consider the topic of balance in our lives is the story of Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38–42. Jesus told Martha there was need of only one thing. What does that mean?

Mary and Martha | Luke 10:38–42

Ask someone to read the story aloud, or have a different person read each verse.

DISCUSSION | Look at the story of Martha and Mary again (Luke 10:38–42). What are the verbs, the action words, in the story? Can you list them?

They *went*

He (Jesus) *entered*

Martha *welcomed*

Mary *sat* at the Lord's feet

(Mary) *listened*

Jesus was *saying*

Martha was *distracted* by her many tasks

Martha *came* and *asked*

Lord, do you not *care*

My sister has *left* me

Lord *answered*

Martha *worried* and *distracted*

Mary has *chosen*

Martha was experiencing “portion distortion,” not in terms of food, but in terms of activity.

If Martha were to draw a circle representing that day in her life and divide it up in portions—a pie chart—what would it look like? What about Mary? Leader, draw two circles on the board, one for each of the sisters, and ask the group for suggestions. You might lead by saying something like, “Mary probably got her eight hours of sleep,” and marking off a third of her circle.

Martha’s circle will have a bigger portion marked off for “chores” than Mary’s, and a smaller portion

for “being with Jesus.”

Now, offer each of the participants a paper plate and ask them to make their own pie chart by writing down what is “on their plate” and dividing the tasks into sections.

DISCUSSION | Can you think of times when you or someone you know was “distracted by many things”? If you feel comfortable doing so, share a story of what that was or is like for you.

Jesus says, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” The first part of this verse, “there is need of only one thing,” is the word of relief for Martha, who was distracted by many things. Mary, who has chosen the good part, has

JOURNALING

A helpful tool for self-assessment can be journaling. Keeping the Wholeness Wheel in mind, along with the key words *balance* and *control*, spend some time this summer writing in a journal about each of these risk factors. Perhaps focusing on a different factor each day (or one each week) would give you some insight into balancing the areas of the wholeness wheel.

Why don't we try that for a few minutes today? Ask each participant to take a piece of paper and pencil and write for herself; no one else will see what she writes. And let's consider sleep for our experiment. About how much sleep do you get each night? Do you get about the same amount of sleep every night? Is your bedroom comfortable? Is there something you could do to make it more conducive to good restful sleep?

peace—and it will not be taken from her. This is the portion that puts all things into proportion.

It is natural at times to be like Martha. Jesus enters into her imbalance, and ours, and promises that “there is need of only one thing.” This one thing was made clear when he rose from the dead. We have the call and the gift to *act boldly with balance*.

DISCUSSION | When are you more like Martha? When are you more like Mary? Does that change from day to day, or even within a day? If you are comfortable doing so, tell the group about it.

Wholeness and Balance

The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness has given us the Wholeness Wheel as a way to remind individuals, couples, families, circles, committees, and congregations about balance.

DISCUSSION | List some ways our lives can get out of balance. For example: Not enough time for friends. Next to each entry, write down a suggestion on a way to

re-balance or ease the imbalance. For example: Reserve half-hour on Sunday afternoon for calling friends.

Control

All nurses will agree that healing our imbalances also begins with self-assessment.

DISCUSSION | With confidence we can consider each of our risk factors and ask ourselves these questions:

1. How much control or choice do I have with this factor?
2. Do I exercise my choice with this factor each day?
3. What does a typical day with this factor look like?
4. Can I achieve better balance in this area? Write about how that might look.
5. Do I need to change something today about this factor?

Ask participants to share their thoughts on this self-assessment. Remind the group that it may seem that we don't have control over some risk factors, for example, family health history, but we can use the information to make good choices, and that is a way to control them. Ask participants to write a prayer to God asking for guidance and motivation.