Margin: The health of a Leader
The Journey to Wholeness

Teach us to order our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Psalm 90:12

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(A study based on the book *Margin* by Richard Swenson, M.D.*)*

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Psalm 90:12

Teach us – This is something that we do not have on our own. We must be taught (by God). He must give us a new perspective of wisdom: We do not live forever; we must spend our lives wisely (as anyone on a budget); We must organize our days Somewhere in the history of depravity, we replaced knowing with *doing.*

Number: To number is to order, weigh out, divide out, ration – there is a proper, godly order that we should have in our lives – another characteristic of depravity is disorder – we aim everywhere and hit nothing

Days - Life should be measured in days, not years.

Aright – there is a correct way to live that eludes us without God's wisdom/intervention

Wisdom: Moses makes a connection between wisdom and the correct ordering of our lives

Deuteronomy 6:5 – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

It is very difficult to love this way when:

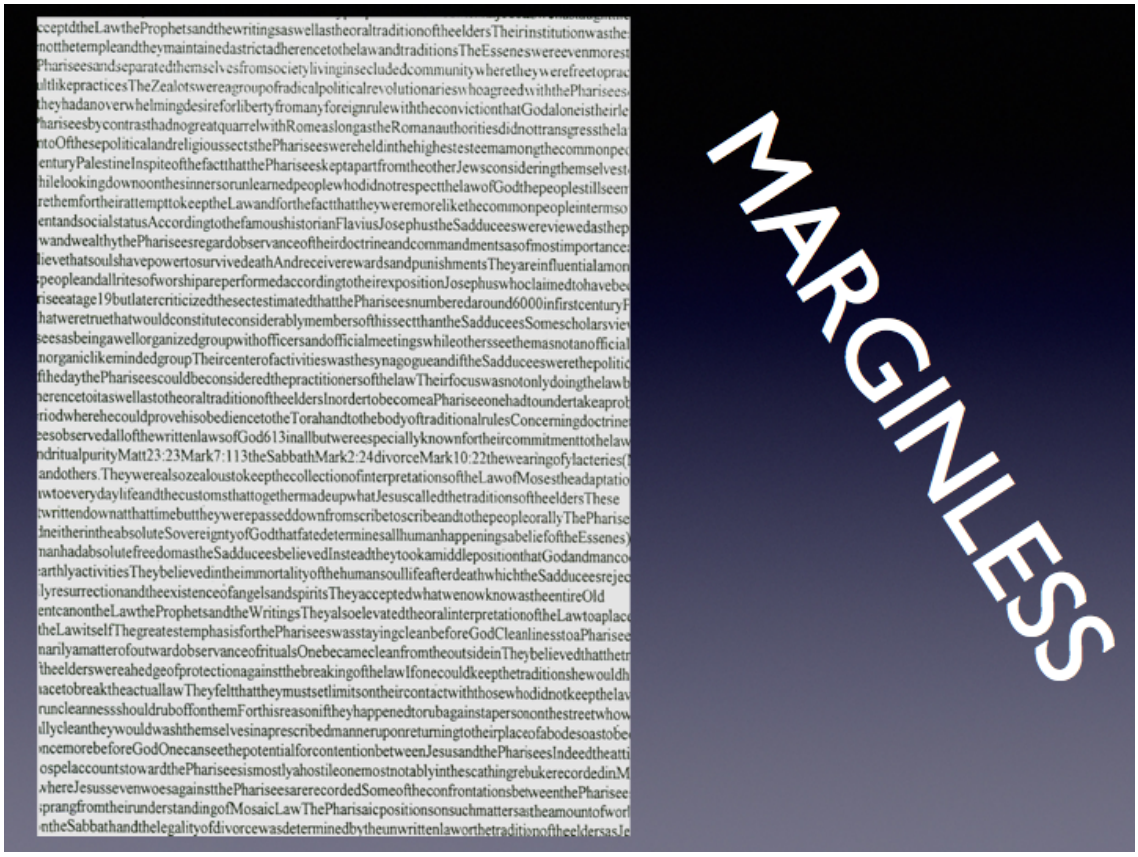
1) our hearts are weary
2) our emotions are frazzled
3) Our strength is gone because our bodies are exhausted

In short, we just don't have much left to love Him with.

Margin *is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is the leeway we once had between ourselves and our limits.*

*"The spontaneous tendency of our culture is to add detail to our lives: one more option, problem, commitment, expectation, purchase, debt, change, job or decision. We must now deal with more "things per person" than at any time in history. Yet one can only comfortably handle only so many details on his or her life…Exceeding this threshold is called "****overloading****".*

Consider the following illustrations. The first one is a regular page with words separated by spaces, paragraphs and margin at the sides, top and bottom. The second has no margin. Since the second page contains more letters, the temptation is to think one could get more reading done with this kind of page, but the opposite is true. You could read many times faster with the normal page. It is the same with our lives. Less is more.



Let's look at five areas of margin that affect our lives, our ministries and our relationships: **time margin, emotional margin, physical margin, spiritual margin and financial margin**

Time Margin

Time is the great leveler – Everyone has the same amount. It is what we do with what we are given that makes our life a success or a failure . The character and career of a person is determined by how and with whom he spends his time.
The greatest use of time is to spend it on something that will outlast you. Yet, in our culture there is nothing we squander so thoughtlessly as time.

Ephesians 5:15-17 - *Be careful, then, how you live - not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity (redeeming the time) because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Wasted days are wasted destinies. John Wesley, the great preacher and organizer who helped transform England and America in the eighteenth century, measured his days in five-minute increments and endeavored to make each period productive. This may seem a little over the top, but the principle is a sound one.

Everyone needs:

1) God time (time to hear his voice, be established in his love, the Word, prayer)
2) Personal time (time alone for personal reflection and growth, hobbies)
3) Family time (time to teach as you walk in the way; time to learn from elders)
4) Sharing time (time to learn and grow within community – fellowship)

How do we restore time?

- Expect the unexpected (give yourself more time than you think you need)
- Learn to say no to things that are not your specific calling.
- Turn off the television, internet and other media
- Prune out activities (do less but do the right things)
- Practice simplicity and contentment (recognize unnecessary possessions for what they are: stealers of divine time!)
- Plan for free time
- Be available - Am I interruptible? In over-filling our days,we have scheduled ourselves out of the great commandments: Can I be a good Samaritan? Can I go a second mile? Do I have time to share the gospel?

Emotional Margin

Of all areas of margin, this one is extremely important, because it affects all other areas. Our amount of emotional energy is finite.

At a time in my life when I was emotionally broken down because of a storm of church issues, leadership issues, definition issues, personal issues, family issues, my loving Father guided me to Matt. 11:25-30. He called me to come to him and receive rest, to exchange my burden and to learn from him.

We must learn to balance the things that drain us emotionally and the things that revitalize us emotionally. When we have no emotional energy, we have nothing to give those to whom we minister.

How can we build our emotional reserves?

- Nurture our social relationships (Acts 2:41-47)
- Reconcile relationships (Eph. 4:32)
- Serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
- Rest (Exodus 20:8)
- Laugh (Eccl. 3:4) and Cry (Eccl. 3:4)
- Create appropriate boundaries
- Give thanks (1 Thess. 5:18)
- Grant grace (2 Pet. 3:18

The bottom line is relationship

1) How well do I relate to God?
2) How well do I relate to myself?
3) How well do I relate to others?

Relationships are the biggest area that “progress” has injured. Social, emotional and spiritual relationships are all stolen by “progress” and nurtured by margin.

Above all -- Love Today.

The only time we have is today. Regretting the past or worrying about the future does not help us at all. My church will not grow into what I envision it is to be unless I love it as it is right now. That is also true of my wife, my children, my future leaders… and myself.

Two keys to emotional health:

1) Learn Contentment

Contentment is both commended "godliness with contentment is great gain" and commanded "be content with what you have" in scripture.
Our culture and our economy run on discontentment. Advertisements must manufacture need for our economy to continue. There is intentional stimulation of discontentment and covetousness.

"We dishonor God if we proclaim a Savior who satisfies and then go around discontent"
(A.W. Tozer)

"There are two ways to get enough, one is to continue accumulating more, the other is to want less" (G. K. Chesterton)

"Most of us look "up the ladder" and notice that the wealthy have more than we do. This, of course, strikes a near fatal blow to one's contentment. If, instead, we reversed our gaze and looked down the ladder, our gratitude would thrive and opportunities for sharing would abound… I am not aware of a single person who takes seriously the words of Paul at their deepest level: 'If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.'"

"Money does seem to meet our needs in the short term. It buys is food, shelter, vehicles and experiences. It does not, however, meet any of our long-term needs: love, truth, relationship, redemption… contentment is a matter of will, a choice."

Learn Simplicity

To be a follower of Christ means to live as he lived. No one lived a simpler, more unencumbered life than he. We need to decide who we are trying to please

Balance: It is possible to over-devote in one area and be in disorder in other important areas. It is not uncommon to see a physician who fails as a parent, an entertainer who fails as a spouse, a pastor who neglect personal health, or an executive who fails at all three areas.

Rest: God has commanded us to rest. We must have time to reflect, meditate, be still, remember, delight in Him. The problem is that there is no glory in rest… we are never a hero when we rest.

2 Corinthians 10:13-16– Paul said that he will boast only in the sphere of ministry that God gave to him.

Romans 12:3-8
God gives a measure of faith and grace gifts to each person. We feel pressure when we minister outside of our sphere, taking on responsibilities that are not ours. We need to learn to accept the limited sphere God has given us.

Physical Margin

Without your health you have no ministry and no quality of life
With poor health (physical, emotional or spiritual) we have a limited ministry

"Our bodies are, in one sense, sophisticated energy machines. If we properly care for the engine and load the appropriate fuel, our machine will operate reliably… the stronger the body's reserves, the better able the body will be to resist the ravages of stress… maximum body strength and efficiency depend upon three factors: ***nutrition****,* ***exercise and sleep****."*

Paul referred to our bodies as "jars of clay". He was pointing out that we possess the mighty Spirit of God within our frailty. I believe Paul was using a maintenance metaphor. A clay pot had to be handled carefully and maintained, being rubbed with oil in order not to grow brittle and crack.

A new mother is so wrapped up in her infant child that she oftentimes neglects herself. The irony is that if mom doesn't take care of herself, she will not produce enough milk to feed her own child. She has to focus on keeping herself healthy or else her child is at risk. The thing she most cares about may suffer unless she has enough physical energy to care for it properly.

There is a time for every type of activity and rest in our lives. Consider four gears of a healthy lifestyle:

1) Park: rest and renewal
   (Not just get away and rest, but learn to rest in the midst of our distress)
2) Low: relationships and friends
3) Drive: work and play
4) Overdrive: times that require extra effort

Psalm 23 reminds me that my wonderful Shepherd want s me to live a rested lifestyle:

- He makes me lie down
- He leads me by quiet waters
- He restores my soul
- He anoints my head with oil – gets rid of annoying flies
- He prepares a table for me, even among my enemies
- He makes me *dwell* in the house of the Lord (abide in him)

We will rest one way or another - either by a purposeful lifestyle of creating margin in our lives or by burning out and collapsing in exhaustion. The sabbath is not just a day, but a way of life.

Here are a few tips to help us to practice a **Sabbath lifestyle**:

1) Know your rhythms - When are your best times to rest and reflect, stop and rhythm out and assess your heart, your life, your relationships
2) Plan specific times to connect with God
3) Write your thoughts and revelations down in a journal
4) Learn to take five minute "praise breaks" throughout the day
5) Learn the discipline of silence and listening
6) Take occasional days to disconnect with the normal and reconnect with God

A comprehensive wellness program

- Proper Nutrition (proper weight)
- Proper Exercise
- Eliminate tobacco products in all forms
- Eliminate drug use (including alcohol in excess)
- Stress Management
- Periodic examinations (regular physicals)

Nutrition

A little humor

God populated the earth with broccoli and cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow vegetables of all kinds so that men and women would live long and healthy lives, but Satan created McDonalds – and McDonalds brought forth the 99 cent double cheeseburger and Satan said, "Do you want fries with that", and man said, "Super-size it!" And man gained pounds.

God brought forth healthful yogurt so that woman could keep the shapely figure that man found so fair. But Satan brought forth chocolate cake. And woman gained pounds. God said, "Try my crispy, fresh salad. But Satan brought forth ice cream and woman gained more pounds. God said, "I have sent to you heart-healthy vegetables and olive oil with which to cook them. Then Satan brought forth the chicken-fried steak, so big that it took up the whole plate. And man gained pounds and developed diabetes.

So God brought forth running shoes and man resolved to lose those extra pounds. But Satan brought forth cable TV, along with the remote control, so that man would not have to toil to change the channel. And man gained even more pounds.

God brought forth the potato, a vegetable naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthy skin and cut up the starchy center, deep fried them and created sour cream to dip them in. And man clutched his remote control and ate the potato chips soaked in cholesterol. And Satan saw it and said, "It is good". And man went into cardiac arrest. So God sighed, and created heart bypass surgery.

Food is a powerful force in our life. We don't just eat food, we *love* food
Every piece of food we put into our mouths has a consequence, good or bad. You know what fuel you put into your car – but we don't think that much about what we eat.

The answer is to simply make better choices:

- **What** - The foods that should be the rule have become the exception (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats,) and vice versa (pizza, doughnuts)
- **How Much** - Watch your meal portions - you do not need as much as you think you do.

Medium milkshake has 752 calories – to burn that off - climb the 1860 steps in the Empire State Building twice
(Whopper Value meal – 1400 calories, 71 grams of fat.)

Exercise

Collective (including everything) 30 minutes most days a week – decreases risk from most diseases 58% and can add 6 years to my life.

Find what you like (run, walk, bike, swim, racquetball, etc.)

Integrate your faith into the discipline of exercise (prayer walk, listen to audio recordings of scripture, worship)

Spiritual Margin

John *15:1 - 4 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

The truth is, these jars of clay leak. We constantly need to be filled with the Spirit of God. In John 15:4-10, Jesus uses the word "remain" or "abide" or "live" eleven times in seven verses! **We *must* be connected to Jesus or else there in no possibility of fruit.**

Abiding is the key to:

- An full and effective life (vss 4-6)
- Fruitful ministry (vss 4-6)
- Answered prayer (vs 7)
- Bringing glory to God (vs 8)
- Security (love) (vs 9-10)
- Joy and fulfillment (vs 11)

Be-ers verse do-ers

In the creation account in Genesis, we see the difference between man and the rest of creation. God breathed the breath of life into man and made him a living soul. God does not care so much about what we know or what we do as he cares about who we are. In order to be fully human and fruitful in our lives, we must stay connected to our Creator

How do we connect and remain connected?

1) Access to the Word of God (the All-Wise God, my Teacher)
    a. Come into contact with the Word
        i. Chunks: Read it in large doses
        ii. Bites: Write verses down and memorize them
        iii. Hear it (audio recordings)
            1. *It is the sword of the Holy Spirit*
            2. *Christ used the scriptures to fight the enemy*

    b. Joshua 1:8 – Meditate upon it day and night
        i. "I love Thy law, it is my meditation all the day (Ps. 119:97)
        ii. The Hebrew word *meditate*: ruminate, roll it around your mind
        iii. The Hebrew word *meditate*: connotes hearing *and* obeying
            1. *We must deliberately give time for contemplation*

2) Prayer (the Relational God, God my partner)
    a. Prayer is to be perpetual communion with the Father. In true prayer we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will what He wills. We work together with God to see His will be done on earth.
    b. Prayer should not be complicated or mechanical. It should flow naturally, speaking to my Father freely throughout the day.
        i. *Christ spent whole nights in prayer (Luke 6:12)*
        ii. *He often Rose before dawn (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16)*
        iii. Practice the presence of the Lord

3) Worship (the Sovereign God, my Father)
    a. As we behold Him we are changed to be like Him
    b. It is a focusing on who He is and what He has done
    c. Love God and love others (the divine order is worship first, service second - be first, do second). Activity substituted for worship is idolatry.

4) Solitude (The Gentle, God my Guide)
    a. Time to sit at His feet - "Martha, you are disturbed by much serving"
        i. God's Word cannot be heard where there is no silence
        ii. It is a state of heart, not a place and time. One can experience solitude in a crowd. Solitude is inward fulfillment.
    b. It is stopping and listening (start by trying just five minutes a day)
    c. Eccl. 5:1-2 - *To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools… therefore let your words be few.*
    d. Take advantages of the "little solitudes" of the day
        i. (before getting up, quiet evening, traffic light, walking from the parking lot)
    e. Develop a place for solitude
        i. in your home, office, in your car, a park, a church sanctuary, try to live one entire day without words at all (speaking or hearing), turn off the TV, take a day twice a year for listening, re-evaluating God's direction for you

"The Blessed Branch Life"

Branch life is an easy life. The branch has no responsibility except to receive nourishment from the vine and root system. It is a life of absolute dependence upon the vine.

Am I to understand that when I work, when I minister to my family or fellow workers, when I visit or pray for the sick that it is the vine doing the work and not me? Yes! That is the supreme revelation for the Christian. Paul put it this way, "It is no longer I, but Christ in me."

The relationship between the vine and the branch is an daily, hourly, unceasing, living connection. This is exactly the idea Jesus wants to get across to us; without him we can do nothing. Morning by morning, day, by day, hour by hour, step by step I am to

depend on him. He is my strength, my wisdom, my anointing, my gentleness, my self-control, my life is in Him.

We have made assumptions that the only way to experience all God has for us is to live a maxed out, overloaded lifestyle. This mindset must be changed, assaulted, thrown out of our minds. We must choose to live differently - it must be a lifelong value to us.

Isaiah 30:15-18
This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:
"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you;
he rises to show you compassion.
For the LORD is a God of justice.
Blessed are all who wait for him!

Financial Margin

The main principle here is that God owns it all. I am merely a steward (taking God's resources and using them to bring about God's purposes). There are two keys to financial margin: Planning and Contentment

Planning – I will spend my money with or without a plan. I can only spend it once. I must consider choices I have, and prioritize and choose to spend it wisely.

Short term:
1) Give it (Proverbs 3:9 - *Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of your produce*)
Three levels of giving (growing in maturity)
Give something —> Give proportionately —> Give sacrificially (led by the Spirit)

2) Save for future (Invest)
Emergency fund —> Specific Goal Fund —> Home stretch fund

Consider the latte factor: instead of buying a latte, save $2.74 per day (1000 dollars a year) and at age 20, invest it at 12.5%. In forty years it will equal $1,000,000!

3) Pay off debt
Psalm 27:31 *The wicked borrows and doesn't pay back*
Proverbs 22:7 – *The borrower is slave to the lender*
Determine what you owe; Pay off the smallest loan (this will encourage you); roll down payments (all the way to paying off your house)

4) Pay taxes - Romans 13:7
Reduce our tax burden when legally possible. Pay the taxes that you owe.

5) Lifestyle
Do you live on a 10/10/80 plan? Tithe 10%, give 10% live on 80%

Long term:
College; Retirement; Pay off home

Contentment – 1Timothy 6:6-10

1) Live within our means – be content with what I make and what I have
2) I have *learned* to be content. This does not come naturally: it must be learned