

How many of you would say that you occasionally or often feel pretty stressed? How many of you would say, *“You know, bills are coming in from the holidays and the economy is kind of tight and things may not be as loose as they used to be.”* How many of you would say that you occasionally, or even often feel some financial tension or stress? How many of you would say, *“I really wish that I had either more time for myself, because I don’t do much for myself”;* or *“I wish I had more time to spend with the people that I love.”*

We live in a culture that pushes us to the limits. Buy more, do more, accomplish more, conquer more; more, more, more, more, more. I would argue that most of us are living at an unbiblical and unsustainable pace. It’s insane what normal is today.

There are kids, that on top of homework, on top of school, will be out 4 or 5 nights a week doing their activities, not to mention what they do on the weekends and we call that normal. For many of us, the schedules now that we impose on our children, end up imposing on us and we are stressed, they are stressed.

If someone said, *“Are you really enjoying your life?”* Most of us would say, *“No, and I don’t have time to talk about it, gotta go!”* Virtually everybody I know has very little margin for error in the major portions of life. Most people have no margin for the most important things in life. *“What is margin exactly?”*

Margin: The Amount Available Beyond What Is Necessary.

It’s the difference between what you have and what you need. If I have 30 minutes to get somewhere and it takes 20 minutes to get there, I have 10 minutes of margin. If I have \$100, and I have got \$80 worth of bills, I’ve got \$20 of margin. The difference between what you have and what you need.

How does margin play out in everyday life? Margin would be showing up maybe 5 or 10 minutes early to a meeting so you are not stressed all of the time. Margin financially would be having money leftover at the end of the month.

Margin is having distance between you and temptation. Rather than being morally on the edge all of the time, is having preset buffers in your life to keep you from stumbling into life-destructive behavior.

Margin could be having emotional capacity to deal with problems. When your kid comes up and drops something on you, you don’t just unleash on your kid because you’re overwhelmed; it’s having the emotional capacity to deal with struggles.

Margin could be having three or four nights a week, where you don’t have anything at all on your schedule. Margin could be having extra time or extra money to invest and give to people and ministries that you love. Margin could be simply having time to think, to reflect, to meditate, to dream. Margin could be having significant time with God. Not a quick *“God bless this meal, thank you, Amen, help me today!”* But significant time meditating on His Word, enjoying His presence.

Simply put, margin is what most of us do not have. I am convinced that the best things in life happen in the margins. Luke, Chapter 10, is a great story about two different women; one decided she didn't have margin, the other created margin and experienced something that could never ever be taken away from her. Let's pick it up in Luke 10, starting in verse 38 and here is what Scripture says:

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.”

Luke 10:38-40 (NIV)

Two women that had the exact same opportunity. We've got Mary and Martha. Jesus, the Son of God is present. Mary created a moment. She could of had things to do, she might have had laundry at her place that was undone, she might have had grocery shopping that she needed to do, she might have had tidying up, but she just said; *for the moment I am not going to do that, I am going to embrace this moment and enjoy Jesus.*

Martha, on the other hand, was like many of us, she was distracted, she was wiggling out. It's interesting that she was not distracted by something that was bad or evil. She wasn't distracted by some sinfulness. She was actually distracted by what we might say, some good things. In fact, many of us would be distracted by the same thing. She is thinking, *okay, Jesus is in the house, he's like, rumor is He is the Son of God, better get out my good company plates, better make sure the candle is lit, got to make sure the toilet paper matches the shower curtain, because God forbid I make a fool call like that with Jesus in the house.* We have got to make sure everything is just right and she was distracted with good things from the best things.

If Satan, our spiritual enemy, cannot make us really, really bad; he will try to make us really, really busy. Some of us become so busy at doing lesser things, that we miss out on the most important things, we are distracted from the very best.

Illustration: Staycation

So many of us are consumed and obsessed and possessed with accomplishing the urgent, and what we think is important, and we are missing the most important things in life.

Mary and Martha, they are in this situation ...

“She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

Luke 10:40 (NIV)

Martha was absolutely convinced that what she was doing was correct. *This is the important thing! I'm in here doing this, and she is just sitting in there being lazy! Jesus, take my side!*

Therein lies the challenge for all of us ... **most of us are convinced that the way we are living is necessary and right.** We think, “*Well, this is the way we have to live! Busyness, that’s success, isn’t it?*”

We are convinced that this is what truly matters and is completely necessary to be successful in this world, *everybody is doing it!* Forgetting the fact that broad is the road and wide is the path that leads to destruction, the Bible says, and many people are on it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and very few people find it. That’s why the words of Paul in Romans, Chapter 12, verse 2 are so important; “**Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world.**”

Why do we think that what everyone else does is God’s best? To not be like everyone else; but instead, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, then you will be able to attest and approve what the will of God is, His good, His pleasing, and His perfect will.

I’m convinced that the way most of us are doing life is completely contrary to what God had planned. “*Jesus, tell her to help me, I’m right, I’m right! This is the way that it should be!*” Jesus says *no, your production mindset missed the moment.*

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”
Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

Here is what you have to understand. The choice is yours, and you are going to be tempted to fight back and say, “*You don’t know what the real world is like. You don’t know what it’s like to have financial pressure, I can’t do this!*” No, the choice is yours, the choice is always yours. “*Well, but, my boss!*” **No, the choice is yours, and if you choose what is right, it will never be taken away from you.**

What happens when we live a margin-less life? What happens when margin decreases?

When Your Margin Decreases ...

1. Your Stress Increases.

When you’re running late and your margin decreases, what happens? Your stress increases!

Illustration: Scheduling Margin – Running Late To Church/Married Life Seminar

Illustration: Financial Margin – Something Breaks At Home

When Your Margin Decreases ...

2. Your Relational Intimacy Decreases.

You see it all of the time. Those of you that are busy, you are frustrated, you are challenged. Your mind rarely disengages from the things that you think are important. You can be with somebody you love, but you are not with them. You are present, but you are not all present. Your mind is still running. You can go on vacation, but you are never really there, you are always still connected to work, something is still going on.

Illustration: Family Dinner (facebooking, texting, emailing, twittering)

Your relational intimacy also decreases with God. Busy, too busy for people, too busy for God. And we think that is normal. Why?

Why is it that so many of us live margin-less lives? Why is it that so many of us plan on slowing down one day, but we rarely ever do? Why is it that very few people take the house that they cannot afford, sell it and downsize, and create some financial margin? Why is it that we say money doesn't make us happy, and yet so many of us fight and scrape to get even more? Why is it that we do not radically cut back on our schedules to spend time with the children that will be out of our house like that? Why is it that we are so sick?

The bottom line is that we do not fully trust God. We don't have enough faith to really believe that God is on the throne, that He will handle the details of life and that His way of doing life is better.

We are afraid that if we are not going and going and going, we are going to miss out on something out there, that elusive something that is going to finally fill the void we feel so deeply in our hearts. Gotta work harder, gotta make more money, gotta have the nicer, gotta have this, gotta be at the meeting ... gotta, gotta, gotta, gotta, gotta! *Because if I don't, I am going to miss out on that something that I am longing for!* It's insane!

Most of you, you make more money today than you have in your entire lives, and yet, you battle with more financial stress than you ever have. Most of you, you've got better opportunities to do great things, and yet, you are more empty and more exhausted. Why?

It's because we are filling our lives with things that do not matter. In a word, **idolatry**. **We are elevating good things to become supreme things.** We are distracted by all of the production and worldliness.

Gotta have the bigger house, then it may help our marriage. Gotta have the nicer car, then it will make me feel good about myself, therefore I have got to get the promotion so I can sustain this lifestyle. Got to be at the meeting so they will think well of me, because their opinion matters, and my whole self worth hinges on what they think about me. Gotta have our kids involved in the best of all the opportunities, because God forbid we invest spiritually in our children, they have got to be great flute players! Gotta have the perfect body, because my soul is not as valuable as my body. I've got to produce more and more and more, because I am so empty.

It's idolatry. It's insane and it's killing marriages and families and people are hurting. It's not what God intended.

In this seminar we're going to have a 'come to Jesus meeting'. In these sessions we're going to challenge you and push you like you haven't been pushed in a long time. Some of you are going to see it, feel it, believe it, and you are going to do life not according to the patterns of this world, but according to the rhythms of God's grace; and you are going to choose what is better. You are not going to have regrets, because you are not going to give your life away to things that do not matter and do not last.

TIME FOR A "COME TO JESUS" MEETING

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, ...

All who are stressed out, overwhelmed, can't get it all done ... single parents who are about to fall apart ... business guy, who feels like you're gonna lose it all ... mom who has no margin for herself ... those who are overwhelmed and feel insignificant if they're not busy all of the time.

... and I will give you rest.

Rest for your souls; peace, assurance, tranquility, rest for your souls. A lot of us, we don't even know what rest is, we are going to talk a lot about rest in our first session.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

Wives – *"I don't have any time for me, I don't have any time for me and if I did something for me, I would feel incredibly guilty."* Do you realize how insane that is?

Husbands – *"Well I've got to make more, conquer more, achieve more, because that is what will show love to ..."*

"Be still, and know that I am God."

Psalms 46:10 (NIV)

Assignment: Take 5 minutes a day where you don't produce anything. You don't think anything, you just be in God's presence, just listen. What it's gonna do is for 5 minutes is it's going to break the idolatry, where you think you are on the throne of this life and you are going to leave the laundry undone, the kids knocking, and your emails unchecked, and your Facebook will survive without you looking at it for 5 minutes; and you are not allowed to Twitter about it. You are just going to be, for 5 minutes, you are just going to be. It's a first and significant step into creating a lot more of margin.

Here is where we are going to go in this seminar:

Session #1: We are going to talk about scheduling margin and we are going to talk about some extremes, because most of us we do not have time and you are going to say, *“But I don’t have time to do that!”* No, you have time for what you choose to have time for and we are going to challenge you to make some significant commitments.

Session #2: We are going to talk about financial margin, because most of us have none and the pressure is so real in this consumeristic, materialistic world, and we’re going to show you how you can create financial margin. It will be simple, not easy, but your life can be transformed as we create financial margin.

Session #3: We are going to talk about moral margin, because all over the world people are falling into dangerous lifestyles of sin, because there is no buffer between them and temptation, and when our schedules are crushed, and when our finances are tight, all of a sudden we are so stressed and so many people relieve themselves with sin, that is an escape and ends up totally destroying their lives. We are going to build moral margin. We are going to stop seeking meaning from the things of this world, and we are going to find meaning from the things of God.

“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)

When you stop living according to the patterns of this world, but instead you live according to the rhythms of His grace, and you will never be the same.

Let’s Pray!

God, I ask that Your Holy Spirit would pierce our hearts. I thank You in advance, for those who will be open to Your will. Father, I ask that You would give us the courage to make significant life changes that would honor You. Lord, help us to refuse to surrender to this culture and not give our lives away to things that do not matter. Help us create margin for the most important things in life. We will seek You and we know You will guide us.

Discussion Questions:

1. How much do you enjoy your life? Talk about the parts you are actually able to enjoy and the parts that drain you.
2. Margin is the amount available beyond what is necessary. Explain what margin looks like in your life right now.
3. When margin decreases, stress increases. What are some of the things that currently cause you the most stress? How is that stress affecting your life? Share the area where you are most aware of living without margin.
4. When margin decreases, your relational intimacy decreases. How have you seen your intimacy with God and your spouse decrease as a result of not having margin in your life?
5. What are some specific ways you can begin the process of reducing stress in your life? Discuss what you're willing to do (or stop doing) to experience true rest.
6. A lack of margin is also a reflection of idolatry. What are some of the things you are placing before God? How will you go about putting God first?

7. Matthew 11:28-29, Psalm 46:10, and Isaiah 58:11 tell us that if we come to Jesus and be still and rest before Him, our souls will be satisfied. How have you found rest and comfort through Christ? How did that rest ultimately lead to satisfaction? While it sounds simple, why do you think it is so difficult for many of us to rest and be still before Christ?

Take time to rest this week with Christ. This time could consist of praying, reading the Bible, or just enjoying some quiet time alone. Be creative. Remove the distractions for just a little while and allow Him an opportunity to renew your soul and your mind.

Begin the process of reducing some of the stress in your life this week. Identify one or more things that are creating too much stress and create a plan to reduce that stress. Not only write down your plan of action, but talk with your spouse as you carry out your plan.

Use these prayer tips to guide your time with God ...

- Bring to God those areas of your life that are causing stress. Ask God to help you in removing that stress.
- Seek God's guidance through prayer of ways He wants to create more margin in your life.
- Confess to God in prayer those things that you are placing ahead of Him. Commit to God that you will put Him first.
- Be still and rest before God during your prayer time. Allow Him to comfort you and renew your mind and soul.
- Lay your burdens down before God in prayer. Tell Him what is weighing you down and trust Him to carry them for you. Seek His comfort and love.