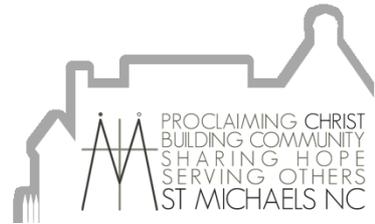


# Sermon Series: Creating Margins



## #1 The tyranny of busy-ness

### Intro



I went shopping this week to purchase several items at different locations and I was quite disturbed. At each shop the cashier asked me the same initial question: **“Are you having a busy day?”**

Why did they each ask the same question? Did I look harried and worn out each time? Did I have the word *busy* printed across my forehead?

More likely, each of the cashiers is a product of her own environment. Each has been taught that **if you’re important, you should be busy; and if you’re busy, you must be important.**



Often people will call the church’s office landline phone and leave a message that says, “Vicar, I didn’t want to call your mobile phone, as you must be a busy man.”

The news reports today that Donald Trump is feeling the pinch at the Whitehouse. He’s complaining about the assessment the press will give to his first **100 days in office**. He’s under pressure to prove his performance as president and it’s pinching. “I need more time,” he’s saying. “It’s ridiculous!”

Let’s face it – whether you’re a pastor, a parent, a plumber or a pediatrician in today’s world, you are in **danger of being too busy**. If you add to your actual working hours the pressure of family, exercise, bills, school, friends, committees, and a barrage of email requests, voicemail messages, demands and desires, then **it’s easy to become overwhelmed and overwrought.**



And then, think about adding the **expectations upon Christians**. Aren't you followers of Jesus supposed to fit in bible reading, prayer, small group attendance, church attendance, acts of charity and mercy, and more? As Robert Banks wrote back in the 80's: "...with respect to time, Christians are a good deal worse off than many."

Previous generations measured their lives with calendars on the wall. Today we live by the minute. Letters once were dated, now emails are clocked to the second.

Author Richard Powers<sup>1</sup> also writes about '**the contagion of real time**', saying

"In real time, every second counts. Every minute must be maximized."

So we normalize 'multi-tasking', 'split screening', 'Skyping', 'Facetime', 'Hands-free', RSS feeds, picture in picture, and more. If you have more time than someone else you are expected to **maximize it**.

Powers writes, "...in real time, we live in two minds, three tenses and four continents at once... **nanoseconds now weigh heavy in on our hands.**"

## Margin

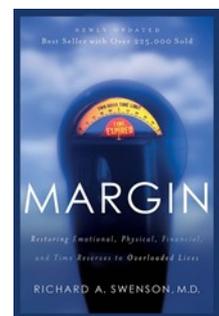


Life wasn't always like this. My mother and my grandmother had huge margins of time available to use for building relationships and for unanticipated emergencies and for unexpected pleasures. But the world has changed. We can't turn back the clock... can we?

Author Dr Richard Swenson believes we must create margins in our lives.

Swenson says:

"Margin is the space that once existed between ourselves and our limits. (Margin is) something held in reserve for contingencies and unanticipated situations."<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *The Paris review book for Planes, Trains, Elevators and Waiting Rooms*, Picador 2004

That's what this new sermon series is about. We're going to work our way through some pretty solid topics that relate directly to managing our time and our energy in life for what's most important.



Remember writing exams at school and being allowed to write notes in the space around the outside of the page. Swenson likens this to the time we need to free up in life for what's most important.

Swenson writes:

“(Today)...we have no margin at all. Yet because we don't even know what margin is, we don't realize it is gone. We know that something is not right, but we can't solve the puzzle beyond that. Our pain is palpable, but our assailant remains unnamed. Much of this pain is in our relational life: to self, to others, to God. We miss margin in many areas. But,” he says, “we (really need) it in our relationships.”

### Healthy Margin



To be a healthy person, says Dr Swenson, we require margin in at least four areas of life: emotional energy, physical energy, time and finances.

He says:

“In emotional energy, seldom have we been so stressed, so alone, and so exhausted in spirit. In physical energy, we are overfed, underactive, and sleep-deprived. In time, our clock-dominated nanosecond culture leaves us wheezing and worn out. And in finances, universal indebtedness makes our societal landscape look like a fiscal (warzone).”

### The Scriptures



Although the ancient world was not a nanosecond culture, the bible shows plenty of awareness about the tyranny of busyness.

#### Psalm 37

For example, as we heard in Psalm 37, the bible calls people to trust patiently in God

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<sup>2</sup> *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Tim Reserves to Overloaded Lives*, Navpress 2004

rather than ‘fretting’ over and get angry about business deals.

**7** Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.

**8** Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.  
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Busy-ness, worry and anger can combine for very destructive outcomes.

#### Mark 4

In the parable of the sower of Mark chapter 4, listen to how Jesus describes one category of people unreceptive to God’s Word. He says:

**18** ...these are the ones who hear the word, **19** but the **cares of the world**, and the **lure of wealth**, and the **desire for other things** come in and **choke** the word, and it **yields nothing**.

#### Galatians 5

In Galatians 5 Paul presents two different paths people can take.

Some, he says, live according “to the flesh”, and others according to God’s Spirit. That is to say, there are people who **get busy gratifying** and pleasing the **self** over others. He lists some of their destructive lifestyles in verses 19-21, and declares them spiritually bankrupt.

Then there are others, those united to Christ and aligned with God’s Spirit, who show **selfless qualities** and behave in ways that **benefit others** and bring **glory to God** (verse 22-23).

#### Mark 11

The bible also warns against the tyranny of **religious busyness**.

In Matthew (chapter 11) Jesus calls out the religious leaders who spoke about the “yoke of the Law”.

A Yoke was a heavy wooden stock that joined two oxen around their necks so they could labour together.

Jesus looked upon harried people burdened by hundreds of religious rules that promised to make them right in the eyes of society and God. He said to the people,

Take **my** yoke upon you...**My** yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
(Matthew 11:28–30).

Instead of rushing about in the **vain pursuit of trying to make yourself right with God**, Jesus said, “Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He said, “Follow me.” He called people to take on the light load of

trusting in God who mercifully grants us a way to be right with Him through grace, not works of obedience or achievement.

### 2 Thessalonians 3 & Matthew 28:19

The Bible **doesn't suggest being busy is necessarily bad**. In fact, in 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul urges Christians who were **idle** to get to work.

We also know that **Jesus commissioned his apostles** in Matthew 28 to “go” and “make disciples of all nations.” After waiting to receive God’s Holy Spirit to empower them (Acts 1:8), they were **to go and get on with God’s good work**.

### Eph 5 and Col 4

The bible, however, does urge us to have a **qualitative attitude towards time**.

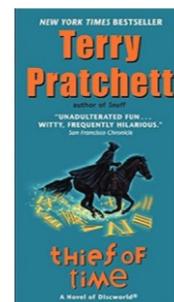
In Ephesians 5 and Colossians 4 the choice of the Greek word for “time” is *kairos*, not *chronos*, indicating an intention to speak not merely about the measure of time, but the meaning of time. Paul calls his readers to “redeem the time”, which in marketplace terms of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century suggests “buying back from slavery” the time that has been captured. In Ephesians 5:16 he writes: “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” And in Colossians 4:5, he says: “Make the most of every opportunity”.

### What shall we do about busyness?



Ask yourself this, **how much extra time each day do you need to complete all you need or want to do?** Thirty minutes? An hour? Two hours? Or would you prefer an extra day a week?

Terry Pratchett’s book *Thief of Time* has some characters called ‘the Monks of History’. They manage time in his fantasy universe. The Monks can store time and pump it around. They take it from places where it’s not needed like underwater or high up on mountains (how much time does a stone need?). Then they pump it to cities where there’s never enough time. Would this system help you? If so, you might need our new sermon series.



### Concluding illustration



I once visited the great duomo in Milan, Italy. Near the main entrance there’s a **sundial** on the floor. A ray of sunlight from a hole on the opposite wall strikes the clock, shining on the

bronze tongue on June 21, the summer solstice, and the meridian on the winter solstice, December 21. The sundial was placed in the Milan Duomo in 1768 by astronomers from the Accademia di Brera. Though it's very old, it's surprisingly precise. Officials in Milan even used it to regulate the clocks throughout the city. **Imagine if you had just those two points of time as your guide to life and all that time in between to determine what is important in life?**

Our plan in this sermon series is to review our use of time, not setting our watches by the Church's goals for your use of time, but by learning more about God's eternal plans for you and me and how to make the most of the days we are given for God's glory.



Over the coming months we'll cover topics that reach into your very real and busy world: work, rest, family, community, and more. Our aim will be to help you make those margins that allow us to give room for what's most important to us and to God.

I can't say I saw these inscriptions with my own eyes, but it's alleged that over three doorways of the Milan Cathedral are three ancient sayings written in Latin.

- Over one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses with the words: 'All that pleases is but for a moment.'
- Over the second is a cross with the words: 'All that troubles is but for a moment.'
- Over the central doorway are the words: 'That only is important which is eternal.'

The Bible tells us to number our days, not to schedule our nanoseconds. And numbering our days must entail **living in the light of God's eternity.**