

MONDAY MANNA

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MARGIN: MAKING ROOM FOR THE IMPORTANT

By Robert J. Tamasy

Margin. It is critical for our lives in many ways, even though we often fail to appreciate it. For instance, the margins on a typewritten page help the eyes in focusing on the words. If the entire sheet of paper were covered with words, with no white space around them, the task of reading would be tedious at best, even impossible.

Unfortunately, many of us fail to appreciate the importance of margin in our finances and our daily schedules. We attempt to cram in as much as possible, even if we know we cannot possibly handle everything we are trying to accomplish. As a result, we experience stress – lots and lots of stress.

A communication from an organisation called Gather Ministries offered this description: “Margin is the amount of time, money, or whatever, that we hold back – in order to maintain productivity, stability, integrity. ‘Calendar margin’ means reserving time for rest, for solitude, for other people. ‘Financial margin’ means living within our means, even changing our lifestyles, if necessary. ‘Work margin’ means focusing on what we’re made to do and excluding the things we aren’t.”

Many of us would respond, “Calendar margin? Financial margin? Work margin? What is that?!” Because our lifestyles are packed with commitments, obligations – and expenses. We work to excess to acquire an excess of things we think we need; in the process we sacrifice things that are far more important – like relationships, being able to set aside time for personal, physical and spiritual restoration, experiencing true joy rather than temporary happiness, and most of all, an abiding sense of peace in a world filled with unrest.

Even though our social culture encourages us to pursue hectic lifestyles, the Bible admonishes us to do the opposite: to slow down, to rest, to pause long enough to enjoy the moment. In the book of Job, the central character uttered words most of us can identify with: *“I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil”* (Job 3:26). But life does not have to be that way. Here are some things the Scriptures have to say:

Take time to rest. So many times, it seems the rallying cry of the business world is, “Do something, anything – just do it now!” Sometimes, even when the pressures of the day seem to be bearing down on us, the best thing we can do is hit the “pause” button and wait for what God wants us to do. *“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him”* (Psalm 37:7).

Take time to seek God. We tend to get so caught up in our activities and schedules, we easily lose sight of God and where He fits into our lives at that moment. But when decisions are pending and crises seem looming, there are times when the best thing is to act counter-intuitively. Instead of working up a frenzy, we can, as Psalm 46:10 urges, *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

Focus on what will last. Much of our hard work and sleep-deprived days are devoted to achievements and acquisitions that lose value and meaning over time. *“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare”* (Isaiah 55:2).

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Make our priorities God's priorities. When we put God first and strive to do as He directs, He has a way of ensuring that our daily needs are more than satisfied. *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33-34).

© 2019. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace*; *Tufting Legacies*; co-authored with David A. Stoddard, *The Heart of Mentoring*, and edited numerous other books, including *Advancing Through Adversity* by Mike Landry. Bob's biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

How would you define "margin" in our lives and our work? Do you have it in your life? Explain your answer.

What are the factors that oppose being able to create margin in our daily lives?

How can you go about seeking to build margin into your life? What changes would be necessary to have more of it?

Which of the Bible passages cited seems most helpful for you in terms of finding more margin in life, more "space" for the unexpected and what is most important? In what ways?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

1 Kings 3:7-15

Psalms 112:1-5

Proverbs 8:18-21

Isaiah 33:5-6

1 Timothy 4:8