

Guest Editorial: Create margin for God to work in your life

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My weary body slid into the lounge chair by the pool like Derek Jeter stealing second base—out of breath, a bit scuffed up and like I had taken something I wasn't supposed to have. A break.

The previous few weeks had been a bit relentless with projects and deadlines and meetings and conferences that all seemed so perfectly reasonable months before when I put them on my then-blank and inviting calendar. How they played out in real time, of course, was anything but reasonable, instead conspiring with the daily urgencies and interruptions of life to create a rhythm and a pace that was far from life-giving.



Jayne Davis Maybe you've been there. Fragmented—here, there and everywhere—but nowhere, really ...

Margin-less. More tasks than time, more month than money, unrealistic expectations of ourselves, our children, our churches. A persistent sense of being behind schedule. A to-do list that never gets to done. No room for error, or the house of cards may come tumbling down.

Margin-less. Stretched from one side of the page to the other with no white space to be had. It's a chronic condition. It's not a function of a particularly

crazy time in your family or your work or your church. That's what you said last time, remember?

On a mission trip in South Africa last year, I heard a story from a local pastor, told to our team the night before we went into a Zulu village to work for the first time.

Sometime around the turn of the century, he said, a missionary was travelling through the jungle, anxious to get to his new post and begin the work to which God had called him. Two local tribesmen traveled with him as guides, helping navigate the unfamiliar and often-dangerous terrain; a third man served as an interpreter.

Determined to get where he was going as quickly as possible, the missionary pushed the team to travel at a relentless pace for days. One morning, his guides sat down and refused to move. The missionary tried to prod them along, to convey the urgency of his work and of getting to where they were going. But still they refused. Finally, exasperated, he asked the translator to find out why they would not get up.

We must sit here and wait for our spirits to catch up to our bodies.

"We must sit here," one of the men replied, "and wait for our spirits to catch up to our bodies."

That phrase was powerful to me and spoke to a deep need in my own spirit. Creating margin brings that sacred rhythm to our lives. It makes room for us to sit down—mentally, physically and spiritually—and let the Spirit catch up to our body.

There are many ways to practice creating margin, for individuals and for churches. Here are two that have been meaningful to me:

- ***Create margin by stretching your imagination.***

I had the opportunity recently to listen to a community planner in New York City talk about advances in solar technology that are being used in a project called the Lowline, an underground park that is being developed on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It is fascinating! As she put a visual on the screen of “rolling up the sidewalk” and looking at the possibilities for creating something new underground, all kinds of “aha” lightbulbs starting brightening in my spirit—glimpses of things God might have in mind if I allowed him to roll up the sidewalk of my ministry, of my life.

Stretching our imagination in an area we know nothing about gives us freedom to not be in control and creates room for God’s Spirit to bubble up.

- ***Create margin by stopping.***

For six years, we have written our own Sunday school curriculum, *Along the Way*, at our church. It is a large undertaking, and in many ways, it is a monster that continually demands to be fed. Like all good and worthy projects, when we say yes to something big, we are inevitably saying no to other things—present and future opportunities.

After Easter, *Along the Way* will go on hiatus for nine months. We are letting the field lie fallow in the seventh year. Although it is a bit scary to stop doing something so central to our ministry, doing so is allowing us to take a step back and create space, free from the weekly deadlines, to pay attention to what God is up to in our midst, to ask questions of where God is leading us and whether writing our own material is still the best way to take us there.

Without intentionally stopping periodically, the habit of what we are doing will carry us along. For God to speak a new word in our midst, or a renewing word of affirmation, we need to create the space to ask the question and the time and attention to listen. Everything won’t fall apart because we stop doing something; in fact, it might just be the break that is

needed for new ideas and new talents from unexpected people and places to start to emerge.

What do you need to do to let your spirit catch up to your body? As we walk through the season of Lent, how will you develop a spiritual practice of creating margin?

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