



# MARGIN

***Do you have the emotional, physical, financial and time reserves you need to survive in our culture, to have an impact?***

On a beach vacation, I read a book that made a lasting impression on me, even lowered my blood pressure from 140/90 to 118/80! Author, Dr. Richard Swenson took 10 years to write the book, *Margin* (NavPress). Dr. Swenson's interest in the lack of margin in over-leveraged lifestyles can be expressed in a formula:

$$\text{Margin} = \text{Power} - \text{Load}$$

Our culture puts a tremendous load on men especially. Today, many of us will admit we have no margin to lead the distinctive life modeled by Jesus Christ.

Marginless living is a modern disease, insidious, widespread and virulent, and it heralds today's new faith—faith in progress, which is identified with technological novelty. We lead the world in technological success but we also lead the world in human failures including divorce, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse, homicide, and disease. Discipline problems in our schools in 40 years have moved from chewing gum to shooting guns. We are in a crisis and the prognosis by the social experts is not positive. Something historical, of monumental proportions, is happening.

## **How does progress steal away *margin*?**

Progress in American culture flows strongly in the direction of increased pressure on people. It means an ever increasing pace accompanied by more intrusions - telephones in office, home and car - FAX, etc. It means more mobility which translates into less time with loved ones. We can remember when it used to take longer to receive a message, travel somewhere, etc., and that extra time gave us more *margin*.

Inevitably, "progress" in the hands of fallen men means that we will tend to overlook the social, emotional & spiritual contributions to our well being as we come to rely more upon material progress.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn says we are “insane”. He has gone back to Russia. The problem he sees is a lack of love. **We have all the unhappiness money can buy.** We need to break the addiction to the lure of this world’s culture and create those reserves for living a life of peace in rich relationships.

### **What is the remedy?**

How does Dr. Swenson suggest we provide ourselves with margin? Ten years ago he realized that he had to make some tough career decisions to be able to maintain his margin. He decided upon a career path that was less visible, and less lucrative financially, but would allow for more margin. A large part of his book is devoted to prescriptions which focus on gaining margin in important areas of life:

- **Emotional Margin.** More meaningful relationships, less conflict. Reconcile relationships, granting grace (not judgement).
- **Physical Margin.** Diet, exercise, sleep, decrease fat intake, decrease sugar intake, drink more water.
- **Financial Margin.** Settle the issue of Lordship; break money’s back; give it away; become counter-cultural. Live modestly within your harvest, etc.
- **Time Margin.** Limit TV. Prune the activity branches (learn to say “no thanks”); practice simplicity and contentment; develop long term vision.

In my case, Dr. Swenson made such an impression that I purchased a NordicTrack and I even used it! A key to consistent use was an “accountability wall calendar” that a friend in Christ brought to my house and put up for me.

This is a good example of emotional margin coming through closer, more supportive relationships affecting physical margin (lower blood pressure)—coming through, in this case, regular exercise. *Margin* by Richard Swenson, M.D. (NavPress), is a life changing book. I highly recommend it.

—Chris White

***Additional resources are available at [leadadmin.org/resources](http://leadadmin.org/resources).***