

Margins 3 – Our Relationship with God requires Margin
1 Samuel 3:1-10 and Deuteronomy 6:4-8
September 22, 2013

As we have been spending the last few weeks talking about Margins, I have had the truth of just how close I live to the edge hammered home once again when I tried to update my I-phone to the new operating system that was recently released. It locked my phone up to where I could not access it at all. Now, after a few minutes, I realized I could hook it up to the computer and restore it to a previously saved version, but for those few minutes the thought that caused my heart to race was for my calendar on my phone. My life was on that calendar and I did not know what to do when I thought it was gone. Thinking back to the anxiety it caused makes me realize how little margin both literally and figuratively I have in my life. And as we continue on, talking about Margins, I doubt I am the only one who feels this way.

Last week we talked about how all of our relationships require margins. This week, I want to specifically look at one particular relationship – our relationship with God. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew to “seek and you shall find.” If we seek out a relationship with God, then we will find it. The problem is that we just don’t build margin into our life to seek God.

Think about this for a minute: I often hear people say how they feel close to God in nature – in the mountains or at the ocean or in the woods hiking. Have you ever felt that way? Me, too! Here’s the thing: I would say that in almost all of those instances those are times when we have created margin in our lives, and in that margin we slow down; and when we slow down, we feel closer to God. I don’t know of anyone who says, “Yeah, I was up in the Smokey Mountains hammering away on a proposal on my laptop and I really felt close to God...” Our relationship to God grows in the margins of our life.

Our Scripture for today begins with the Jewish SHEMA – “Hear o Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength.” This verse is to them like John 3:16 is for Christians. It is this verse that Jesus brings up as the way to sum up all of the law, but he adds that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

As I think about how lost I was without my phone and all that modern phones offer, I can’t help but contrast it to this verse to LOVE GOD WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE. What if I would have lost God from my life? Now, I know this is not possible simply because God refuses to let this happen, but on my end I often misplace the priority of this relationship on my daily schedule. What about you? Relationships are important, and at the head of those relationships should be our relationship with God. Yet, it is often times the one that suffers when we fail to build margin into our life.

I think part of the issue is we look at this wrong. I was thinking on why it is that I am more willing to sacrifice my relationship with God over other things, and I think it has to do with grace and forgiveness. Often times we make split second decisions that, I believe, at the core center around who is most likely to forgive us. Think about this for a minute in your life: people you work with or work for, your bosses,

your clients, and people like that – often times we work ourselves ragged trying not to disappoint them because we do not have a relationship strong enough to where they would forgive us if we failed them. If I fail, then they will fire me! Conversely, often times our families get the short end of the stick because these are the people who care for us the most, and are most likely to forgive us when we mess up, so we shortchange them knowing and hoping they will forgive us for it. If I am honest then that is the case for me at times.

Now let me take it a step further: God is the author of grace and forgiveness, of second chances and new life. God has gone on record saying, “I will never leave you or forsake you, no matter what.” God has proven that to be true in our lives, so I wonder if we shortchange God even more because we are counting on the fact that he will forgive us when we do it.

Here’s the problem with this line of thinking, though: it is inverted in its order and priority of who we need in our lives in order to make our lives better. When God set out the first commandment that you shall have no other God’s before me, He was offering it for us because we need God. When Moses shared the SHEMA that God had given him that we are to love God with everything we have, it is because God knew that WE NEED GOD. When Jesus said the whole of the law could be summed up in loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves, it is because Jesus knew that these relationships are essential for our health!

So we look at not fostering our relationship with God as something God will forgive us for, but God looks at it as something we are missing out on – missing the opportunity to have our lives transformed; missing the chance to connect with the ultimate source of power and love and grace. We are missing out on the joy that a vital relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, affords us. When we have that relationship growing, it automatically builds margin into the rest of our relationships and gives us perspective.

But it takes intentionality on our part. There are two things that I want to focus on today that are key to our relationship with God – prayer and Bible study. Now, I think we oftentimes make prayer out to be more difficult than it should be. Prayer is conversation with God. Any good conversation is a two-way street, so it has opportunities for you to talk and opportunities for you to listen while God talks. Prayer is not about a wish list, prayer is not something that has to be forced, but rather an opportunity to get to know God better. There are no specific words that have to be uttered - no words really at all. It is more about building margin in your schedule for God. Even in the stillness and quietness of us not knowing what to do, if we give that margin to God, then he will fill it with just what we need. Let me encourage you to try something for a week: when you are by yourself in your car – turn the radio off, and build margin into your life when you are driving and just say, “Alright God, this is your time. I am giving it to you so that we can get to know each other better. Help me to hear your voice better.”

In my book, that is a pretty awesome prayer. Then just listen.

The second thing I want you to try was in your inbox this morning if we have your email address. It was an email from the church entitled "ALONG THE WAY." There is one place we can always turn in order to hear God's voice in our lives and that is the Bible. It is called God's Word for a reason. In the Bible, God always speaks to us. It is God-breathed, meaning it has life because God has given it life, and in God's word we can find life too. That is why reading the Bible is important because it connects us to our source of power – God himself!

So in your inbox this morning, you have an email entitled "ALONG THE WAY." Each morning you will have it there and it will contain 1 chapter of the Bible printed out in the body of the email. If you do not do email, then we have some print outs for you to have. I am asking you to do is to try it for 100 days. There are 101 days left in 2013 so try it for the remainder of 2013. I want you to read the one chapter that will be emailed to you each day and create enough margin to think about what God is speaking to you in that text today so you can take that with you along the way! A second thing on today's email is a Faith Talk. These are short discussions that will be attached to Sunday's email each week, that will help start conversations among people, whether that is with your family at home, or your coworker, or a friend or neighbor. Try it out sometime this week to build margin for a conversation with someone else.

2 things I am asking you to commit to: 1. A week with no radio on in your car to build margin for prayer, and 100 days of reading a chapter of the Bible a day and reflecting on it. Can you do that?

At the end of the text from Deuteronomy today, Moses is telling people that this SHEMA, this statement of loving God, is important – God's Word is important and we need to brand ourselves with it. He says this word should be on our hearts. We should teach it diligently and talk about it when people sit in our house because in this word we find the answers to all of our problems and we find joy and love and hope. Then it says to bind it as a sign on your hand and put it on your forehead. In other words, put it in places of importance – over our minds and in the palm of our hands and in our heart where we won't forget it. So, I want to give you an opportunity to do just that as a sign of your willingness to build margin into your life for God. We have little bracelets up here that have a bead, made of olive wood from Bethlehem, which the youth have made and prayed over. I would like for you to come forward and have one bound on your hand as a sign of the importance of your relationship with God.