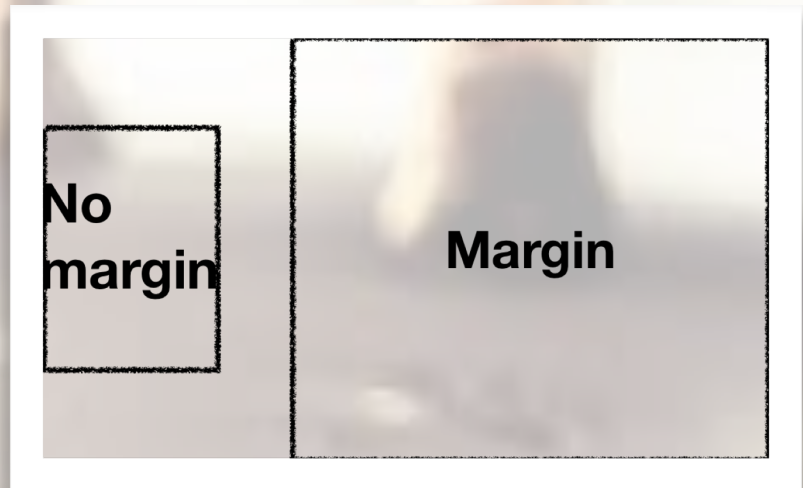


July 20-24, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 237
Adding Margin To Your Life

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

July 19, 2026



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If hey help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

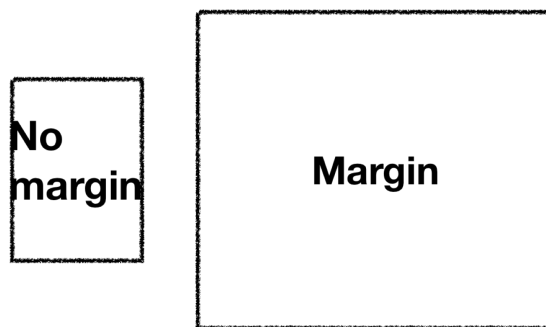
**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday Reflection: This week we are going to be looking at the concept of margin which I think makes sense at this point in our series because we've been talking about living out our calling (what God put us here to do), slowing down and focusing our energies on what matters the most. If we're going to do those things then most of us are going to have to figure out some stuff to cut out of our schedule. Why? Because we are one of the most overbooked cultures that has ever existed. Yes we are also the most prosperous culture that has ever existed but the price of our prosperity is working harder than ever, longer than ever and stretching ourselves (and our families) thinner than ever.

Is it really that bad? Well, I read this week that we are sleeping on average 2 1/2 hours less per night than our grandparents did. We are working on average 12 hours a week more than our grandparents did. The average person has around 36 hours worth of work stacked up on their desks- much of it they will never get around to looking at. We spend 8 months of our lives opening junk mail (virtual and analog), 2 years of our lives playing phone tag with people who aren't picking up our calls and 5 years of our lives waiting for people who are late for meetings (because they're overbooked and overstressed too). We're a piled on, stretched to the limit society. We are chronically rushed, chronically late, chronically exhausted.

I have no peace. I have no quiet. I have no rest and trouble keeps coming. Job 3:26 (GW)

Ever felt like that? Yeah, me too. It's really interesting that if someone penniless we give them food stamps. If someone is homeless we direct them to a shelter. If someone is out of breath we get them oxygen. But if someone is marginless we give them one more task to do. As it turns out, marginless-ness is the disease of our culture and it is heaping stress upon us that is beyond our ability to comprehend. Maybe the best visual representation of what margin -vs- no margin looks like for me is this graphic:



Which one do you identify with most? Yeah, me too. So what's the answer? Well, we're going to look at how to add margin into our lives this week but it won't happen easily. We overbook our lives for a reason. And getting out of things we've committed to won't be easy. But nobody else has been giving the responsibility of guarding your schedule- God has given you that sacred responsibility. After creating the first humans God said this to them?

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over... the earth." Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

Now obviously God wasn't talking specifically about our schedules and margin in that verse. But regardless of the fact that schedule and margin wasn't the only thing He's talking about in that verse- they are part of what He was talking about in that verse. Because the earth and

the cultures we've created within it will do everything in its power to get you to overbook your life. So what is our sacred responsibility that God's given me when it comes to this week's lesson? Take dominion over your schedule and the pace of your life. Because if you don't someone else will.

There will have to be some difficult decisions that each of us will have to make if we're going to take dominion over our schedules and add margin into our lives. To give us space to feel the peace, joy and satisfaction God intends for each of us to experience in this life. And make no mistake about it- He intends for all of us to live our lives with margin. So I'll leave you with this scripture for you to reflect on today as we prepare to ruthlessly take dominion and add margin into our overloaded lives.

Reverence for God gives one deep strength. Proverbs 14:26 (TLB)

Tuesday Reflection: So if I'm going to be accept the sacred responsibility of taking dominion over my life and my schedule by adding margin to my overloaded life the first thing I'm going to have to do is accept that humans have limits. Once I've accepted that truth then I need to recognize that I myself am in fact, a human. Therefore logic would dictate that I myself have limitations:

I have learned that everything has limits. Psalm 119:96 (GN)

Still struggling with this one? Well then read the above verse again and answer this question- what does God mean by "everything"? Am I included in "everything". After answering that then we can again address ourselves to the point for today- accept my limitations. We live in a culture that constantly tells us "You can do it all! You can have it all! You can be it all!" But you can't. The truth is, you can not do it all. None of us can. We all have limitations and because of that we have to make some tough choices about what we do with the limited time, energy and resources we have. Which means I shouldn't just be looking at my energy level- I should also be looking at what I'm choosing to put my energy into. Because some things just aren't worth my time:

It is stupid to waste time on useless projects. Proverbs 12:11 (GN)

Don't you love the Bible? I love the way it puts so many things so matter-of-factly. Some things are not worth your time and energy. Turns out not only do we have limits but so do some of our projects. So let's take a look at some of the limits that we should be considering when we schedule our lives.

We've all got physical limits. There is only so much physically that you can do and take. Exceed that limit and you're going to experience some problems. Most of us kind of recognize that- even if we don't let it slow us down. We all know there is a limit to how much we can carry but if you're like me and you're bringing in groceries from the car your understanding or willingness to recognize your limits gets iffy when faced with the prospect of having to make multiple trips from the car to the kitchen.

If I was to ask you if you could carry someone you love out of a burning building most of us would think we might be able to pull that off. But ask you to carry 5 people at a time and we'd all admit our limitations.

But what about carrying people emotionally? How many people can you carry emotionally at once? There our belief about our own limitations starts to break down for many of us. But can you carry more than one person emotionally at once? Probably although it depends on the other person and your own unique limits. But can any of us carry 5 people emotionally at once? How about 10? Turns out we've got emotional limits too.

You've also got mental limits- how much information you can take in and retain at any given moment. You've got time limits and we looked at that last weekend with the beans. We've all got 84,600 seconds in every day that we get to schedule out but once we get to that 84,600th bean there are no more to seconds to schedule. You've hit the limit of time given you for a given day.

We've all got limitations. Most of them were set by God Himself. Go beyond your limits and you'll start to break down- just like a car. You say, "it'd be nice if God gave me a warning light or signal like my car's check engine light." First of all how many of you actually stop driving your car when you see that light? Secondly God has given you an early warning system- it's called stress and pain and fatigue and irritability. We talked about this in the slowing down lesson a few weeks back. Go beyond your limits and you'll start to sense less joy, less ease, less peace, less meaning and less satisfaction. So for today maybe just try to wrap your mind around the concept that everything has limits- including you.

Wednesday Reflection: This week we're looking at how to add margin into our lives and schedules. Yesterday we started by addressing the idea that all of us have limits. Today we'll continue looking at what it takes to subdue your schedule and take dominion over your calendars by remembering to always expect the unexpected. In 21st century America many of us have taken scheduling our day to the extreme. We see ourselves as military commanders marshaling our 84,600 seconds that we are given in any given day and squeezing the most productivity out of them that is humanly possible. We squeeze as much into each day as we possibly can and arrange our schedules in such a way that if everything went exactly according to plan we'd get more done than any other human on the face of the planet.

The problem is things don't go exactly according to plan very often. I can't get an hour of my life to go as planned let alone a day or year or life. Planning is good, but you have to expect the unexpected even when you plan:

How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog- it's here a little while, then it's gone. James 4:12 (NLT)

Now I don't want to bring you down too much in pointing review out the brevity of our lives but that message is everywhere throughout the scriptures so we don't want to ignore it either. But what I do want to focus on here is that first line from the scripture above- how do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? You and I have no idea what tomorrow is going to be like. We often plan out our days like a military tactician and think to ourselves, if everything goes exactly as planned I will get more done than any human in the history of the planet.

But nothing goes exactly according to plan. Why not? Life happens. Somebody else is late. Traffic is bad. You forgot something and have to go back home to get it. And that makes you

late. Even if you've had the exact same routine for years we just forget to add margin in so we won't be late.

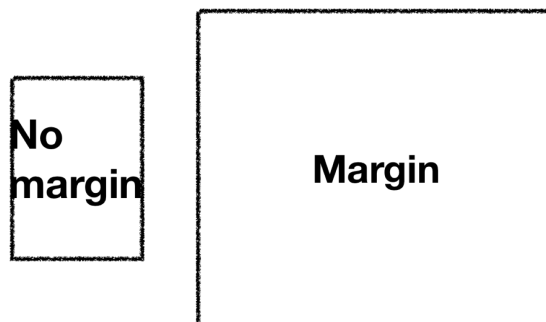
Heck, some of you have been coming to Riverside for years and you still can't make it to weekend worship services on time ;o) And that's ok- I don't ever want this to be a place that's just another thing you have to work to try and get to on time. But you get the picture, right? We have a tough time scheduling our lives because our lives are so unpredictable. Which is why the Bible recommends planning for the unexpected:

A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. Proverbs 22:3 (NLT)

Expect the unexpected. Because it's coming. I remember last summer when I woke up on August 14th and felt great and had all kinds of plans for the rest of the summer. And by 1 PM I was laying in the back of an ambulance on my way to get a stent put in my heart because of a whacky little defective artery in my heart.

That put everything in my life on hold. To this day just over 6 months later I'll see something that was on my list to take care of last fall and recognize the reality that the unexpected comes along when we least expect it. That's one thing margin will do for you- when things don't go according to plan we've got some extra space in there that will allow us to deal with the unexpected- and according to the book of Proverbs that will make you a very wise guy (or gal but that doesn't rhyme- sorry ladies ;o)

Thursday Reflection: Ok- so I've accepted my limitations and I've learned to expect the unexpected in my life. Now what? Well, now you get to work putting space in your schedule. Remember the graphic that we used on Monday?



Would you say if you had your schedule laid out before you that your average day would look more like the picture on the left or the right? In other words, does your schedule look more like the day of an easy-going sane person or more like a crazed serial bomber's manifesto? If you want to have margin in your life then recognizing your limits and expecting the unexpected is important. But until I start cutting out the things that aren't as important in my life so that the space is there to deal with the unexpected despite my limits I will continue to live more like the Unibomber than Jesus.

But here's the deal. Add margin to your schedule this morning and someone will try to take it away from you by this evening. Our culture doesn't really appreciate margin but God loves it:

Only someone too stupid to find his way home would wear himself out with work.
Ecclesiastes 10:15 (GN)

Again—don't you just love the way the Bible puts some of these things? And yet we do it over and over again. We wear ourselves out with things that seem urgent and demand our attention but in the long run aren't terribly important. This life is a marathon and not a sprint. Yes sometimes we will be required to sprint but if that's all you ever do and you don't revert to the margin that God desperately wants you to be incorporating into your life then your life will have much less quality as well as far less quantity. Why? Because of the limits God himself has put on our lives:

Our time is limited. You, God, have given us only so many months to live and have set limits we cannot go beyond. Job 14:5 (NLT)

You know what that means? God set boundaries for me and for you. Have you ever read the book *Boundaries* by Cloud & Townsend? It's a fantastic book that explains the importance of you and me setting boundaries in our lives with our schedules, our energy and our relationships. But those boundaries are not arbitrary—God put them there. It's our job to find the borders of those boundaries and then defend those borders as though our lives depended on it. Which they do in terms of both quality and quantity. Because as you and I add space to our calendars that will mean ruthlessly cutting out things that don't make the cut in our lives.

And lots of those things are going to be tough decisions to make. Most of the stuff we have to cut will be really good things. If we had a ton of crappy things in our lives we'd have already gotten rid of them. What most of us have is an overabundance of really good stuff in our lives that we are currently doing which means it is going to be tough to cut any of it. How do I decide what to cut and what to keep? Go back to the lesson on focusing your life from a few weeks ago and remind yourself of your most important roles and your values. Then come back to your schedule and rank the things you do in a given day from one to ten (or 50 or however many things you do in a given day). Now start adding space in between all those things in your schedule. It will become pretty apparent what needs to be cut.

I know it won't be easy. In fact it will probably be incredibly difficult and might even cause you to set some boundaries that other people won't take too kindly to. Sometimes people you really care about. If you're struggling with this part of it maybe you should read the book *Boundaries* by Cloud and Townsend. Riverside is going to be offering a *Boundaries For Women* class in a few weeks (I know, another thing to add to your already overcrowded schedule). But if you need help setting and protecting your boundaries then maybe reading the book or taking the class will become temporarily one of the most important things on your to-do list.

Friday Reflection: Okay, so I have accepted my limitations, expect expect learned to expect the unexpected then and yesterday I added space to my schedule by cutting out the things that were the least important in terms of my values and roles. Now what? Well now you set a reminder in your calendar to prune your schedule in a few months time. Why? Because once you've added margin to your life you'll find that this culture we live in, other

people and you yourself will start adding things to your day that will soak up that margin in record time.

So on a regular basis you and I will need to take a fresh look at our schedule to see if margin creep has occurred. There are SO many things we could get involved with in our lives. Some of them are really good. But no matter how good all the things in your life may be you probably still don't have the ability to do them all (remember the first point of this lesson? Accept my limitations?). The first century church in Corinth had a mantra- "I am allowed to do all things". It was their way of really emphasizing the grace of God. Paul had spent years there teaching them that they were saved by Grace through faith. That it was a free gift. That they could never earn it on their own. Paul taught that same concept in every city where he had planted a church but some of the churches took it to heart more than others. So when the Corinthians said "I am allowed to do all things" it was their way of expressing how much they trusted the Grace of God over their own ability to always do the right thing. Unfortunately this trust led some of them to decide they could sin as much as they wanted to and it didn't matter because the Grace of God is based not on their ability to be good but on God's goodness. So Paul wrote to them and said:

I am allowed to do all things, but all things are not good for me. 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NCV)

What's Paul saying? Well, first of all he's not disagreeing with them which kind of blows me away. The church I grew up in would have seized on that idea first and foremost and said, "oh no you can't!!! You can't just do anything you want!" But Paul doesn't do that. Instead he simply points out that doing all things isn't necessarily going to be good for me.

Ok, let's extrapolate that to my schedule. In this case I want to add two tiny little words to that interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:12 and I'm not claiming this is inspired scripture I'm creating here but I think a little creative license is going to be helpful for us when it comes to wrapping our brains around how much we can and can't do in our day:

I am allowed to do all THE things, but DOING all THE things is not good for me.

God will not stop you and me from overbooking our lives. You're allowed to do whatever you want to do. He won't stop you. He will warn you about the consequences of overbooking but He will not stop you. Sure, you're allowed to do all the things but doing all the things isn't going to be good for you. It won't be good for those you love that God has entrusted into your care either.

However, while you are allowed to do whatever you choose and God won't stop you don't forget that there are limitations and boundaries that He has set up in all of our lives. And if you don't set the boundaries that are healthy for you and guard them against all infiltrators then what generally happens is those natural boundaries will do the pruning I should have done myself and that's generally a much more painful process than doing the pruning ourselves would have been:

Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways. Proverbs 20:30 (NLT)

So don't forget to set a reminder to prune your schedule. How often? I don't know? Once a month? Once a quarter? I wouldn't go much beyond that because as it turns out we're pretty

oblivious to the margin we fought so hard to create in our lives being soaked up by more busyness.

Saturday Reflection: This week we've got a Saturday reflection that I hope will give you a jolt of hope and courage when it comes to adding margin to our lives. What's so important that I added a sixth reflection to this week's rotation? That if you do what God asks you to do by living a life where margin is part of your reality then you can expect to do less and accomplish more. Maybe not by the standards of our culture but certainly by God's standards. How is that possible? Well, by cutting out the stuff in your life that is not the absolute most important things you could be doing and focusing on the absolutely most critical roles you have chosen according the values you wish most to be remembered for you end up accomplishing the most important things in life. And by choosing God's way you receive a blessing and a power from God that will change things you couldn't change by yourself:

Respect for God adds hours to each day. Proverbs 10:27 (TLB)

How does that work? I have no idea but I've seen it in my own life over and over again (maybe because I've got extra hours every day to just watch for it to occur?). I mean, sure, this isn't a literal thing, right? Not really but in a sense it is. At least it works out that way for me. Partly because when I'm doing my best to live my life the way God is asking me to live it He pours His power into the stuff I've got to get done which means it gets done better and faster than I could have done it on my own. But I'm guessing a big part of what this proverb means is that if I respect God then I'll follow His plan for my life which will include adding lots of margin to my life and cutting out the stuff that's not the absolutely most important stuff in my life. And if I've done that then guess what? I've got extra hours in each day-scripture fulfilled.

That's powerful enough. But add to that the idea that by expressing our faith that God knows what He's talking about and adding margin by focusing on the stuff that is of utmost importance in my life I am inviting God's miraculous power into my life in ways I can't possibly imagine:

If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matthew 17:20 (NLT)

That verse always vaguely bothered me. Why? Because I've never seen a mountain move. Have you? So then what does that mean? How should I take that promise of Jesus?

When I was in Israel on the first day we went to a place called the Herodium. It was a massive mountain fortress that Herod built just in case things ever got too out of control. If they did he'd just head out to whichever fortress was closest to him (he built 9 of them all around Israel) and climb up into the fortress and escape his enemies. And like everything Herod did he spared no expense. It was a fabulous palace/villa/vacation home/fortress. It sits on a hill to the southeast of Jerusalem. It can be seen from Jerusalem and if you were in Bethlehem it would have absolutely dominated the landscape.

This fortress was put on a hill right next to another hill of the exact same height. But Herod didn't like the fact that the hill next to his Herodium would be the same height. So what did

he do? He took off about half of the hill next to his fortress and added that material to his hill so that the Herodium would be the tallest thing for miles around.

Herod literally moved a mountain.

And every one of Jesus' disciples would have heard that story. Every one would have seen the two hills standing next to one another and recognized the power of king Herod. Every one of Jesus' disciples would have had the Herodium in mind when He said to them, "If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."

What does that mean? Well, I think He's telling them (and us) that as impressive as what Herod did with the Herodium (and it was impressive- 2,000 years later and the ruins are still standing and are still impressive- I can't imagine what it would have been like to see it in the first century) it's nothing compared to what God can do through the tiniest amount of faith expressed by His followers.

In other words, do less and accomplish more. And every time you wonder what Jesus meant by "moving a mountain" think about this picture I snapped from the eastern edge of Jerusalem.



