“Margin is a space between our load and our limits.”
- Richard A. Swenson
PART I
The Problem of Pain

Food plus health plus warmth plus education plus affluence have not equaled utopia.

We live with unprecedented wealth and all that it brings. We have leisure, entertainment, convenience and comfort. We have insulated ourselves from the unpredictable ravages of nature. Yet stress, frustration, and oftentimes even despair unexpectedly accompany our unrivaled prosperity.

Margin has been stolen away, and progress was the thief. If we want margin back, we will first have to do something about progress.

In a general sense, those cultures with the most progress are the same as those with the least margin.
**PROGRESS AXIOMS**

1) Progress works by differentiating our environment, thus always giving us more and more of everything faster and faster.

2) The spontaneous flow of progress is toward increasing stress, change, complexity, speed, intensity and overload.

3) All humans have physical, mental, emotional, and financial limits that are relatively fixed.

4) The profusion of progress is on a collision course with human limits. Once the threshold of these limits is exceeded, overload displaces margin.

*Please understand: progress is not evil. Similarly stress, change, complexity, speed, intensity, and overload are for the most part, not enemies. But we have different conditions at play than at any other time in our history and we must discern our course carefully lest we be overwhelmed by forces out of control.*

*We must have some room to breathe. We need freedom to think and permission to heal. Our relationships are being starved to death by velocity. No one has the time to listen, let alone love. Our children lay wounded on ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions. Is God now pro-exhaustion? Doesn't He lead people beside the still waters anymore? Who plundered those wide-open spaces of the past, and how can we get them back? There are no fallow lands for our emotions to lie down and rest in. We miss them more than we suspect.*

*First we must gain control of progress; and second, we must redirect it.*

*Progress’s biggest failure has been its inability to nurture and protect right relationships.*

*Margin, however, knows how to nurture relationship. In fact, margin exists for relationship.*
Pain and Progress in the 5 Environments of Life

1) Physical
2) Cognitive
3) Social
4) Emotional
5) Spiritual

MOST OF OUR PROGRESS
- Physical Environment (wealth, technology, health – the material world)
- Cognitive Environment (knowledge, information education – the intellectual world)

MOST OF OUR PAIN
- Social Environment (family, friends, neighbors, church – the societal world)
- Emotional Environment (feelings and attitudes – the psychological world)
- Spiritual Environment (the eternal and transcendant – God)
The 3 Types of Stress

1) Eustress – positive stress
2) Distress – negative, destructive stress,
3) Hyperstress – An excessive volume of stress.

The volume (of stress) is important because how we deal with stress depends on how much of it we are confronted with. If the amounts are manageable, we can learn to avoid distress and possibly turn it into eustress. If however, the amounts are at hyperstress levels, then stress reduction is more important than stress management.

Often our perception of the stressor damages us more than the stressor itself.

Contemporary Stressors:
- Change
- Mobility
- Expectations
- Time Pressure
- Work
- Control
- Fear
- Relationships
- Competition
- Frustration
- Anger
PART II
The Prescription of Margin

Margin is a space between our load and our limits.

The formula for margin is straightforward:
Power – load = margin

Power is made up of factors such as energy, skills, time, training, emotional and physical strength, faith, finances and social supports.

Load is made up of such factors as work, problems, obligations and commitments, expectations (internal and external), debt, deadlines and interpersonal conflict.
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RESTORING TIME MARGIN
1) Expect the Unexpected
2) Learn to Say No
3) Turn off the Television
4) Prune Activity Branches
5) Practice Simplicity and Contentment
6) Separate Time from Technology
7) Short Term Flurry VS Long Term Vision
8) Thank God
9) Sabotage Your Fuse Box
10) Get Less Done But Do the Right Things
11) Enjoy Anticipation, Relish the Memories
12) Don’t Rush Wisdom
13) For Type A’s Only: Stand in Line
14) Create Buffer Zones
15) Plan for Free Time
16) Be Available

RESTORING FINANCES
1) Travel in the Right Direction
2) Break its Back – Give
3) Counter Culture
4) Live within Your Harvest
5) Discipline Desires and Redefine Needs
6) Decrease Spending
7) Increase Income
8) Increase Savings
9) Make a Budget
10) Discard Credit Cards
11) Don’t Mortgage the Future
12) Resist Impulses
13) Share, Lend, Borrow
14) Emphasize Usefulness over Fashion
15) Fast
16) Kingdom First
PART III
HEALTH through:

Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6 Godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:8 If we have food and clothing we will be content with that.

Philippians 4:11-12 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”

J. I. Packer said, “Contentment is essentially a matter of accepting from God’s hand what He sends because we know that He is good and therefore it is good.”

Contentment is the freedom that comes when prosperity or poverty do not matter.

The more we choose contentment the more God sets us free.

A. W. Tozer said, “The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One.”

That for which I long becomes that to which I belong.

Envy makes it hard to have friends. Everyone I know has something I do not.

Simplicity

Simplification implies leaving things behind and moving to a new future.

It is not easy to say no.

With the internal truth anchored the external simplicity is a celebration.
Balance

I’m not advocating half-heartedness and mediocrity, for we should always do our best. But “doing our best” has limits. Our rush towards excellence in one quadrant of life must not be permitted to cause destruction in another. Norman Cousins said, “We need to be more proportionate.”

Balance is necessary and attainable – not easy, but possible. When we understand that we are finite and that it is okay to be finite, then we can begin to accept our limits with comfort.

Rest

The 4 gears

1) Park
2) Low
3) Drive
4) Overdrive

Constant activity is the characteristic of our age. If we are not active, we feel slothful. If we are not productive, we feel guilty... It comes from a cultural value system that idolizes productivity. I’m not saying productivity is wrong. I am only saying it shouldn’t be idolized.

Gordon MacDonald said, “A rest-less work style produces a restless person. We do not rest because our work is done; we rest because God commanded it and created us to have a need for it.”

Thomas Kempis said, “The proud man and the covetous man never have rest, but the meek man and the poor in spirit live in great abundance of rest and peace.”

When my surrender is completed and His yoke is accepted then my soul will find rest.