

## Time Keeps on Slippin

### *Under Pressure: Pt.2*

This morning we are continuing a series that we began last week and because the topic is so important – so vital to every one of our lives – we will be talking about it for six weeks to kick off the New Year. It's one of the most vital concepts in the quest for a good and fulfilling life – it's the principle of margin. *Margin*, we've said, is the amount available beyond what is actually needed. That's the definition we're using. Margin is the extra or the reserve.

And we said last week, that while we know need margin in the things that make up the physical world around us – margin in books and on highway lanes and in movie theatre seats – we want there to be plenty of room, plenty of space, in those areas. But for some reason, often we live as if we don't need margin in some of the truly critical areas of our lives. And as a result, we wind up under a great deal of pressure and the ensuing stress and anxiety that goes with it.

But what we've also been discovering is that our Heavenly Father didn't create us to live that way. In fact, all throughout scripture, you see God calling His people to step away from the edge and lead a life of margin – even though the word itself is not in the text, you find the concept of margin again and again. And the reason is this; because it's in the margin that the most important things in life happen.

It's in the margin that we have relationships and experience intimacy with other people. And it's within the margins that we have relationship with our Heavenly Father. You hear it all the time, “I used to go to church, I used to be a Christian, but I just got...busy.” And what happens is we allow our lack of margin to squeeze the most important things out of life.

In an attempt to get the most that we can out of life we actually wind up losing control of our life. That's the story of so many people. So many of *us* in this room can relate. So many of you told me last week how much you're looking forward to this series – how much you need it – me too. Because the truth is, all of us will live with limits – maybe the limits our culture pushes us to, maybe the limits our Heavenly Father invites us to - but one way or another, all of us will live within limits.

Today, specifically, I want to talk about your schedule; how to create margin with your time. Interestingly, we're given some incredible insight in scripture on how to do that, but let me warn you up front, when I tell you what it is, your initial response is going to be “I don't have *time* to do the things required to create margin.” In other words, I don't have time to get control of my time. But here's the thing, if you are a Christ follower, along the way, your Heavenly Father is going to lead you to a place of margin. He can *make* time for you to find time, but you'd be so much better off if you bring it to Him before that.

So let's jump in together as we talk about our schedules. First, I want to give you three key statements that are the facts of life when it comes to our time. And this will create the context for our discussion on how to create margin in our schedule.

**The first one is this, Your time is limited.** And you say, "I don't even need to write that down." Well, you might, because as you think about the way you schedule your life, you may schedule it like most people, you schedule it as if you have *unlimited* time. You keep adding, adding, adding, adding.

And somebody says to you, "Well, what are you going to *stop* doing?" And we think, "I've never even asked myself that question." I've never stopped to think what I'm going to subtract, I'm too busy adding. So I say "yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And it never occurs to me that I might need to *stop* doing anything. That's because we function as if our time has no limit. But the truth is, your time is limited.

**The second fact is this; All of your time is going to be spent.** That is, every single second you've been given will be spent doing something. You don't have "left over" time. You don't get to the end of your week and pull out a box with an extra 45 minutes in it. When the grim reaper shows up at the end of your life, you can't pull out a suitcase and go "Uh-uh, I've got six months left! I've been saving and I have six

months of time built up so I don't die now." No, you can save money, but you can't save time. You can have leftover chicken, but you can't have leftover time. Every single moment that you've been given gets spent. You don't save it up.

And again, this is so simple, why are we wasting time talking about these facts. Because, when you lay these facts of life beside how we *live* our life, we act as if we can find extra time. We say things like, "I know that's important, but I'm going to do that later because I've been saving time for that." Really? Where? "I know this is a busy season, but I'm going to slow down later." As if somehow there's a "later box" out there filled with rollover minutes. Every single moment of your life will be spent. You cannot save any of it.

**And then the third fact is this; Someone is going to determine how you spend your time.** You have a limited amount of time, it all gets spent and somebody is going to determine how it will be spent. Now, most of the time the person who determines how it's going to be spent is us, right? *We* determine it. You have your own calendar and nobody gets to write on it but you. Maybe you sit down with your spouse and talk about how the family time will be spent, but mostly *you* determine how all your minutes get used up.

For some of us, we'd say, "Well part of it's me, but there's another group that determines how my time gets spent. My *kids* determine how my time gets spent. My *boss* determines how my time gets spent." And all of us know the incredible frustration of feeling like our time is not our own. And getting to the end of the week with a list of important stuff we wanted to do that we just didn't get to because somebody else had their hooks in our time. But either way it all got spent, right? And *somebody* – us or others – determined where it was going to go.

Now, here's the problem with both those scenarios – whether you're in control of your calendar or somebody else is – at the end of the day; at the end of the month; at the end of the year - because of the way we're wired and because of our culture – what happens is we tend to allow the urgent things to push aside the important things. The things we *know* should be a priority... somehow don't make it onto the calendar. And so we don't exercise enough and we don't take care of our health enough and we don't spend enough time with our kids and we don't spend enough time nurturing our marriage and we don't spend enough time with our friends.

And I could stand here today and make us all feel guilty about the important things that we don't do and we'd all go "You're right, you're right, I'll come back next week for some more of that." Nobody argues. Just look at your calendar. The things we know are important don't get on there. And it's because when you're in charge or other people are in charge of how your minutes get spent, the tendency is to allow the urgent to push out the important. And there's never margin. And we feel under pressure.

So here's what I suggest - more importantly, here's what your Heavenly Father would suggest - He says, "You know, you've tried being in charge. And you've seen what happens when other people are in charge. What if you let *me* be in charge? What if you brought *me* your iPhone and your GoogleCal and your schedule? What if you surrendered that part of your life to me? What if you said, 'Heavenly Father, I want you to be in control of how I spend my time'?"

Does that sound intimidating for anyone? We'll talk about why in a few minutes. But here's what we're going to discover today; the most *logical* thing you could do would be to surrender your time to your Heavenly Father. And here's why; because He's the one that gave you your time to begin with *and* He's the only one who knows how much time you have left.

Because, remember, your time is limited. It's all going to get spent. Somebody's going to control how you spend it. What would it look like if you were to surrender control of your calendar and your schedule to your Heavenly Father – who gave you the time to begin with, and who knows how much you've got left? Here's what the Bible says about that. This is from **Job 14:5**, "*Man's days are determined; you...*" – talking about God – "*...have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.*"

Check that out. He's saying that God has determined your number of days. In other words, your days are *numbered*. Every time you go to bed at night, you can mark one off the list – it's over and all the moments got spent – it's not like vacation time you can roll over into next year. Every moment is used in that moment. And Job says that God knows the number of our days and you cannot add to them. It is totally up to God.

So here's the question, if your days are numbered, if they are limited – and they are. If all your moments are going to get spent – and they will. And if only God knows how much time you've got left. And if God is the one who granted you your number of days. Wouldn't it make sense that we would go to Him for wisdom about how to spend the remaining moments of our life?

Throughout scripture you will find God extending people's lives and taking people's lives. Jesus tells a parable about a guy who thought he had lots of time. Turned out he had *no* time. There's a story in the OT about a king who thought he was about to die and God said "I'm going to give you more days." God knows and controls the number of our days. So why would we not bring to Him our time and say, "I'm going to schedule and I'm going to prioritize the way *You* lead me and my family to schedule and prioritize." Why wouldn't we do that? Isn't that the logical place to take our time and our schedule?

Here's what will happen when you do; you'll end up with *margin*. Because when you surrender your time to your Heavenly Father, He's going to lead you to a schedule that allows for the things that are most important and the most important things in life happen in the margin. The downtime. The left over. The extra. The unstructured and unscheduled.

I want to give you three statements this morning that relate to allowing God to create margin in our lives. We'll put these up on the screen and you might want to write them down. First one's a bit of a recap. **Creating margin begins by recognizing your days are numbered by God.** You know what that means? It means you only get to be a teenager one time, so you need to do everything that you ought to do when you're a teenager *while* you're a teenager because you only get the one shot at it. Your days are numbered by God.

It means you only get to be in your 20's once; in your 30's once; in your 50's and 60's and 70's once. In other words creating margin begins when we recognize that our days are numbered by God. There is a limit and God knows the limit. That's the beginning. And it's the beginning because as you lock onto that thought, it will give you the *perspective* that you need to prioritize correctly.

Here's how the psalmist said it, **Psalm 90:12**, he's talking to God, "*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" This is a powerful verse. What he's saying is this, that if you would like wisdom about your schedule, it begins by realizing that your days are numbered. When you realize "Aha, my days are limited!" You will have wisdom in how to appropriate the ones you've got left.

Think about it this way; what if you were to find out tomorrow that you had one week to live, how would you reorganize your schedule in light of that knowledge? Things would change wouldn't they? What if you had one month to live? God says, "Hey, you only have one *life* to live." There was an ESPN broadcaster, I forget which one, but whenever he'd read a report that an athlete's medical condition was listed as "day to day". He'd say, "And remember folks, we're all of us just day to day."

That is the truth. You just get one life. How then should you live? It's easy if I think I've only got a week. Or I've only been given a year. God says, "You've only been given a life!" How do you live in light of the fact that your days are numbered – they're limited?

And the psalmist says that when you lock in on that one thought, from it will come the wisdom you need to spend your time *wisely*. It's when we think we have unlimited time – when we lose sight of the fact that our days are numbered – that's when we lose our margin and live beyond our limits. You've got to number your days.

I read about a guy who, when he turned 50 – very personal for me lately! - he went online and purchased 1,300 marbles. He figured, "if I live to 75, I have 1,300 Saturdays left." And he put them in a big jar and set it on his dresser. His wife told him it was the most morbid thing she'd ever seen in her life. But every Saturday morning he goes in and takes a marble out and throws it away. And he said, "You can't believe what this has done for my perspective on time." You know what he's doing? He's numbered his days. He's recognized, "I'm not going to live forever. I've only got a certain number of Saturdays left." And he said it helped him prioritize his life like never before. My time is limited, how then should I spend my time? That's wisdom, the Psalm says.

The second thing flows from numbering our days and that is to **prioritize accordingly**. If we know our days are limited, then we need to prioritize accordingly. In the book of **Ephesians**, the Apostle Paul says this about time (**5:15-17**) “*Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity...*” - literally “taking full advantage of your time” “*...because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*” That’s a powerful verse.

He says, “Because your days are limited, don’t be foolish, but be wise. Make the most out of the time you have been given.” So let me give you a little question you ought to drop into your repertoire. You ought to ask this every time you sit down with your spouse to talk about the calendar. Every time you pull out your iPhone. Here’s a question that will lead to margin. It’s actually one of the three key questions we hammer home to the children over in KidZone. If your kids have been here at SWFF any length of time, I guarantee they know this question. “What’s the wise choice?”

It’s not a bad thing. It’s not illegal. It may be profitable. It may be enjoyable. Everybody else is going to be there. But in light of our past experience; in light of our future hopes and goals; and in light of the limited time we’ve got...what is the *wise* thing to do?

Is it *wise* to add this to the schedule? Is it *wise* to commit? Is it *wise* to say we’ll be there? Is it *wise* to sign her up for that? Not, “Is it right or is it wrong?” But in light of the fact that my days are limited, what is the *wise* thing to do, as I consider whether to add this to the schedule?

I’m telling you, you add that question to all of your scheduling issues, and it will make a difference in your thinking. Because you know how we do it now? “Well, we’re not doing anything else on Saturday night so I guess that’s a ‘yes’.” We’ve got a few hours free that afternoon, so ok.” Yes, yes, yes. Add, add, add. And somebody says, “Well what are you going to subtract?” “Oh, we don’t subtract, we just add.” We’re just like a big balloon filling up with air. But it’s not going to burst, we’ve got plenty of time. It’s just going to go on and on and on.

But what if you were to start asking, “Is this wise?” In light of where we want to be and what else is going on right now, is this wise for our family? No? Ok, then we’re just going to say “no” to this right now. Not because it’s a *bad* thing, but it’s just not the *wise* thing. That’s what the Apostle Paul is saying, “In light of what’s going on in our culture – the days are evil – we’re being pushed to the limits,” he says “you’ve got to walk wisely.” Understand what God wants from you. It begins when we begin to see that our time is limited and then we can *prioritize* according to our limited time.

Now, let me give you a warning here, especially for all you hard charging, super type A personalities. There is a fear that if I bring to God my schedule I'm not going to be productive. Right? We're just going to be sitting around going, "Honey, what do you want to do? I don't know dear, what do *you* want to do?" You know, I'm just going to be nice and I may show up at work and I may not and if I lose my job who cares because my family loves me. No, no, no. That's not what we're talking about.

Listen, God is a God of productivity and He *made* you productive and He *wants* you to be productive. Applying this principle won't make you less productive, the secret is, in the long run, it will actually make you *more* productive. And here's why – here's the secret principle – your capacity is not determined by how much stuff you cram into your schedule, but rather priority determines capacity. Can we say that together? **"Priority determines capacity."**

That is, as you begin to prioritize wisely – in light of the fact that I have limited time and it's all going to be spent – then I'm going to begin putting the important things onto my schedule first. And what you will discover is that your priority determines your capacity.

Here's how you know that in the everyday world; when you pack your trunk or the back of your minivan or SUV, if you want to get the most stuff in there that you possibly can, you don't just put it in there randomly, do you? No, there's a specific order and by prioritizing things correctly, you can get more things in the back of your car.

I'm one of those obsessive dads – and I bet your dad was like this, and maybe you're this way – but I don't want anybody helping me pack. I want it all brought and set behind the car, but *I* will put it in. You can bring your offering, but only the High Priest shall ascend the sacred steps of the Temple to the Holy Altar. Anybody else like that? It's usually a weird guy control thing. But I don't want anybody else packing it because I know the magic formula. Of course I may have to empty it three or four times to get it right but eventually the family will stand in awe and I will still be able to see out the rear view mirror, that's the goal.

What have I learned? I've learned what you've learned, that the capacity of what I can pack is determined by the priority of what I put in. Yes there's a limit – just like with our time – there's a limit to what will fit in the trunk but in terms of how much I actually get in, it's determined by the priority.

Now, this is a spiritual truth that God has given us, and the only way to know this is to experience it. But as you begin to allow God to help you prioritize *what* goes on your schedule and *when* it goes in, you will be amazed at your capacity and you will be extremely productive *with* margin. It'll all fit in there and you'll still be able to see out of the rear view mirror and people will be amazed. Because capacity is determined by priority.

And so God says, "I want you to begin by realizing there's a limit. And I want you to surrender all of your scheduling issues to me and allow me to determine your priorities. And you're going to begin to understand these priorities because once you realize time's running out and I only get one life, the priorities become pretty clear. And I want you to begin to put the big things on the calendar first and make sure the important things are scheduled first and then watch as I increase your capacity and margin along with it."

It's amazing, but the only way to truly understand the principle is to surrender your calendar to the One who *gave* you the time, who *knows* how much of it you have left and who has given this incredible principle of capacity and priority.

That brings us to the third statement and this is the one that I can't really explain to you how it works or why it works, but I've just got to be honest with you and tell you this is a part of allowing God to lead you to margin. And this is the one that requires some time. And this is the one that when you hear it you'll go, "I don't have time to get margin, if that's what it takes." And yet it is connected to a powerful promise of God that you really can't afford to miss.

The third one is this; **allowing God to help bring you to margin involves making your time with God a priority.** I don't know if I can explain this very well, but let me try. There is something incredibly powerful about saying to God at the beginning of the day "Father I have X many hours ahead of me, I'm going to give You the first few minutes. I'm going to give You the first 30, 45, 15 minutes. I'm going to begin my day and I am so committed to You ruling over my time that I'm going to give You the first few minutes of this day."

It's a mystery, but as that becomes a habit in your life, you will become so much more sensitive to what God wants in your schedule and what He doesn't. You will become so much more self-controlled in terms of being able to say "no" to things. And you will be so much more pliable when God begins to redirect your schedule because you have given Him those first few minutes in your day.



It's a concrete way of applying and demonstrating this verse that comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 6:33**, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" "Seek first" is about priority. And when you do that, "all these other things will be given to you as well." Do you know what "all these other things" are? Houses, a place to live, stuff to eat, clothes to wear; all the things that we spend so much time pursuing and wonder why there's no time for God.

And Jesus makes this promise. He said "If you will put me first" – and I think a practical application of that verse is when you get up in the morning, with all the other things you've got to get done, you say, "God You're first." He says, "You put me first and then you watch and see. And your capacity may be greater than you ever expected. You may be more productive than you've ever been. But if you follow me, there will be margin and that brings peace and that brings joy.

And this had never been easier than now because of technology. There are so many Bible reading plans...I subscribe to a podcast that *reads the Bible to me* for 12-15 minutes every day. It's automatically downloaded every morning while I'm brushing my teeth. Are you kidding me? I can get through the entire Bible every year – actually the NT and Psalms twice in a year. That's life transforming. You don't have to do that one. Just find one. And if you need help...ask me. That's called "spiritual direction" and it's in my job description.

That's a habit in my life. Now, like all habits – I can be honest – I blow it from time to time. I get busy too. But here's what I've learned in my life, every time I chose the business of the day over spending time with my Heavenly Father – every time – I pay for it over the course of the day. Things just get out of whack. I get out of whack.

But the most productive days I have are when I resist the tug of the urgent and first spend some time with connecting with God. And when I give Him the first of my time, He never fails in His graciousness to give me just what I need to get the job done and get it done with peace at the end of the day. But each day I have to choose...what am I going to prioritize? What my culture pushes me to prioritize? Or my relationship with my Heavenly Father

But we all get to choose. Somebody is going to determine how you spend your time. And it can be your culture and your job and your kids and you can run yourself ragged and feel like there's never enough hours in the day – just feel squeezed. But it doesn't have to be that way. If you're tired of running, that can begin coming to an end today if you'll say as a couple, as a family, as an individual, "God, our time is limited, it's running out and You know how much we've got left because You gave it to us to begin with. Teach us to order our days as if we only had one life to live."

And your Heavenly Father will take you up on that and He will lead to margin. And it will be a place of productivity, because God has designed us to get things done. He's not against that. Are you willing to give Him control? Are you willing to this week – if it's not already a habit in your life – to put Him in a place of priority and to give Him some time?

Let me give you a real practical way to start that as we close. I want everybody to take off your watch for just a moment. And now the ushers are going to come and I want you to just put them in the bucket. Just kidding. No, but a watch is such a personal thing. It's your watch. So does everybody have it in your hand? Ok, I want you to hold your watch and just think for a minute about where you keep your watch at home – on the dresser, in the nightstand, in the bathroom, wherever it might be – visualize that place.

And I want you tomorrow morning to do something that maybe you've never done before – it'd be great if we'd do it for a week or a month or maybe for the rest of our lives. But what if tomorrow morning, before you put this on, you said a little prayer.

What if you quoted this incredible verse from Psalm 90, what if you got up and you said, "Heavenly Father, teach me to number my days that I might gain a heart of wisdom. Father, today I want to remember that You gave me every second I will spend today and You know best how I should spend them."

"So before I put this watch on I am giving to you my time. Teach me to number my days so that I might remember that I've only got this shot, I've only got this life to make a difference in this world. Give me the wisdom I need to live every moment the way it needs to be lived. And lead me to a place of margin."

You're going to put this on every day. What if that became a time of dedication every single day? What an incredible visual reminder of what God has *given* you...and what He's *called* you to be in light of that incredible gift.

Let's pray...