

Margin in the Marketplace

Under Pressure: Pt.5

Today I want to finish up our *Under Pressure* series by talking to you about developing professional margin. Because if there's anywhere we feel pressured, most often it's at work. So today specifically I want to talk to those of you who are in the marketplace, in the workforce, which is most of the people in our congregation. And I want to talk specifically about how do you take these principles that we've been talking about and reorganize your time at the office – or more and more *home* office - in such a way to get *more* done in less time, to have *less* stress, and potentially to make *more* money. I would guess that's three things that we're all very interested in and so today I want to talk about one simple principle that's found in the scripture – believe it or not – that will give us a context for developing margin in the marketplace.

Now, if you're like me and like most people, the tendency in our work world is, again, to be pressed to the limits that our culture would push us to where we have too much to do and not enough time to get it all done – we feel the pressure. So as a result we don't have any emotional margin because we're stressed out. And of course that spills over to what we're like when we get home – *if* we get home - at the end of the day so it affects our relational margin.

Now, if you've been paying attention – and even if you haven't, you know this – our American marketplace is in something of a crisis. The COVID pandemic has affected the workplace in ways that economists are still working to understand. If you've tried to eat out recently you've experienced long waits for restaurants with half the tables empty. That's because no one can find workers. Unemployment is very, very low so everyone who wants a job can have one. The problem – for employers at least – is fewer people seem to *want* a job. At least the kinds of jobs they've been accustomed to.

Americans work more annual hours than anyone in the world except Russians. In 2018, the average American worked 1,786 hours. That's 423 *more* hours than the 1,363 hours of the average German worker. Assuming a 40-hour work week – and some of you are already laughing at that – that's around 10½ *additional weeks of work* per year. *Business Insider* magazine had an article in March 2020 – right after all the business's were shut down – that even with two whole months of work lost to the pandemic, Americans would still work the same number of hours as pre-pandemic Germans. By the way, the article was titled, “[The Coronavirus Shutdown Is Revealing America's Troubling Obsession With Work](#)”.

I've been reading a book by Harvard economic historian, Claudia Goldin, who talks about the rise since the 1990's of what she calls "greedy work". The highest paying jobs more and more require the most hours at work or at the beck-and-call of work. She says, "Earnings at the very upper end of the income distribution have ballooned. The worker who jumps the highest gets an ever-bigger reward. The jobs with the greatest demands for long hours and the least flexibility have paid disproportionately more, while earnings in other employments have stagnated." (*Career and Family*, 10)

This had led to tremendous pressures on young families in particular, when both college educated partners are faced with a dilemma. Do we make all the money we can in an increasingly expensive world when it comes to middle-class standards like housing, education and health care? Or do we actually reserve enough time to be involved in raising a family and investing in our own relational development? You can't do both. And Goldin argues that this – not discrimination – is actually at the root of the modern gender wage gap. It's usually the woman who chooses the job with the more flexible hours in order to be the primary caretaker.

It's a problem. A problem that the pandemic is merely highlighting – like a time out in a football game to make adjustments. The next generation is looking at us and saying "no thanks". I read an article on Friday that claimed 65% of Gen Zers plan to join the Great Resignation this year. We have to find a solution to the work-life balance. I don't know if modern capitalism will find a workable solution or not. But I actually believe that the Bible – can you believe a pastor would say this??? – the Bible offers a solution for this, and every other, generation.

So today I want us to open God's Word and look at one simple principle – obviously there are a lot of things we could talk about when it comes to developing professional margin – but we're going to look at one simple principle that's found in the Old Testament - *and* the New Testament - but we're going to look at the Old Testament passage this morning.

And let me tell you right up front that while I'm talking about this, you will be tempted to argue with me or just dismiss what I say because in your mind you will say something like, "Yeah, if I did what you do, maybe. Or if I owned the company, maybe. Or if I was more of an executive or worked in a certain department, then maybe Anthony what you're saying would work for me."

But before you judge what I have to say too quickly, I'd like you to listen to the whole message with this in mind; today, I want to give you a *target* to shoot for professionally. In other words, I'd like to paint as clear a picture as I can of what I believe the bull's eye on the target is for you in your occupation. And this is not a talk that you can run out and apply today. This is probably not something that you can do in the next week or maybe the next month – although workers have more power right now than in quite some time. But still, it *may* not even be something you can ever do in your current employment situation. But I believe – and I think you'll agree at the end of our time together – that this is something *all* of us should work toward professionally, even if it takes us several months or even several years to get there.

So all I want to do is give you a goal; paint a picture of what could be and should be for you professionally. And *God* - who I believe created this principle because He created us - gives us an unbelievable insight into how to gain professional margin regardless of whether or not you own the company or just started with the company or whatever your vocational status is. Wherever you are, this is applicable, but again for *most* of us it's in the future...but it's something for us to work towards.

So if you have your Bibles, I'd like you to turn way back to the Old Testament, to the book of Exodus chapter 18. And just for those of you who've been around church for a while, who is the main character in the book of Exodus? Moses, right. Even if you haven't read the book, you have seen the movie, so most everybody has at least *heard* of Moses. Here's what's going on with Moses and the nation of Israel. Moses, as you know, went to see Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." And Pharaoh said, "No." And Moses said "Yes." And God said "Yes", so God and Moses won. And so God and Moses lead the nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

Now, what you need to understand – and really it's pretty much impossible for us to understand without being there – but this was a nation of *slaves*. There was anywhere from 200,000 to possibly a *million* of them - nobody knows for sure. But there were several hundred thousand people that fled Egypt and for 400 years they had been slaves. They had no government, they had no organization – and get this - they had no law - God had not given the Ten Commandments yet. So once they crossed the Red Sea, they had God, they had Moses and they had their freedom...and that's it. Well, they had a decent meal plan as well.

So for four months they journeyed out of Egypt and they eventually came to Mt. Sinai and pretty soon Moses was going to go up on top of that Mountain and God was going to give them their social order. God was going to give them the Law – “here’s how you are to conduct your lives, here’s how you are to behave.” But for now, all they had was *Moses*. So consequently, all these hundreds of thousands of people looked to *Moses* for structure. They looked to *Moses* for order. They looked to *Moses* to settle their disputes. Imagine that.

Well, as they get to Mt. Sinai, Moses’ father-in-law - Jethro was his name - comes to visit. Now, Moses father-in-law was not Jewish – not an Israelite – but he lived in the area and so he came to visit his son-in-law. So he gets there late one afternoon and spends the night with Moses and sees his daughter and his grandkids and they have dinner together. And then the next morning they get up and Jethro decides to go to work with Moses to see what his son-in-law does. What does this mighty man who confronted Pharaoh and prevailed do all day?

So that’s where this story picks up in **Exodus 18:13**, “*The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.*” So he gets there early and sits down on his stool and all the people who have some issue or a question line up to talk to Moses. And the line stretches further than the eye can see and he’s there from *morning* all the way to *evening* trying to

counsel and judge and settle disputes with all these people who have come with him from Egypt. Moses had a greedy job!

v.14, “*When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do **you alone** sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"* In other words, Jethro is appalled. Here’s the great and mighty Moses and he’s sitting on a chair with people lined up as far as you can see settling disputes. “She says it’s her cow but it’s really *my* cow. No it’s not, it’s *my* cow.” “Next.” And on and on it went all day long. So Jethro is standing there saying, “*This* is what you do? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

And then Moses kind of pushes back, **v.15-16**, this is great, “*Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek **God's** will."* In other words, this is a God thing, this isn’t just me. This is what God has called me to do. “*Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."* So Moses says to Jethro, “Look, the reason I’m doing what I’m doing is because this is what God called me to. I’m doing *God’s* will.

And Jethro is thinking, “Well, that may be God’s will but that’s not the way God would want it done. That’s ridiculous. You’re just sitting there day after day with these disputes, you can’t do this.” And this little dilemma all those thousands of years ago points to something that easily becomes a dilemma for all of us in the work force. And in just minute we’re going to talk about the principle that fixes it. But here’s the dilemma as it relates to us.

See, when you began your job – when you got transferred, when you got that promotion, when you founded the company, when you became team leader, whatever it was – you went in with the idea that, “I’m going to do whatever is necessary to get the job done.” And it was both necessary *and* it was what you wanted to do because you wanted to prove that you were a leader and could make things happen. I want the supervisors to watch me and say, “She has got it together.” I want the board to say, “He was the right choice.”

And so it is natural and necessary to do everything that comes our way; to say “yes” to everything that lands on our desks. Because we want people to know that we are hard workers and nothing is beneath us and we’re willing to stay late and get there early. And often times, it’s necessary because there’s no one else to do it. You start your own company and you’re the one loading the paper in the copier and turning on the lights and calling the repair people, you do it all because there’s no one else to do it.

But what *begins* as natural and necessary, if you continue in that mode, you will eventually hurt your own productivity. And if you continue to do everything that comes your way and say “yes” to every opportunity – all the projects and marginal, peripheral kind of things that come your way – what happens ultimately is that you diminish your ability to do the job you were hired to do and your productivity suffers. And over time, people will start to say, “Hmm, she’s not as sharp as we thought she was. He used to be an all-star, I wonder what happened?”

And somewhere along the way, we have to take into our world, the advice that Jethro gave Moses and we have to learn to *focus*. Here’s why – here’s what I know about you – two things. Number one, there are not a whole lot of things that you are really good at. You’re *pretty* good at a lot of things, but you are not really, *really* good at a whole lot of things. You are really good at maybe one or two things.

In other words, if I were to look at what you could potentially do, whether that’s sales or strategy or R&D or customer service or operations – of all those things that you could potentially do in the organization, there are only a *couple* of them that you are really, really good at. And when you are in your groove – you found your sweet spot – it’s called working in your strengths – people are amazed. And they say, “How did you pull that off?” And you don’t really know how to answer the question, you just *do*. It comes natural to you. But you’re not really, really good at but a couple of things, even though you’re asked to do a lot of things.

The second thing I know about your work situation is this; of all the things that land on your desk, of all the things that are expected of you, there's only a couple of them that really, really make a difference in the organization. That in terms of adding to the bottom line and moving the ball down the field and really making an impact financially; of all the things that you are expected to do, there are probably only a *couple* of things that really, really make a difference. If you didn't get to the other eight things, but you really knocked these two things out of the park, you would become indispensable to the company.

But as *always* happens in *every* growing organization, things tend to get added. And “could you do this and could you attend this and could you train this, and could you implement this and could you...could you...” And before long, you're doing a dozen different things, ten or eleven of which really don't add to the bottom line - really don't move the company along - but yet they are your responsibility.

Here's the key; when you can marry #1 and #2 – when you can marry your *skill-set* – those one or two things that you're really good at – with those one or two things in your job description that really *make a difference* in the company – when you can marry those two things, you will find margin professionally. I'll explain why in a minute, but that's ultimately the goal, to discover, “What is the thing that I do better than anything else?

What is the thing that really suits me?” What is that thing, because God made you that way. “And how can I marry that part of me with a particular area of responsibility in this company?” Because when you match those two things up, you are going to do your best and you're going to end up with margin professionally.

And when I say that, if something within you wants to push back and say, “Well I just couldn't do that.” Remember, I'm not saying you can run out of here and apply this immediately. But it has *got* to be the bulls-eye on the target. It's something that you've got to begin thinking toward and working toward for the future professionally. Because in doing so, you will create for yourself margin.

Well, the story goes on; Moses has basically said, “Hey Jethro, I know that you're my father-in-law and everything but I'm doing God's will here.” So here's what happens in **v.17**, “*Moses' father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is **not good.**”* Now, talk about a shot. Think about this, he sits there day after day dealing with children and parents and families and neighbors and conflict. And at night he comes home and he's just exhausted and he falls asleep during *SportsCenter*. But at least he's thinking, “I've done my best.” And then his wife's dad comes along and says, “What you're doing is not good.” That'd be hard to take.

He goes on, (v.18) “*You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out.*” – You ever feel that way? You get home and you’re just worn out. And if someone were to say to you, “Did you move the ball down the field today? Did you make progress?” You’d say, “You know, to be honest, I don’t even know what I did today. I was in constant motion, but I’m not sure I was *productive*. I mean it was one thing after another - I worked hard - but in terms of ‘did we affect the bottom line’, I don’t know, but I sure am worn out.” “*The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.*”

Then it gets really fun, (v.19) “*Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you...*” Now, you’ve got to understand the scenario here. And for those of us men, we can relate to this because of our egos. Ladies, pretend it’s your mother-in-law telling you how to raise your kids and you’ll understand. But imagine that you are Moses. You are the big guy. You squared off against the most powerful king in the world and you *won*.

You held up a stick and a *sea* parted. “Ya’ll see that!” You threw down a stick and it turned into a snake and it devoured the snakes of Pharaohs’ magicians. You’re about to go up to a mountain and God is going meet with you personally and give you dictation. He’s going to give you “*the Law*” - the law that will be the foundation of human law for thousands of years to come. You and God are *tight!* You are a big deal, broseph!

And along comes your father-in-law who has lived in the desert all of his life. Who has tended sheep all of his life. Never even been to the big city. Not an Israelite. Has never been a slave. Has no context of what you’re dealing with. And yet your father-in-law shows up, and after watching you for *one* day, he says, “Let me tell you what you need to do, buddy. I got this thing figured out for you”

You think you’d push back a little bit? I would. Heck, I *do*, and my father-in-law *is* a pastor. And often times the advice I get is very good, but there’s something that just rises up in us isn’t there? Something that says, “You’ve got no idea how it is on this side of the line pops.” You know what that is? That’s pride. And it’s in all of us.

And yet, here’s big shot Moses, totally justified to say, “Jethro, I don’t see anybody lined up to talk to you. How’s those sheep going? Because I’m kind of herding like *a million people* here.” But the interesting thing is Moses had the courage and humility to listen. And the advice that Jethro gave him, even though it must have seemed unbelievably impractical – “people are lined up waiting, I don’t even have time to *have* this conversation, and you’re going to solve my problem even though you’ve *never* walked in my shoes?” But Moses *listened*, and in listening he made a decision that enabled him to apply the principle that we all need to apply.

Middle of v.19-20, “*You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.*”

Here’s what he does – this is so great – Jethro identifies for Moses the two things that Moses *has* to do. In other words, “Moses, there’s a lot of things that you *could* do, here’s the two things that you and *only* you can do.”

Number one, you are God’s representative to see that disputes get settled – you are responsible for that. Number two, you are responsible to teach them the decrees and laws and show them the way that God would have them conduct their lives. Two things: you are responsible to see that their disputes get settled and you are to teach them how God would want them to live. That’s what you are responsible for. Now let’s talk about how you are going to implement that.

v.21-23, “*But..*” because that’s your responsibility, but you’re not going to do it all, so, “*...select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. **Have them** serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make **your load lighter,**” –*

that’s margin – “*because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain,*” – that’s margin – “*and all these people will go home satisfied.*” Happy customers.

That is, “Moses, you’re going to *do less*...and accomplish more. You’re going to do *fewer* things...and you’re going to get more done. You are going to do less and have more margin and it’s a win for you and it’s a win for the people and it’s a win for what God wants to accomplish through you in this world.

I love v.24, this may be one of the most miraculous statements in the Bible, “*Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.*” Isn't that something? Do you know what we have to do to achieve professional margin? It can be summed up really in one word. The word is “*focus.*” Focus. Less is more.

You and I have got to discover - what is the thing we do that allows us to excel? - and we’ve got to marry that to our job description and find a way to do *fewer* things and accomplish more. Because productivity is not measured in terms of *busyness*. Productivity happens when you are able to focus what you’re really good at on those one or two things that make a difference in the company.

Another way of saying that is this, “You play to your strengths and you *delegate* your weaknesses.” You operate in your strengths and farm out the stuff you’re really not very good at. Now, here’s the thing that you’ll be tempted to do and it’s what most people do, we say, “No, no, I’m going to shore up my weaknesses and wing it when it comes to my strengths.” You’ll spend all your efforts trying to turn a weakness into a strength, which study after study shows is a *waste* of time in the marketplace.

Rather, the best thing you can do is to figure out the things that you were created to do. Marry that with your job description and give it your all. Play to your strengths; delegate your weaknesses. And in doing so, spiritually speaking, you are lining yourself up with what *God* would have you do and who God has *created* you to be. And you get more done with less stress and thus you have more margin.

There are a couple of excellent books in the secular business field that lay this out. If you’re not so sure about the Bible, but the *New York Times* best seller list makes it a done deal for you, check out *Now Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham. He used to work for the Gallup Poll people and he’s done all kinds of studies about how this plays out in culture.

And then *Strength’s Finder 2.0* by Tom Rath will help you figure out what your strengths are. We use it in the hiring process here. But both books shows how most people believe and act as if their biggest growth opportunity is through their areas of greatest weakness. But the research shows it’s just not true.

Here’s Rath, “This might sound like a heretical point of view, especially for those of us who grew up believing the essential American myth that we could become anything we wanted. Yet it’s clear from Gallop’s research that each person has greater potential for success in specific areas, and the key to human development is building on who you *already are*. You *cannot* be anything you want to be - but you *can* be a lot more of who you *already are*.” (*Strengths Finder 2.0*, 7-8)

Your greatest potential for growth – and for the betterment of your organization – is in the areas where you are *already* strong. For instance, here’s what that looks like for me. I used to teach this to church planters all the time and so I would take these assessments myself every so often. We would use tools especially tailored to ministry - Spiritual Gifts and such.

Here's what mine looks like, the scale is one to ten and I have one ten and three nines in my top five. This test said my greatest strength was "New Ministry Development" – and the page description that went with it said, "You might consider the area of church planting." Hey, thanks, I might just look into that. The other top three were "Pastor", "Teacher" and "Word of Knowledge" – which has to do with special insight to reveal God's will through the application of scripture...handy. So those are my top strengths.

Do you know what's *not* in the top five? Didn't even make the list? Probably scored a one? "Administration and organization." I am really not very good at all at administration and organization. If you know me very well, I don't even have to tell you that. My desk is a mess. My desk has always been a mess – every job I've ever had. When I was a kid, my *room* was a mess.

My mom would make me clean up my room and I would become paralyzed. It wasn't that I was a shiftless, lazy kid – I mean not *totally* – it was that I didn't know where to start. So she would have to take me over to the closet and say, "Ok, just this, this and this for the next half hour." And then later she would direct me to underneath my bed and step-by-step she would have to spell it out for me.

And not a lot has changed. One day, during construction of this building, I was looking for a document for the city on something and I couldn't find it. I literally had plans and contracts and bids and carpet samples and all this construction stuff strewn all over my office. And Deanna happened to be there and she was helping me look through all this stuff and she said, "Do you need me to make you some folders for all this?" Yes. "Ok, you just start over here and sort through this stack..." It was like I was seven years old again.

But you know what? When I'm researching and putting together a sermon, nobody has to hold my hand. I am *energized* by that. I'm good at that. But I can get *better* at that. So when I started my doctoral studies, for my first class, did I choose a course on being a better administrator? No, I took, "Creative Processes in Preaching." See, here's my challenge; I can be tempted to try to put a lot of work into being more organized and a better administrator and just wing it where I'm already strong – in communication – but that would be the worst thing for this church.

And that's how God made *you* as well. Your goal professionally – the way God designed you to work – is to find the one or the two or the three things in which you excel and figure out a way professionally to get focused on those things. And when you do, most likely, you are going to become *indispensible* to your organization. And people will watch you do your thing and say, “That’s unbelievable how you do that, teach us.” And you’ll say, “I can’t teach you, I’m not even sure how I do it, it just comes natural to me.”

And if you have a good employer, she’ll notice a couple of things that you’ve dropped and instead of getting on to you for it, she’ll say, “You know what, he is so valuable in the things he *does* do, we’ll take these and give them to something else because *that* adds value to this company.” And you’ll be more successful, your company will be more successful, and you’ll have *margin*.

You know why you’ll have margin? Because when you’re working in your zone, you get more done in *less time* – that’s *time* margin. When you’re working in your zone, you get more done with *less stress* – that’s *emotional* margin. When you’re working in your zone, you get more done and most likely you’re going to be rewarded *financially* – that’s *financial* margin. And when you’re happy and successful in your career, you’re stronger *morally* because there’s a sense of “I like who I am. I like how God’s made me.” Because you are in your zone.

So I want to quickly give you three things to do to get you thinking in this direction. And some of you are going to hear these and say, “That’s perfect.” Some of you are going to say, “That’s totally impractical because of where I work.” Again, I just want to paint for you today a picture of what *could* and *should* be for you professionally. So let me give these to you real quick.

The first one is this, when you get home today or sometime tomorrow, you need to ask yourself this question: **What defines success for the person in my position at work?** Not, “what have I been asked to do?” Not “what responsibilities end up on my desk?” Not “what was the last project that washed up in my cubicle?” But specifically, in your job, what is *success* for the person who does what you do?

And you know what I’ll bet? I’ll bet if you were to write that down on a 3x5 card and you were to ask your boss to write that down on a 3x5 card – “give me in one sentence what defines success for my position in this company.” In other words, what is the thing that I’ve got to make sure I hit that ball over the fence every time? Chances are, they would not be the same thing because corporately, things can get out of alignment so quickly.

But you need to define and determine, with input from the outside, what is the one thing – if I don't get anything else done – what is the one ball that I *cannot* afford to drop? You need to know what those are. And you may already know. But you need to know what that thing is – is it closing deals, is it finding new leads, is it product development, is it product improvement, is it customer service, is it making sure those three clients are happy, happy, happy? Whatever it is, you've got to define that for yourself.

Second thing is this: **Write the ideal job description with these parameters in mind.** In other words, as you think about where you are working *today* – not where you want to be *someday* - you've got to sit down and write out the ideal job description. Three or four or five bullet points or maybe a half a page or a paragraph. But what would be the ideal job description with these three things in mind: Success for the person in your position – which you've already determined. The mission of your organization. And then your particular skill set.

In other words, if I could do exactly what I knew I was gifted and called to do in this organization, here's what I would do because here's where I think I can add the most value to this organization. You write your own job description – here's what *success* is, here's what the *mission* of the company is, and here's

what I was *designed* to do. So what would be the best position for me on the team?

And then the third thing you do is you **have a sit down with your employer.** Make an appointment and you say to him or her, “You know, I've been thinking, I really want to see this company continue to succeed and I think I've figured out a way to help it succeed better. Here's what I'm really, really good at. Here's what you've said success is at this company. And here's the mission of the organization. Would you be willing to help me and work with me to work my way into *this* job description because I think I could add more *value* to this organization if I could.”

Now, you know what? A reasonable employer – who in most cases would not be able to say “yes, you can start today”, that's not going to happen – but a *reasonable* employer is going to think, “Wow, you've been trying to figure out how to make *both* of us more successful?” A reasonable employer is at least going to take that seriously and realize that nobody is good at everything. And what you've done is you've painted a picture for yourself and for your employer. “Here's what *could* be and here's what *should* be and if I could work towards that, *everybody* wins.” Moses wins, the nation wins, you win and your organization wins.

And then, if you're real comfortable and it's going well, you might have to ask them this question, "What would you like me to *stop* doing? Because we both know that these three things are what moves the ball down field in our business, these eight things don't. I'd like more time to focus on what you and I both know makes a difference. So what would you like me to stop doing?"

And you know what, if you're an employer, you know this is huge. Because you know as well as I do, it's not just a matter of having the right people, it's having them do the right things. Jim Collins in *Good to Great* says that before you make the "what" decisions for an organization – before vision, strategy, structure or tactics – you have to make the "who" decisions. He compares wise leaders to a bus driver who say, "Look, I don't really know where we should take this bus. But I know this much: if we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we'll figure out how to take it someplace great." (*Good to Great*, 41). And so if you work through this stuff with your team, everybody wins. And if you have an employee that gets that and wants to help you do your job in that, that's a goldmine.

You know another reason why I need to commit to staying in my strengths and out of my weakness in this church? Because here's what I've learned, when I stay in my two or three little boxes, I create opportunities for people that are *better* than me anyway. My weaknesses are someone else's opportunities.

And the sooner you can discover what *is* your niche, what *is* your sweet-spot, what *is* your zone, and the sooner you are able to stay there, you create opportunity for more people. And the ultimate thing is this, even though *you* have weaknesses, your weaknesses are not reflected in your *organization*. As you determine what you are really, really good at and marry that to what is really, really critical in your organization.

I want to close with a baseball analogy. Those of you baseball fans, I need your help on this one. Spring Training is supposed to start at the end of this month. *Supposed* to – speaking of work conflict, would ya'll pray that they get this labor dispute settled so your pastor can enjoy his favorite sport? Ok, but on the baseball front. This is Bryce Harper. He was named the National League Most Valuable Player in 2021. Last season, the Philadelphia Phillies outfielder batted .309 with 42 doubles, 35 home runs, 84 RBIs. That's really good.

Now, I want to show you the stats of another player by comparison. Ok this guy, and he played the entire 2021 season in the majors – did miss a couple of weeks after testing positive for COVID. This player batted .154 with 0 home-runs – he’s actually *never* hit a home-run in his whole professional career - and 4 runs-batted-in over the course of a whole season. Simple question, is he a good baseball player?

Yes. In fact, this player was voted – along with Bryce Harper – as one of the most *outstanding* players in all of baseball in 2021. His name is Corbin Burnes and he won the Cy Young award for the Brewers. See, he went 11-5 with a league low 2.43 ERA and struck out an incredible 234 opposing batters as a *pitcher*.

Do you think going into this season his coach is saying, “Corbin you’re a real liability buddy, if you don’t get that batting average up I don’t know if we’re going to have room for you on the roster?” Not even an issue, why? Because he’s a *pitcher*. They just gave him one task to do and he does it over and over and over. Hey, we can get other people to hit. We can get other people to run the bases. You just keep doing that thing you do. Because you are indispensable to this team.

And did you know that the same is true for you in some capacity? That as you discover and as you move toward operating in your strengths, you will become more and more indispensable. You will have *more* time. You will have *less* stress. And you will potentially make *more* money. Because of a principle that God designed when He created us with skills and strengths and weaknesses. You play to your strengths and you delegate your weaknesses. You *focus*. You work towards doing what only you can do. You do that long enough and eventually – not tomorrow – but eventually you will find margin in the marketplace.

Let’s pray...