

## Chapter 8

# Creating Margin and Boundaries, Reducing Self-Inflicted Stress

Rescue Mission Ministry provides plenty of stress without any additional contribution on my part. If I am to succeed in this ministry, I need to hone my ability to deal with stress. Although many pages could be written of the effects of stress on our lives, we will concentrate here on how we can handle the day-to-day activities to minimize the accumulation and pressure from what often times is a built-in occupational hazard.

### Margin

Any book that is easy to read has a good amount of what is called “white space,” providing visual breathing room for the eye.

“White space” is a term used in sales, in brokerage deals, and in landscaping. It is used to provide for contingencies, or describes what is out of the mainstream. The only common denominator in any of its uses is that in every case it is considered a good thing. Dr. Richard Swenson has a number of great books on this topic, including *Margins*, *Overload Syndrome*, and *In Search of Balance*. You are probably the only one who will make margin in your life, and it has to be by intention and planning. Setting priorities of time spent on rest and relaxation will make you much more productive for the rest of the hours of your day. It is wrong to say this is impossible. Nevertheless, it is improbable, unless you determine to make it happen. I learned to make appointments with myself, blocking out the calendar in order to get my head back on straight.

### Boundaries

Boundaries means that I put limits on my availability, that I stick with the priorities that God gives me. Christian workers sometimes get caught in the pattern that they must keep doing and doing because God has called them to minister. The need for boundaries is the need to know my limitations and God’s provision. I am not the only source the Lord has to do the work, and sometimes I can get in His way by trying to do what He has assigned to others.

There is a reason why God gave boundaries to humans. If He wanted me to work more, He could have made a 52-hour day instead of the 24. God has patiently worked to help me understand that He is the sufficient One, not me. Over and over, He has had to remind me that His work gets done in His strength. I am not the answer to people’s needs...God is.

## Putting Truth into Practice

In Rescue Ministry, everything seems like an emergency in the lives of those we serve. For one reason, our clients have not learned the truth discussed in this chapter. When I have planned for margins and boundaries, and a “crisis” comes along, I have much ability to ride the waves. One sLI student, Grace, a shelter manager, learned early on to make margin in her life by working ahead when there was a calm in the storm so the work would be caught up when the next “emergency” knocked on the door. It is the same concept that good money managers use when they establish an emergency fund in their home.

Jesus utilized margins and boundaries during His earth-life. Mark 6:31, where Jesus asks His disciples to come away with Him to rest awhile, is a great example of knowing when to back away from the demands of people around you. Have you noticed when Jesus healed people, He frequently gave them something to do following the healing rather than do it for them?

Am I driven by a love of God or by guilt? Am I very aware of how much God has accepted me, or am I needing to go buy acceptance from others because of how much I can do for them? Do I get some kind of feeling of importance by being too busy?

Is my perspective the same as the Lord’s? How will the issue causing the stress right now affect eternity? Or even six months from now? Will it be catastrophic if the problem is not solved today? Is there perhaps some value in the delay we are experiencing in taking care of this matter now? God is very big on peace. Am I willing to sell out on peace just to push a stress-induced situation?

Being stretched is a good thing. A rubber band would be useless if not stretched. But it is also of no value when it has been overextended and breaks. Some stress is relieved when I develop good time-management skills. Here are a few of the challenges to becoming a good manager of time and some solutions to try:

Lack of focus – Name every hour of the day, with the priority of the hour, giving direction. Remove clutter around me that distracts from the project or person at hand. Identify a tangent quickly and get back on track.

Interruptions – Some interruptions are God’s instructions but many are created because of the lack of time management of the person coming to interrupt. I have the opportunity again to help that person with boundaries as I set the time frame for working on the issue.

Procrastination – Develop the skill of finishing something every day. The perfectionist continues to leave the file open on a project because they know they could improve it. The problem is that every time I start back on a project, I spend the initial warm up time before ever getting to the project. Break the assignment down into smaller units and finish them.

Values – What do you think of when you hear the word “excess?” And what about the word “simplify?” Much of our willingness to keep stress to a healthy level has to do with my values. What is important to me?

When do I know that I am too busy?

- When I do not have time to be with the Lord on a daily basis.
- When I can't remember what I am supposed to be doing this hour.
- When I leave work remembering the promises I made that are left unfulfilled.
- When the deadlines control my sleep patterns.
- When my output exceeds the input.
- When I do not have time for God to direct me because I am so busy doing what I surmise He wants me to do.
- When there is no joy in serving.

## Philippians 4:6-7

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”