



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

HOW TO SAY NO: AVOIDING OVERCOMMITMENT BY SAYING YES TO GOD FIRST



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
PART ONE: THE THEOLOGY OF HUMAN LIMITS	7
PART TWO: THE IDOLS OF THE CALENDAR	12
PART THREE: THE ART OF THE "HOLY NO"	17
PART FOUR: A SUSTAINABLE SOUL	20
CONCLUSION: THE FREEDOM OF BEING A CHILD, NOT A SLAVE	24
THE "SHOULD" SEA AND THE COURAGE TO REST	27
A PRAYER	28

INTRODUCTION

I want you to meet Sarah. If you walked into her church on a Sunday morning, you'd see her everywhere. She's the one adjusting the microphone stands for the worship team at dawn. She's the one who stayed up until midnight baking for the youth fundraiser. She leads a small group, helps in the nursery, and manages a full-time job in between. Everyone calls her a pillar of the church. Her pastor holds her up as the gold standard of what a committed disciple looks like. But if you caught Sarah alone in her car on a Tuesday afternoon, you'd see a woman whose hands are shaking on the steering wheel. She's bone-tired. Her Bible is on her nightstand, but she hasn't opened it for anything other than a lesson plan in months. She is constantly talking about God and constantly working for God, but when it comes to making time for God, she hasn't had a real, quiet conversation with Him in longer than she can remember. She is so busy doing His work that she has completely lost her sense of His presence.

Sarah is the face of the Holy Hustle. It is a quiet, respectable kind of spiritual exhaustion that is hollowing out our churches from the inside. We've created a culture where we measure spiritual health by the number of boxes we check on a ministry sign-up sheet. We treat the Kingdom like a corporation where the hardest workers get the most blessings, and the result is a generation of Christians who are functionally running on empty because they are too tired to actually believe in a God they can't see past their own to-do lists.

The Busy Christian Paradox

There is a strange paradox at the heart of modern ministry. We believe that by doing more for God, we are getting closer to Him. We think that if we push a little harder, serve a little more, and sacrifice a little more of our sleep, we will eventually break through into a deeper level of spirituality. But the reality is often the exact opposite.

FIELD GUIDE

The Busy Christian Paradox is this: the more we fill our lives with religious activity, the less room we have for the actual Person of Jesus. We turn the Creator of the universe into a demanding Boss who is never quite satisfied with our output and is always looking at the clock. We start to view prioritizing God as a luxury we can't afford, or worse, as just another task we need to squeeze in between the bake sale and the choir rehearsal. Eventually, the activity itself becomes the idol. We like being the ones people rely on. We like the feeling of thinking we're indispensable. But under that sense of importance is a deep, gnawing hole. We've substituted serving for abiding, and we've forgotten that apart from Him, we can do absolutely nothing.

Recognizing the Red Flags

Burnout doesn't happen all at once. It's a slow leak. It starts with a feeling of mild resentment when another volunteer doesn't show up. It moves to a sense of dread on Sunday mornings. It eventually turns into a cold, hard cynicism that colors everything you do. You start to see the people you're supposed to be serving as interruptions or burdens. These are red flags that we usually ignore because we think we're being spiritual by pushing through the pain. And there are more.

You might be constantly irritable with your family after a church event. You might find yourself checking your watch during the sermon. You might feel a massive sense of relief when a ministry meeting is canceled. These aren't signs of a lack of character; they are signs of a soul that is running on fumes. Spiritual burnout is unique because it feels like a betrayal. You're doing exactly what you were told to do. You're giving your life for the Gospel. So why does it feel like the work of the Gospel is killing you? The reason is that you've moved from a life of grace to a life of spiritual performance.

The goal of this guide isn't to tell you to quit every ministry and move to a cabin in the woods. We aren't looking for a total escape; we're looking for a new posture. We want to move from a life of forced sacrifice – where you're giving out of guilt, pressure,

and the need for approval – to a life of finding balance and ordered priority.

We are going to look at the biblical theology of rest and why the Sabbath wasn't a suggestion, but a command for our survival. We're going to talk about the Idol of Indispensability, avoiding overcommitment in ministry, and why the church will actually be just fine if you don't bake the lemon bars this time. We're going to dig into the unbelievable wonder of what it looks like to find your identity in being a child of God before you find it in being a servant of God.

If you feel like Sarah – if your heart is racing and your soul feels like a desert – I want you to take a deep breath. Your Heavenly Father isn't asking for your hustle today. He's asking for your heart. This journey is about learning to serve from a place of overflow rather than a place of depletion. It's about finding the peace that exists on the other side of the to-do list. Let's start there.

1

THE THEOLOGY OF HUMAN LIMITS

We often live as if the creation account in Genesis was missing a chapter on rest in the Bible. We read about the light and the dark, the land and the sea, and the breath of life entering into the dust. But somewhere in our modern, frantic way of practicing faith, dealing with Christian burnout, we have convinced ourselves that we were meant to be made of something much more durable than dirt. We act like we were forged in a factory out of high-grade steel, designed for 24/7 productivity and a never-ending cycle of output. We view our tiredness as a defect and our limits as a failure of character. But if we want to find the heart of God again, we have to ask, what does the Bible say about rest? We have to go back to the beginning and realize that being finite is not a curse. It's by design. And it's one of the most profound gifts God ever gave us.

Dust, Not Steel

In Genesis 2:7, the text tells us that the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It is a striking image. Before we were anything else, we were dust. We weren't created to be self-sustaining or infinite. We were created to be dependent. The very fabric of our being is fragile, lowly, almost unnoticeable. Dust. When we ignore our limits and the importance of rest in the Bible, we aren't being extra spiritual; we are actually trying to reverse the creation order. We are trying to breathe our own life into our lungs. And how is that going?

Accepting that you are but dust is a radical act of worship. It is a quiet way of saying that God is God and I am not. He is the only one who does not sleep or slumber, as the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 121:4 (and as Elijah implies on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings

18:16-46). Only God can be in all places at all times. When we try to do everything, be everywhere, and meet every single need, we are essentially trying to steal a bit of God's glory for ourselves. We are acting as if the world would stop spinning if we took a nap. This isn't faithfulness; it is a high-functioning form of atheism. We believe in God with our mouths, but we behave as if we are the ones holding the universe together with our hands.

Biblical boundaries are not about being lazy. They are about being honest. They are the recognition that my capacity is a fixed number. If I say yes to a new committee, I am saying no to my children or my own christian mental health. We have this idea that "God's work" has no limits, but that is a lie. God's work is done by human beings who have bodies that get hungry, minds that get foggy, and souls that need quiet. If you try to live like steel, you will eventually snap. If you live like dust, you realize that you need the constant, sustaining grace of the One who made you. You stop trying to be the engine and start being the vessel. You realize that you need the Living Water to fill and refresh you and remind you that you are loved (Rom. 5:5).

The Sabbath Strategy

We usually treat the Fourth Commandment like a nice suggestion or a relic from a more legalistic age. I mean, we don't find it in the New Testament. In Exodus 20:8-11, God tells us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. He points back to His own rest after creation as the pattern we are supposed to follow. But many have turned the Sabbath into a "day of catch-up" or a "day of religious chores." We feel guilty if we aren't being productive, even on the day God told us to stop. But how are we to be productive the other six days if we don't ever rest? Didn't Jesus say, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28)? This is the language of the King, of Yahweh, inviting His people to be yoked to Him. And He knows we are but dust.

The Sabbath isn't just a tip for better time management. It is a survival manual for the soul. It is the rhythmic reminder that our worth is not tied to our work. When God instructed us to rest, He

FIELD GUIDE

was inviting us to step out of the "hustle" and remember that the harvest depends on Him, not us. If you don't rest, you are essentially telling the Creator that you are more productive than He is. Or more essential than He is. You are saying that, while He could finish His work in six days, your work is so important that it requires seven. Or maybe you don't see yourself as productive as God and believe that is why you need the seventh to catch up with God. But is that what God expects from you? Didn't Jesus say, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me?" His yoke is supposed to maintain closeness with Himself.

This is the blessed shalom of the Sabbath. It takes only a mustard seed of faith to stop, if we look to the One we are yoked to. Sure, it takes courage to look at a half-finished to-do list and say, "The world will still be here tomorrow because God is in charge of it." But He's right there with you. In you. Rest is a declaration of trust. It is the moment when we stop playing the role of the provider and start playing the role of the child. These are the ones to whom Jesus also said, "Come to me." I've known people who haven't taken a real Sabbath in years, and they are the most anxious, brittle people I know. They think they are pillars, but they are really just prisoners of their own ambition. If you don't build a rhythm of rest into your life, your soul will eventually demand it through a crash. The Sabbath is God's way of protecting us from our desire to be our own gods.

Jesus and the Crowds

We often look at the ministry of Jesus and see a man who was constantly giving, but we miss the way He practiced the "Holy No." If you have ever wondered, did Jesus set boundaries, in Mark 1:35-38, we see a perfect example. Jesus gets up early in the morning, while it is still dark, and goes to a desolate place to pray. Simon and the others hunt for Him and tell Him that everyone is looking for Him. There were still people to be healed in that town. There were still needs to be met. But Jesus doesn't go back. He tells them it is time to go to the next town. He also instructed His disciples to come away to a quiet place, modeling a sacred form of christian time management.

He left people with unmet needs. Think about that for a second. The Savior of the world, the One with the power to heal every person in every village, walked away from a crowd that wanted more of Him. When considering what does the Bible say about rejection, we see that He didn't feel a frantic, guilt-driven need to satisfy every demand. He knew His mission, and He knew His limits as a man. He frequently withdrew to the wilderness to pray, as Luke 5:16 tells us, showing us how to seek God first. He knew that if He didn't stay connected to the Father, the work would become a hollow performance.

If Jesus didn't feel the need to attend every "meeting" or solve every problem, why do you? We have developed a Messiah complex that Jesus Himself didn't have. We face the challenge of overcoming guilt for saying no to a fundraiser or a nursery shift because we think that "loving people" means never setting boundaries. Or we feel that dying to self always means saying yes. But Jesus loved people enough to prioritize biblical self care and give them the version of Himself that was rested and connected to God. He didn't give them a burned-out, resentful version of the Savior.

When you practice the "Holy No" and learn how to say no, you are following in the footsteps of the Savior. You are admitting that you cannot be everything to everyone. You are remaining close to Him, yoked to Him. This is the grit of ministry and the beginning of how to overcome burnout – realizing that your primary job is to be faithful to the specific work God has given you for this day, not to solve every problem in the church directory. If you are too busy for the "desolate place" with the Father, you are busier than Jesus ever was. That should be a wake-up call for all of us.

The Gift of Being Small

The theology of limits (sometimes called finitude) is ultimately about finding peace in being small. We live in a world that tells us to be big, to be loud, and to be everywhere. But James 4:14 tells us we are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. This isn't meant to be depressing; it is meant to be a relief. You don't have to be the hero of the story. You don't have to be the

FIELD GUIDE

one who saves the church. In fact, you aren't, and you can't. Only Jesus is and can – for them and for you.

When you accept your limits, you find true freedom. You find shalom. You can do your work with excellence, you can serve with joy, and then you can go home and sleep soundly, sweetly, because you know the King is still on the throne. You stop trying to sustain the "Holy Hustle" and start living in the easy yoke that Jesus promised in Matthew 11:30. How blessed are we to have a gentle and lowly Lord.

I've seen Sarahs in every church I've ever served. They are wonderful, dedicated people who are dying on the inside because they've forgotten they are made of dust. They are trying to be steel, and the friction is wearing them down to nothing. If that is you, I want you to hear this: God is not disappointed by your fatigue. He designed you to need sleep. He is communicating something important to you in His designs. He created the sunset as a signal to stop.

So, stop trying to be more productive than the One who made the stars. Stop trying to meet every need as if you are the fourth member of the Trinity. Go back to Genesis. Remember that you are dust and that the breath in your lungs is a gift, not a resource you own. When you finally accept the theology of limits, you'll find that the "Holy Hustle" was just a cage. The "Holy No" is the key that lets you out.

This part of the path is about reclaiming our humanity. It is about realizing that we are creatures, not the Creator. It is about the honesty to say, "I can't," so that we can finally say, "God can." We're going to dig into how this looks in our actual schedules in the next part, but for now, just sit with the reality that you are allowed to be tired. You are allowed to stop. You are allowed to be human. That's a good next step.

2

THE IDOLS OF THE CALENDAR

I have spent a lot of my ministry years staring at other people's calendars – and my own. If you want to know what someone actually worships, don't look at their prayer list; look at their planner. Our schedules are a mirror of our deepest anxieties and our most stubborn idols. We like to think we are busy because we are "called," but often, we are busy because we are afraid.

We've turned the calendar into a battlefield where we try to prove our worth, one "yes" at a time. We tell ourselves that we are being a "good and faithful servant," but under the surface, we are often serving a very different master. A task master. If we're going to find rest, we have to be honest about the roots that are keeping us tethered to the "Holy Hustle." We have to dismantle the idols that live between the lines of our to-do lists.

The Approval Trap

I once sat with a woman who was in tears because she couldn't figure out how to tell her small-group leader she needed a break. She was already working sixty hours a week and caring for an elderly parent, yet she felt a crushing weight of guilt at the thought of saying "no" to hosting a weekly study. When I asked her why she felt she had to do it, she didn't say it was because of a deep love for the Word. She said, "I don't want them to think I'm not committed."

This is the approval trap. It's the problem of people-pleasing disguised as piety. We say "yes" to the nursery, the choir, and the cleanup crew, not because the Spirit is prompting us, but because we are addicted to the "well done" we get from our peers. We are terrified of the look on someone's face when we let them down. We've turned the church into a performance stage

FIELD GUIDE

where we hope that if we do enough, people will finally see us as "spiritual."

Paul addresses this head-on in Galatians 1:10: *"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."* When this runs your life, you're functionally serving yourself. We aren't looking at what God wants; we are looking at how to manage our own reputation. We want to be the "reliable one." We want to be the person who always comes through. But this addiction to being needed is a form of bondage. It makes us slaves to the expectations of others and eventually turns our service into a source of deep resentment. You can't love people well if you are terrified of them. You can't serve God faithfully if you are constantly looking over your shoulder to see if your neighbor is impressed.

The Messiah Complex

There is a specific kind of pride that likes to dress up in a servant's apron. I call it the Messiah Complex. It's that voice in the back of your head that whispers, "If I don't do it, it won't get done." We look at the vacant volunteer slots, the struggling youth program, or the messy church kitchen, and we step in, not out of joy, but out of a frantic sense of necessity. We act as if the survival of the Kingdom depends on our specific labor.

This is a direct assault on the sovereignty of God and a recipe for spiritual burnout. We say that we believe in our heads that God is in control, but our behavior suggests we think He's actually a bit incompetent. We behave as if the Holy Spirit is waiting for us to show up before He can move. We've forgotten that God doesn't need our frantic labor to save the world. He invites us to participate, but He is not dependent on us. Perhaps God wants someone else to step up and clean that kitchen.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul reminds us of the proper order: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Notice who does the heavy lifting there. We do the planting and the

watering – the humble, finite work – but the life, the growth, and the outcome belong entirely to God.

When you have a Messiah Complex, you are trying to "give the growth" yourself. You are taking on the stress of the results, which is a weight no human soul was meant to carry. This is why you're a workaholic for the church. You think that if you stop, the growth stops. But that is an insult to the Master. The church is His bride, not yours. He loves it more than you do, and He is more than capable of sustaining it. When you confront the pride that tells you that you are indispensable, you see the value in avoiding overcommitment in ministry and finally find the freedom to work hard and then stop. You can go home and sleep because the only real Savior is still on duty.

The Fear of Missing Out in Ministry

We don't usually talk about the fear of missing out in a theological context, but it is one of the most powerful drivers of the "Holy Hustle." It's the quiet anxiety that if we step back – if we take a season of rest or say no to a high-profile role – we will lose our "place" in the community. We worry that the "reward" will go to someone else or that we will be forgotten.

This is especially common in churches that equate activity with status. If you aren't "doing," you aren't "seen." We've created a ladder of spiritual success, and we're afraid that if we stop climbing, we'll slide all the way to the bottom. We compare our "output" to the Sarahs of the world, and we feel a nagging sense of inadequacy if we aren't just as busy.

Jesus warned us about this posture in Matthew 6:1: "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*" When our ministry is driven by the fear of missing out on recognition or a sense of "belonging," we are practicing a horizontal righteousness. We are performing for an audience of men. The tragedy of the fear of missing out in ministry is that it keeps us from the very thing we actually need: the quiet, unhurried presence of God. We are so afraid of missing

FIELD GUIDE

a committee meeting that we miss the "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) that only speaks in the margins. But how are we to hear it when we have no margins left? We are so busy building our "place" in the church that we forget our true place is already secured in Christ.

Breaking the Idols

Dismantling these idols isn't something that happens overnight. It's a rugged, daily decision to choose the "smallness" of being a creature over the "bigness" of being a pillar. It means being willing to be the person who says, "I can't do that right now," and being okay with the awkward silence that follows.

- **Audit your "Yes":** The next time you are asked to serve, wait twenty-four hours. Ask yourself: Am I doing this because I love God, or because I'm afraid of what the person asking will think of me?
- **Embrace the "Gap":** Allow things to go undone for a season. Let the vacancy stay vacant. Watch what happens. You'll find that God often uses those gaps to call others into service, or He simply provides in ways you couldn't have planned.
- **Practice Hiddenness:** Find a way to serve that no one will ever know about. Kill the fear of missing out by intentionally choosing the "reward" that only the Father sees (Matthew 6:4).

The "Holy Hustle" is a hard task master, and its currency is exhaustion. But the Master we serve says His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). If your calendar feels like a crushing weight, it's not because God put it there. It's because an idol is sitting on it.

We have to get back to a place where our time is a gift we manage, not a debt we owe. We have to learn to trust that God's plan for the world is much bigger than our frenetic schedules. In the next part, we'll look at the "ordered priority" – how to actually build a life that reflects the heart of God instead of the demands

of the church directory. But for today, look at your planner and ask: Who am I actually trying to please? Once you can name the idol, you can finally practice the hard mercy of a clean “no.”

3

THE ART OF THE "HOLY NO"

We often operate under the assumption that holiness is synonymous with saying "yes." We've built this image of the "perfect" Christian as someone who never refuses a request, always has a smile on their face, and runs on four hours of sleep because they are "sacrificing for the Kingdom." But here is the reality: if you are constantly saying "yes" to everyone else, you are inevitably saying "no" to your family, your health, and your own peace. It is time to learn how to say "no" in a way that isn't a betrayal, but a responsible act of stewardship.

How to Say No to Church Volunteering Without Feeling Guilty

Most of us avoid the word "no" because we are terrified of disappointing people or appearing lazy. We end up agreeing to tasks we don't have the time for, and then we spend the whole week quietly resenting the work and the person who asked us to do it. An honest "no" is actually much more merciful than a resentful "yes." When you take on a task that you don't have the strength for, you aren't giving the church your best; you're giving them your fatigue and your irritation.

Try being direct. When learning how to say no, you don't need to provide a three-page dissertation on why you can't help. You can simply say, "Thank you for asking, but I don't have the capacity to do this with excellence right now." Or, "I can help with this next month, but I can't take it on this week." This isn't being rude – it's being honest. When you set clear boundaries, you are actually helping ministry leaders find the person who truly has the time and the heart for that specific job. You stop being a "placeholder" and start being a person who honors their commitments.

Do you feel like your "yes" loses its value when you agree to everything without a second thought? Is it possible that a firm "no" today is actually an act of love for the people you serve?

Setting Healthy Boundaries in Ministry Without the Guilt

We are usually pretty good at budgeting our money, but we are terrible at budgeting our energy. We treat our stamina like an infinite well that will never run dry. However, the Bible tells us to be good stewards of everything God has given us, and that includes your physical and emotional resources. If you squander your energy on every minor request that comes your way, you will have nothing left for the things that actually matter.

Think of your energy as a bank account. Every new task is a withdrawal. The question is, do you have enough "deposits" of rest and silence to cover the cost? If you are constantly living in a spiritual "overdraft," your relationships with God and your family will start to accumulate debts in the form of bitterness and distance. You cannot finance other people's expectations by bankrupting your own soul.

Have you ever stopped to calculate how much energy you spend trying to look "perfect" for the congregation? Is your current level of exhaustion the result of trying to be the hero in a story where God is already the Savior?

Signs of Church Ministry Burnout and How to Recover

There is a huge irony here: the church needs you to be rested and alive much more than it needs you to be exhausted and "busy." When you are well-rested and have spent time in quietness with God, you bring a sense of peace into a room. When you are driven like a slave, you bring tension, even if you are doing all the "right" things. Your state of being is far more important than your volume of doing.

The world doesn't need another stressed-out Christian, one bad day away from a breakdown. It needs people who possess a deep, internal quiet. When you practice the "Holy No," you are protecting the light that is supposed to shine for others. You become a better leader, a better spouse, and a better friend

FIELD GUIDE

because you actually have space in your soul to care. You stop reacting to people as "interruptions" and start seeing them as human beings.

Have you noticed that your best ideas and your most sincere prayers usually come when you aren't in a hurry? Is your current busyness worth the price of losing your joy in God?

How to Stop Overcommitting Yourself at Church

We need to break the cycle of internal competition. We aren't working on a factory floor, and God doesn't keep a timesheet. So, you don't have to punch in. His love for you didn't increase when you added three more meetings to your calendar, and it won't decrease if you step down from a committee. The "Holy Hustle" is often just a way to run away from our own emptiness.

Start small. Cross one thing off your list today – not because you're lazy, but because you are human. Give yourself permission to have a quiet evening. Look at that free time not as a "missed opportunity to serve," but as a gift from the Father who wants to be with you. This is what true discipleship looks like: knowing when to leave the nets behind and simply follow Him to a desolate place.

4

A SUSTAINABLE SOUL

We often treat rest like a reward we'll eventually earn once the "busy season" is over. We tell ourselves that if we just push through this one fundraiser, this one project, or this one family crisis, we'll finally have permission to breathe. But the truth is that the busy season never actually ends. In the world of ministry and high-performance Christianity, there is always another "urgent" need and another "kingdom opportunity." If you don't intentionally build a structure for rest right now, you will spend your entire life running toward a finish line that keeps moving further away. I've experienced this myself. But building a sustainable soul isn't about a one-time vacation or a long weekend; it's about a daily, gritty commitment to living within the margins God actually gave you.

Rhythms of Grace: Christian habits for a slower life

We live in a world that is designed to keep us scrolling, responding, and reacting every waking second. Why are we surviving in that doom? Most people touch their phones thousands of times a day, and for many Christians, that constant connectivity has turned into a form of spiritual slavery. To have a soul that is even remotely sustainable, you have to fight for your attention. This starts with practical, daily routines that force you to slow down long enough to remember who you are. These aren't just "lifestyle choices"; they are spiritual survival tactics.

One of the most powerful habits you can develop is the "Digital Sabbath." This isn't about being anti-technology; it's about being pro-soul. It is the intentional act of turning off all notifications and putting your devices in a drawer for twenty-four hours every week. Why do we feel like the world will stop spinning if we aren't reachable for a single day? That anxiety is a sign that we've made

FIELD GUIDE

our connectivity an idol. When you unplug, you are performing a literal protest against the "Holy Hustle." You are telling your soul – and the world – that your value isn't tied to your responsiveness or your "online presence." You are giving yourself permission to be "off," which is something the modern church rarely does.

Another essential rhythm is morning silence. Most of us wake up and immediately invite the entire world into our bedrooms by checking our email or the news. We start our day in a "reactive" mode, responding to other people's demands before we've even had a chance to talk to God. What would happen if you committed to ten minutes of silence before you ever touched a screen? Not ten minutes of "doing a devotion" or "preparing a lesson," but ten minutes of being still before the Father, focusing on how to seek God first. It is the discipline of "Unplugging" from the noise of the world so that you can actually plug back into the Source of your life. These small, daily habits are the bricks that build the wall of protection around your peace.

The Margin Principle: Why leaving empty space in your planner is an act of faith

Most of us view a gap in our planner as a vacuum that must be filled. If we see fifteen minutes of empty space between meetings, we check our email or make a quick phone call. We have a pathological fear of "wasted time," and we've convinced ourselves that every minute must be "productive" for the Kingdom. But the Margin Principle tells us that empty space is actually an act of faith. It is the recognition that we are not the ones in control of the schedule.

Leaving margin in your day – literally building in 30 minutes where *nothing* is scheduled – is how you leave room for the Holy Spirit to interrupt you with things that actually matter. Have you ever noticed that the most significant spiritual conversations or the most profound moments of peace usually happen in the gaps between your tasks? When you schedule yourself to the limit, you are effectively telling God that you don't have time for anything He might want to bring your way unexpectedly. You've locked the door and pulled the blinds on the Holy Spirit.

Margin is the evidence that you trust God to handle the big things while you focus on being present for the small ones. It takes faith to leave a square blank on your Google Calendar. It feels like you're falling behind or being lazy. But you can do it because Christ is near. That "white space" is a sanctuary. It's where you have the capacity to listen to a friend who is hurting, to notice the beauty of a sunset, or to simply take a deep breath and pray. If you are constantly "about to snap" because you're running from one thing to the next, you aren't living a life of faith; you're living a life of frantic mismanagement. Margin gives you back your humanity. And your shalom.

Finding balance between faith, work, and family

The Holy Hustle is a sprint, but the Christian life is a marathon where deep rhythmic breathing is essential. It's easy to start a ministry or a new project with a burst of energy and "forced sacrifice." We love the adrenaline of a new launch. But it's much harder to sustain that work for twenty or thirty years without collapsing into a heap of resentment. Finding a balance between your faith, your work, and your family requires a long-term vision that looks past next Sunday's service.

If you gain the world but neglect your children or your marriage, you have failed your first calling. This is the hardest truth for high-capacity Christians to swallow. We like to think that God will "make up the difference" at home while we're out doing His work. But God doesn't reward the neglect of our primary responsibilities. Even hard-working Martin Luther set aside time for Kathrina and his children. Your family is the primary congregation you've been called to shepherd. When you prioritize a committee meeting over a quiet evening with your spouse, or a fundraiser over your kid's ball game, you are telling them that they are secondary to your "performance."

Building a sustainable soul means making peace with the fact that you can't do everything. It means choosing to be a "slow and steady" disciple rather than a "bright and burned-out" one. This requires an audit of your priorities. What are the non-negotiables in your week that protect your home life? Are you willing to be

FIELD GUIDE

"less productive" in the eyes of the church staff so that you can be more present in the eyes of your family?

The goal isn't only to start well; it's to finish the race without collapsing. You want to be the person who, forty years from now, still loves Jesus and still has the respect of the people who know you best. That kind of longevity only happens when you honor the limits God built into your design. You move from a life of frantic performance to a life of ordered priorities. It's not about doing less for God; it's about doing the *right* things from a place of overflow instead of a place of depletion. When you live within your God-given margins, you aren't just surviving the ministry; you're actually enjoying the God you're serving. Let's aim for that.



CONCLUSION: THE FREEDOM OF BEING A CHILD, NOT A SLAVE

We spend the better part of our lives trying to prove that we were a good investment. We treat our relationship with God like a performance review that never ends. We check the metrics, we audit our "kingdom impact," and we look for any sign that the Master is pleased with our quarterly results. But the irony of the "Holy Hustle" is that the more we work to earn God's favor, the further we drift from the very heart of the Gospel. We've traded the inheritance of a child for the wages of a slave, and we wonder why we're so exhausted.

There was a man I knew – let's call him David – who was the ultimate "pillar." He didn't just attend church; he practically carried the building on his back. He was a high-capacity executive by day and a ministry machine by night. He was the guy who could organize a three-day conference while leading a capital campaign and mentoring four young men, all without breaking a sweat. Or so it seemed. David lived by the "more is more" theology. He believed that if he stopped running, he would stop being useful. And if he stopped being useful, why would God want anything to do with him?

His breaking point didn't come in a dramatic spiritual vision. It came in the form of a persistent, nagging pneumonia that eventually put him flat on his back for six weeks. For the first time in twenty years, David was forced to sit still. He couldn't answer emails. He couldn't lead the committee. He couldn't even stand

FIELD GUIDE

up to sing a hymn. For the first two weeks, he was a wreck. He was convinced that the church was falling apart, his projects were failing, and God was looking at his bedroom door with disappointment. He felt like a "failed" Christian because he was producing exactly zero results.

But something strange happened in the third week. The world kept spinning. The church didn't close its doors. The projects were handled by others, or they simply waited. And in the silence of that bedroom, David realized that God hadn't left the room. In fact, he felt closer to the Father in his weakness than he ever had in his "strength." He realized that God loved him the same whether he was sitting still or running. The Father wasn't looking for a "return on investment"; He was looking at His son. That realization changed everything. David realized he had been serving a Master he didn't actually trust and had been acting like a slave when he was actually a child of the house.

Human Beings, Not Human Doings

We have a chronic identity crisis in the modern church. We've allowed the world's obsession with productivity to seep into our pews. We've bought into the lie that our value is a variable number based on our "output." But the Bible uses a specific term for us: we are Human Beings, not Human Doings.

Our primary calling is not to *do* for God; it is to be with God. In the creation account, the very first thing humanity did after being created was rest. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, and their first full day on earth was the Sabbath. They started their existence from a place of rest, not a place of work. They didn't have to "earn" their place in the garden; they were placed there by grace. We were designed to work *from* our rest, not for our rest.

Your worth is an innate gift from the Creator, not a trophy you win through exhaustion.

When you realize that you are a "Human Being," the pressure of the "shoulds" starts to lose its grip. You stop asking, "What should I be doing for the Kingdom?" and start asking, "How can I abide in

the King?" This isn't an excuse for laziness; it's a strategy for sustainability, for apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. A branch doesn't "hustle" to produce grapes; it stays connected to the vine. The fruit is the natural result of the connection. If you are exhausted, it's a sign that you've disconnected from the Vine, and you're trying to manufacture fruit with your own hands. You're trying to be a machine instead of a living thing.

THE "SHOULD" SEA AND THE COURAGE TO REST

Most of us are currently drowning in a sea of "shoulds."

I should be doing more for the youth group.

I should be volunteering for the local shelter.

I should have a more consistent prayer life.

I should be the first one to say yes.

These "shoulds" are the chains of a slave. They are driven by guilt, fear of judgment, and the need for approval. But the Gospel is the "Holy No" to every one of those chains. It tells you that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). It tells you that the Master has already done the heavy lifting. The most "spiritual" thing you can do today might not be signing up for a new ministry. Instead, it might be taking a nap and trusting that God can handle the world for an hour without you.

It takes courage to rest. It is much easier to keep running and stay busy because busyness feels like control. Rest feels like vulnerability. It's an admission that we are small, finite, and dependent. But that smallness is where our freedom is found. When you are a child, you don't worry about the mortgage or the grocery list. You trust the father to provide. You are free to play, free to rest, and free to simply *be*.

A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I lift up the person reading this who is currently gasping for air. I pray for the "Sarahs" and the "Davids" who have spent years financing the church's expectations by bankrupting their own peace. Lord, they are tired. They are tired of the performance, tired of the "holy hustle," and tired of feeling like they are never doing enough.

I ask that You would give them the radical courage to stop. Break the power of the "shoulds" over their minds. Quiet the voices that tell them they are lazy or unfaithful because they need a Sabbath. Remind them right now, in this very moment, that Your love for them is not a paycheck they have to earn. It is a gift they have already received.

Help them to unclench their fists. As they let go of the committee meetings, the bake sales, and the "pillar" status, let them feel the physical and spiritual relief of Your easy yoke. Give them the grit to say the "Holy No" to the world so they can say a joyful "Yes" to You. Restore the margins in their lives. Fill the empty spaces in their calendars with Your "still, small voice."

May they walk out of the slave quarters and back into the Father's house. May they learn to work from a place of overflow instead of a place of depletion. And above all, Lord, give them the peace that comes from knowing that they are deeply, perfectly, and irrevocably loved – not for what they do, but for whose they are. In the name of the One who finished the work so we could find our rest, Amen.



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