

Readers explore their busy lives and discover how they can experience the joy of slowing down. We will learn about margin—what is it, how did Jesus create it, and how can we follow Him? Through the Lord’s guidance and grace, Samantha shares how to make time for eternal realities.

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## IN THE CHAOS

*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”*

HAGGAI 1:5–6 (NIV)

With tired eyes, sagging shoulders, and an aching lower back, I placed the computer on top of my seven-month pregnant belly and opened it. However, as soon as I started digging through the pile of unending work emails, my two-year-old screamed my name from the bathroom—which is never a good thing—the doorbell rang, and the oven timer beeped.

Rushed, I ran to get the one-sheet-pan dinner out of the oven, motioned to my friend to come on in and drop off the sippy cup my son had left at her house the day before, and dashed to inspect the damage done to the bathroom (let’s just say toilet paper was everywhere).

Not only that, but as I looked around, I saw every toy tractor, truck, and train we owned lined up along our cherry-walnut chest

my Papa made me, loads of laundry overflowing, mail piled up on the counter, and a general state of mess. I was swimming in chaos.

Busy was the norm, and because it had become my norm, I wasn't stressed or overwhelmed. And yet, I wasn't present.

I had made my life hurried.

I spent most of my days jumping from one task to the next. I had become a master at marking off my to-do list, multitasking, and making plans obsessively.

As pastor and author Ben Stuart describes it in his book *Rest & War*, I felt like an octopus on roller skates<sup>1</sup>—plenty of movement, just not necessarily forward; busy, but not productive.

That same fall evening, I walked down the worn pathway to the mailbox and my kind neighbor casually asked how things were going. I responded as I normally did: "Oh, I'm good, busy . . . but good." Her response is what stuck with me. She said, "I don't know how you do it all."

Honestly, at that moment, her words felt like a badge of honor. They meant I was doing more than she was, that she was impressed with how much I could do, and in some way, I was achieving more. My ugly, selfish pride surged.

Later, I opened my Bible, planning to do my daily Bible reading I hadn't seemed to have time for earlier in the day. I opened to Haggai only to read this:

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

Haggai 1:5–6 (NIV)

In the stillness of the night, the Lord's conviction came raining down as my sweet neighbor's words echoed in my mind.

"I don't know how you do it all."

Those few words weren't a badge of honor; they were a call to action. They were an indication my life was full of misplaced priorities. Like the people Haggai addressed, I was striving, but never satisfied. I was failing to do what God had called me to do and be who God had called me to be. My life was like "a purse with holes in it."<sup>2</sup>

In the book of Haggai, the temple was destroyed, and yet God's people focused on building their own houses and pursuing their own success instead of following the Lord's command to rebuild His temple. So often, we are like these Israelites. We pursue financial security, job success, do-it-all parenting, and endless pleasures over the commands and will of God.

What about you? Are you exhausted from planning and re-planning, and still feeling like you can't get it all done? Does it seem like you're constantly on the go, physically or mentally, and rest is unattainable? Have you traded peace, ease, and purpose for striving, achieving, and success?

The good news is God will meet us where we are and work within our schedules and circumstances if we let Him. This may involve replacing "good" things with the things God's calling us to do or looking for opportunities to say a sacred no when our plates are full.

However, the reality of "doing it all" and "being busy" is probably present in your life as well. We are encouraged and often even forced to be on the go. We say yes without thinking. We make plans to have plans and fail to set and maintain the boundaries we desperately need.

**This book is  
about slowing  
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already doing.**

As a result of this hurried and busy lifestyle, we sacrifice what we don't even realize we are sacrificing: the things that matter.

An article in the *New York Post* reported that American families get just 37 minutes of quality time together per day.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-seven minutes. There are 1,440 minutes in a day. Our quality time comprises just a little over 2.5 percent. What are we doing with the other 97.5 percent?

Once the reality of this lifestyle began to soak in, I started asking God to show me what I was missing.

What did Scripture show me? What did the people far wiser and more experienced than me do to prevent this chaos? How could I slow down, eliminate the mess, and make time for the things that matter? The most basic answer I discovered was the need to lay aside my plans for the purposes of God. I needed to create margin.

This book is about slowing down, creating space, and ultimately joining God in the work He is already doing. It's a call to make small, moment-by-moment changes that have the potential to impact eternity. Above all, this book is written to give God glory: glory in my words and in my actions, and in the bigger story they tell.

This is the story of a God who knows how to rest. A God who has everything under control. A God who gave His only Son to save us from our sins and the bondage they bring. In Christ, there is freedom from striving, busyness, and hurry. But it requires surrender. Are you ready to take off these weights and follow Jesus with every area of your life?

The first three chapters of this book identify and break down the problem of hurry and control. When we pry our fingers off the objects we hold the tightest, we make room for God to heal, teach, and replace our idols with the things of God. Chapters 4 through 10 focus on the processes and tools we need to slow down. These chapters apply the truths found in God's Word as the remedy for

this epidemic of hurry. Finally, chapters 11 through 14 offer tried practices and applications for those who are committed to making a change. As we hunger for the purposes of God and take active steps toward inviting Him to direct our paths, we'll find that our pace will slow and our eyes will open. Soon our perspective will change.

Recently I stood in front of a traditional church pew and sang the old hymn "Be Thou My Vision." As I sang (not well, I may add), tears streamed down my face as the words became a prayer, a plea, and a confession of my inadequacy and Jesus' sufficiency. I knew in order to change my perspective, I needed Jesus to become my vision. Everything must filter through the lens of Christ: what I see and plan, even what I think.

Tradition tells us an Irish monk named Dallán Forgaill wrote this as a poem in the sixth century as he reflected on the faithfulness of St. Patrick, a missionary to Ireland in the fifth century. Many years later, in the early 1900s, Eleanor Hull versified the text into a hymn. The first verse of the hymn is this:

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

For generations, followers of Jesus have recognized our deep need to see as Jesus sees and think as Jesus thinks. Forgaill, Hull, and countless other believers have pleaded with the Lord to guide their steps and light their path. The song ends in this way:

High King of heaven, my victory won,  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Sun!

**In Christ,  
you have  
everything  
you need to  
slow down.**



Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.<sup>4</sup>

Don't miss this. The victory is won! We serve and follow the High King, the Ruler of all. He was sufficient for the generations of believers who prayed this before you, and still is sufficient for you and me too.

So, before we get in too deep, know this: in Christ, you have everything you need to slow down. You have everything you need to rest and relinquish control and spend time with your King. Dive in, ask the Lord to be your vision, and trust in His sufficiency.

My prayer is this book challenges your pace, your priorities, and your plans, and shows you a God who wants you to abide with Him.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a few questions for reflection and a verse to memorize. These questions are designed to help you pause and ask the Lord what it is He wants you to learn and apply to your life. This can be done individually or in community. The verse is intended to help you hide God's Word in your heart so you can better apply what you've learned. And if, like me, your tendency is to skip right over these and rush to the next thing (sound familiar?), my challenge to you is to use these questions and this verse to force yourself to slow down. You might be surprised at what God has for you!

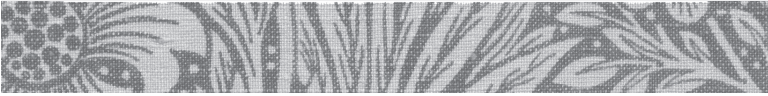
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Have you ever described your life as “busy”? What are some things that make it feel this way?*
2. *Does busyness feel like a good thing to you? Why or why not?*
3. *How does a hurried life affect your view of God?*

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says:  
“Give careful thought to your ways.”*

—HAGGAI 1:5 (NIV)





## WHAT IS MARGIN?

*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark,  
he departed and went out to a desolate place,  
and there he prayed.*

MARK 1:35

**M**y Memaw is the epitome of an English teacher. She taught English for thirty-five years in a small public school in Crane, Texas. Unofficially, she also taught each of her seven grandchildren and still takes opportunities to teach her fourteen (and counting) great-grandchildren, too.

I have vivid memories of riding in the backseat of my grandparents' blue Mercury with my sister, enjoying our "assignments." Memaw would hand us a well-read page of the newspaper and encourage (or force . . . you choose) us to circle the verbs, identify metaphors, find typos, and define words. Looking back, her love of learning and writing is what led me to enjoy writing. To this day, I enjoy defining words. I love to see deeper meanings and practical applications. Before I lose any of you who tune out the minute a part of speech is mentioned, I want to put the definition of a specific word before you: margin.

## INTENTIONAL MARGINS

Margin is defined as:<sup>5</sup>

1. the part of a page or sheet outside the main body of printed or written matter
2. a spare amount or measure or degree allowed or given for contingencies or special situations

The first definition captures the literal margin around a physical sheet of paper. As I think through this definition, I think of space for notes, afterthoughts, and words or pictures designed to be outside the lines. My sister is an incredibly gifted professional artist, and her doodles are always much more impressive than my starbursts and swirls. However, the quality isn't necessarily what matters; it is the space to create and reflect that I love.

But it's the second definition I needed in my life. Pause with me after "a spare amount." When was the last time you felt like you had a spare amount of time? Time left over after work, chores, play, or even quality time with a friend. Time that was just extra. If you're having difficulty identifying space in your schedule, chances are you need margin in your life.

If you keep reading the second definition, you'll notice margin is given (or created) for contingencies or special situations. I believe a better way of defining "contingencies or special situations" is "God moments." God works in our schedules and works in the normalcy of a day, but He is so much bigger. He works in special situations too, in the space much larger than your plans. The catch? You have to choose to create room.

Scripture is full of examples and insight into this process of creating margin.

### *Jesus Created Margin*

Mark 1 documents the start of Jesus' earthly ministry. He called the disciples, healed the sick and demon-possessed, and even healed Simon's mother-in-law in her home. His ministry started to gain attention to the extent that verse 33 says, "And the whole city was gathered together at the door."

Take a minute to pause here. I'm not sure how many people lived in this city, but even in the smallest city, if everyone gathered at your door, I think you'd feel a little overwhelmed. You may think this sounds like the opposite of creating margin, but that's because we haven't read what's coming.

In verse 35, Scripture says, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." This sounds a lot like "a spare amount of time given for special situations." Jesus created margin. He knew how important it was to get away from the chaos, be alone, and talk to the Father.

Mark made a point to let us know it was still dark outside. He doesn't tell us the exact time, but we know it was before the sun came up. Jesus was fully God, but also fully human. This means He experienced tiredness and fatigue just as we do. Now, even if He was a morning person, getting up and going out before the sun was even up was a choice. It was deliberate and intentional. He had to choose to create margin.

If Jesus created margin, shouldn't we? Maybe this requires getting up while it's still dark outside. Maybe it's using your toddler's naptime to pray in the quiet instead of cleaning the house. Maybe you should use your lunch break as an opportunity to spend time in the Word. Where is there space to create margin in your schedule?

Jesus wasn't the only one who created margin.

*Philip's Example of Living Unhurried*

In Acts 6:1–7, we read that the followers of Jesus increased in number, and the disciples tried to do it all. But couldn't. Not the point of the story, but if I were guessing, they probably weren't working to create much margin. As a solution, they chose seven men to serve, one of whom was Philip.

The next time we see Philip is in Acts 8:4–8, in the city of Samaria proclaiming Christ and performing signs. Scripture tells us there was “much joy in that city.” From an outward, worldly perspective, Philip had no reason to leave where he was or stop doing what he was doing. People were paying attention to what he was saying, and his ministry was excelling. However, God had something else planned.

Acts 8:26–27a says this: “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place. And he rose and went.”

“He rose and went.” He didn't stop and explain to God that walking to the desert wasn't on his to-do list. He didn't ask God for more specifics or details before he decided if he would go or not. He simply “rose and went.” Philip's desire for obedience was more important to him than his to-do list, his plans for the day, and even his thriving ministry in Samaria. He had made room in his life for special situations like these.

Continuing on in Acts 8, you learn the Spirit led Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the book of Isaiah yet struggling to understand.

Philip, starting with the passage the Ethiopian was reading, shared

**I wonder how  
many times we  
miss opportunities  
because we are too  
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think we should be.**

the good news of Jesus. Immediately after, Philip baptized his new brother in the faith.

Take a minute to think about this: Because Philip was obedient and committed to following the Spirit over his own plans, a man gained eternal life. Not only that, but this man carried the gospel back with him to Ethiopia, furthering the gospel movement. There's no way we could know the full impact of this encounter!

The story concludes in verses 39–40.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

I love this! Philip could've easily told the Lord, "Okay God, I'll go, but I'm heading straight to Samaria to jump back into my ministry. It's comfortable, it's successful, and I need to get back to keep the momentum going. I have responsibilities!" However, Philip responded differently. The Spirit carried him away to Azotus (I'd love to know more what this was like!). Then, "as he passed through," Philip preached the gospel.

Again, Philip isn't rushing back to where he thinks he should be—he's taking steps and asking the Lord for opportunities along the way. Then, when the Lord answers, Philip is obedient.

I wonder how many times we miss opportunities because we are too hurried and too focused on getting back to where we think we should be. The start of obedience often involves pausing and listening to the promptings of the Spirit.



## BECOMING A FRONT-PORCH PERSON

Several years ago, I intentionally began seeking the Lord for insight and guidance for the year to come. Little did I know what I was asking at the time . . .

As I prayed, I remember so clearly the Lord simply telling me to “draw near.” Desiring more, I read in Leviticus how Moses and Aaron had to draw near to the altar before they could offer the Israelites’ sacrifices (Lev. 9:7). I discovered in Hebrews that we are commanded to draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). And I studied in James how when we draw near to God, He draws near to us (James 4:8).

So as I started to “draw near” by digging into the Word and spending time in prayer, I knew God was preparing me for changes ahead.

A few months later, both my best friend and my cousin moved out of state due to job changes or transfers. In the midst of this, my husband and I also felt the Lord opening doors to move away from the neighbors we loved, invested in, and sought community with to a home in another area of our city.

So in a short period of time, my community was now completely different. However, I’m so grateful the Lord told me to draw near because I knew these changes were opportunities for more than just new neighbors. These changes were opportunities to create margin and join God in the work He was already doing in our new neighborhood.

My husband and I began praying for our new neighbors. We also challenged ourselves to meet every person on our street within the first few weeks of moving in. I had my kids help me bake cookies, and we hand-delivered cards with our phone numbers on them, letting each neighbor know we were praying for them.

However, I knew in order to create margin, I needed to do more. I decided to become a “front-porch person.” My husband is a gifted

woodworker and one of the first projects I asked him to craft was a porch swing. He built a beautiful swing out of pine and hung it for me within the week.

I began setting aside time each day to sit on my swing. As I sat and swayed back and forth, I started praying for neighbors to come out with their kids, or check their mail, or take their trash out. And when they did, I'd make an effort to have a conversation with them.

My time on the swing became the highlight of my day. Some days, my boys would play happily for an extended period, and other days there would be full-on two-year-old meltdowns right in the front flower bed. But the quantity of time and external circumstances weren't what mattered. God was softening my heart, opening my eyes, and slowing my pace through porch-sitting.

To be honest, there was a time in my life when sitting on a porch swing would have felt like a waste. I would've come up with a list of a hundred other things needing to be done instead. At the peak of my hurry, I believed sitting was pointless and idle.

This belief is a lie.

Do you have a hard time just sitting? Are you so caught up in productivity that intentionally slowing for even a few moments feels wasteful? Is your instinct to look at your phone the second you stop moving?

Let me challenge you with this: God works while we wait.

Through sitting on my porch swing and praying for my neighbors, the Lord created opportunities. He provided clear openings to invite neighbors to church and to women's Bible study, to share my

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testimony, and to have conversations about the gospel.

In the days where everything felt shut down or weird or different, I was able to deepen relationships and meet my neighbors' needs simply by slowing down and looking for God-given opportunities.

When God tells us to love our neighbor, He doesn't *just* mean the people right next door. But it does include the people right next door. In what ways might He be calling you to be a front-porch person too? At work? Your kid's school? Soccer practice? To the cashier at the grocery store or the server at the restaurant? Here's the point: being a front-porch person is less about the location and more about being present and available for the Lord to use you as He wills.

### *The Creator Rested*

This idea of sitting, resting, and creating downtime is not new. In fact, it goes back to the creation narrative in Genesis.

Many of us are familiar with the story of creation in Genesis 1. From our earliest days in Sunday school we've been taught, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Usually, this was coupled with a coloring sheet of the earth and a toddler melody of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

However, the lack of novelty should never diminish the miraculous work God performed.

In the original Hebrew, the word "created" literally means "formed *ex nihilo*—out of nothing."<sup>6</sup> There was nothing, and God used nothing to form everything.

Then, we read this in Genesis 2:1–3:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day

## *What Is Margin?*

and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

When it comes to creating margin, we see two important practices in these verses.

### *God Recognized When He Was Finished*

He could've kept tweaking His work, or creating more and more because He is God, but He didn't. "God finished His work."

When was the last time you finished your work? I don't necessarily mean completed everything on your to-do list with absolutely nothing left to do, but instead, finished your work for an allotted time.

When we live hurried, over-planned lives, we fail to recognize finished work because there is always more to do.

This is a hard principle for me to put into place. Finishing work when I know there's more to do feels a lot like procrastination. However, in this account, God lovingly shows us a key difference. Procrastination is avoiding work you need to do, whereas finishing is completing the work you set out to do. This doesn't mean you finish more than you set out to do, it means you finish the work and recognize it is enough.

### *God Rested from His Work*

When the work was complete, God rested.

I think this is one of the most powerful and freeing images of God in Scripture. The Creator of the universe prioritized stopping, slowing, and resting. Then He took it even further by blessing this time and making it holy. This idea of "sabbath," or a day or time to abstain from work, becomes a major theme we see throughout Scripture (more on this in chapter 8).

Yet, when we fail to create margin and make time for rest, we essentially tell God we are more important than Him—a dangerous and ill-considered lie. If the Creator of the universe can make time for rest and designate this time as holy, how much more should we find time away from work? There is nothing you need to do that is more important than the work God accomplished.

This realization should bring freedom! You can create margin, you can sit on your metaphorical porch swing, and you can stop working because God rested.

What does rest look like for you?

## PRACTICAL PROCESSES FOR CREATING MARGIN

As you read on, you'll discover this book is not designed to give you time-management tips or act as a "how-to-slow-down" guide. Instead, rooted in the Word of God and the whisperings He has spoken to my heart, I hope you discover a deep longing for the purposes of God. Then, as a result of these longings, I hope you resolve to make important changes in your life.

However, I do appreciate functionality. I believe we need both accurate theology and implementable practicality to effectively follow Jesus each day. I also believe we are quick to forget. If we don't apply the things we learn, we won't remember them. Just ask me if I can still do calculus! I didn't apply it and unfortunately, couldn't solve for a derivative if I tried.

My prayer is these truths become applications you live out day by day, so each chapter will end with a few processes to apply. These are not one-size-fits-all, and these are not gospel truths, but they are straightforward practices rooted in the Word of God we can implement.

### SET CLEAR PARAMETERS FOR FINISHED WORK

Just as God knew when He finished creating, you too must know when your work is finished. Maybe this involves creating lists and only focusing on X number of tasks. Or maybe it's implementing a system to prioritize tasks and set aside those of less importance for another time.

A quick note on setting aside pieces of work: our hurried lifestyle has trained our minds to become anxious about incomplete tasks. However, in Matthew 6:34, Jesus commands, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

You have enough work, enough tasks, and enough to think about today. When you set aside a task for tomorrow, focus on it then . . . not today. Today has enough. You have enough. We see this with creation. God could have created everything in the first day, but He didn't. If He didn't do it all in one day, we don't need to either.

### FIND YOUR "PORCH SWING"

For me, sitting on my porch swing is time intentionally set aside. Where can you go to sit without an agenda or task to complete? Where is your "porch swing"? Is it a park bench near your house? A table in the cafeteria of your workplace? The comfy chair tucked into the corner of your bedroom? Once you identify this spot, make it a priority to go, sit, and ask God to speak.

### PAUSE AND LISTEN

Like Philip, we must be willing and ready to pause, listen, and obey the Lord. This process is slightly less tangible, but it starts with opening your schedule and asking God to guide your steps. If God places something on your heart, press into it. When you commit to slowing, it's amazing what God will call you to do.

## U N H U R R I E D

Margin is the spare amount of time for God-moments. Will you implement practices to slow and create space to listen and obey His promptings?

*What Is Margin?*

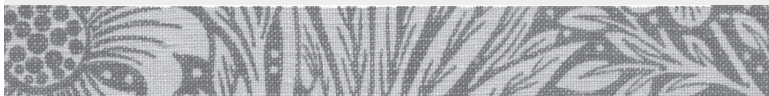
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *How do you react to promptings from the Spirit? Are you willing to obey like Philip, or do you tend to hold on to your own plans and agendas?*
2. *Where can you go to sit without an agenda or task to complete (i.e., your “porch swing”)?*
3. *Do you have a hard time feeling like your work is complete? If so, how can you apply the truths found in Genesis 2:1–3 to your life?*

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

—HEBREWS 4:16





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