

Series: **BREATHING ROOM** - January 10, 2010

FIT TO LIVE!
Mark 12:29-31

1. **Time** magazine recently listed a number of new, cool things that have come out in this past year. Fifty of them to be exact. Like, they've figured out how to create wood for a violin so that it sounds better than a \$2 million Stradivarius **[pic]** Philips has come up with an LED light bulb **[pic]** that works on 10 watts of electricity—and lasts 25 times as long a regular light bulb! And did you know that they've developed a hand-held, battery-run ultrasound? Hey, for about \$144,000—you can have a custom-puppy **[pic]**, a clone of your favorite pet! But the best is the *levitating mouse [pic]*—all accomplished through magnetic force!

-How many of you are really, **REALLY** excited about these new breakthroughs? Like, this stuff is going to **change your life for the better!** Scientific breakthroughs used to make us *oo-o-o-o* and *ah-h-h-h*—but, anymore? Not so much. I mean, I've kinda lost interest. Where do you go after the invention of the Chia-Pet, the amazing Ginsu knife and The Clapper?

-We **thought** that science, change and new breakthroughs would make life easier, solve our health problems, create shorter work-days—you know, make life a **breeze!** But that's not what happened. Progress has been on this steep exponential curve for the past 50 years; just trying to keep up has been like drinking from a fire hose. Actually, a little more like drinking from Niagara Falls.

-Did anyone here, besides me, have at least **one** moment in 2009—of feeling totally, thoroughly overwhelmed by life? Breathless. Exhausted. Anxious. Not having **nearly** enough time for all you had to do? Feeling financially stretched—**anxious**—because there's more month left than paycheck? Anyone? How many of you would say, "I **may** have had that feeling **more** than once?"

- a. Does everyone understand the meaning of the word, **exponential?** On a graph, it looks a little like a water slide at Canada's Wonderland—or Richard Nixon's nose—whichever you prefer. Let me illustrate:

*If you had a teaspoon of ice cream at the age of one—and doubled it every year, know how much ice cream you'd been eating at the age of 50? **52 tons!**
Per second!

*Fold a piece of paper in half 40 times—know how thick it would be? Over 230,000 miles—the distance from here to the moon.

- b. The graphs charting the increases in information, complexity, change, Federal debt, bankruptcies, health care costs, divorces, sexually transmitted diseases, pornography, advertising, population, cars—and on and on—are **all** exponential curves. Especially in the past 20 years. And we wonder why we feel overwhelmed!

- c. What all this stuff translates into is the loss of margin—breathing room--in every area of our lives. Know why? Because our energy, time, emotional stamina and money don't follow an exponential curve. We human beings have **limits**. And that's why there is **so** much pain and anxiety and stress and exhaustion in our world. And it ain't getting' any better!
- d. Richard Swenson, a medical doctor, calls this space between the load we carry—and our limits—**Margin**. When you read a book, the white space around the edge is called—not wasted space—but **margin**. Listen to how Swenson defines Margin:

***Margin...is having breath left at the top of the staircase, money left at the end of the month, and sanity left at the end of adolescence.**

***Marginless is having the baby crying and the phone ringing at the same time; margin is having Grandma taking the baby for the afternoon.**

***Marginless is being asked to carry a load five pounds heavier than you can lift; margin is a friend to carry half the burden.**

***Marginless is not having time to finish the book you're reading on stress; margin is having the time to read it twice.**

***Marginless is fatigue; margin is energy.**

***Marginless is red ink; margin is black ink.**

***Marginless is hurry; margin is calm.**

***Marginless is anxiety; margin is security.**

Marginless is culture; margin is *counterculture

***Marginless is reality; margin is remedy.**

***Marginless is the new disease of the century.**

***Margin is its cure.**

- e. How many of you like the thought of having **margin**? Here's the deal. Margin will **not** just "happen"—unless you have a stroke or a heart-attack. You and I have to **choose** margin. We have to take back our lives. And we **need** to do that—because it's hard to even **think** deeply about loving both God and others with a **marginless** life. So, over these next few weeks—I want us to talk about **how** to take back our lives and regain margin in our physical and emotional energy, our money, and our time.

2. The area I want to talk about this morning in the time that remains is **breath at the top of the stairs**. How many of you could use a **little** more physical energy? Health stuff

always seems to get emphasized just after New Year's. Have you noticed how many ads are aimed at firming up your body, eating healthier, slimming your waistline, losing inches? Have you noticed how much of this rhetoric is aimed at how you **look?** Turning heads? Impressing people with how **young** you seem—even if you are old and decrepit?

- a. There's nothing wrong with wanting to look healthy and fit. What really counts though, is what's **under the hood**. Having physical energy means having the strength and ability to do what you need to do—and **then** some. It means being able to shovel snow and carry Christmas decorations to the attic without aching for a week—or calling 911. It means not needing 5 cups of coffee to get you started in the morning. It means having the strength and energy to do what you have to do—and still have something left.

-Know what I see? I see a world that **obsesses** about the body—exercise, diet, early prevention.

Know what happens? This: **[picture]**. Now, I don't know **why** this person dumped their exercise equipment. But I **do** know that people—not **us** of course—others spend a bunch of money on club memberships and diets—thinking we're going to look like the people on the **Bow-Flex** commercial in 4 weeks. And we get discouraged. Tired. Pressed for time. And one day when we see the treadmill being used as a clothes rack...something snaps—and it goes to the curb!

- b. Maybe we should think less about our gorgeous, sexy bodies being God's gift to the men and women of the world—and more about our **bodies** being God's **amazing** gift to us. How many of you are **happy** about the body you have? How many of you are happy you at least **have** a body?

-Let me say something important. I know that in talking about health and physical energy today, I risk sounding like Dr. Oz or something off of Oprah. The truth is that sometimes God speaks to people in our culture—and the followers of Jesus are the last to pick up on the cues.

-Did you know that your body is a **good** thing—and that it honors God to care for it? Some of the language that's been used over the years by followers of Jesus hasn't been all that helpful. The implication is that this **body** is the one thing that really holds us back. That as unpleasant as death seems, we finally get rid our body for good—and become spirit beings.

-This idea, friends, is simply **not true!** God lovingly, carefully created the human body..

He didn't say, "Ooo, bad idea. I'll do better **next** time around." No, He lovingly and perfectly **created** our bodies. The body was a **good** idea. At death, our spirit is separated for a time from our body; but that's not our permanent state. Just as **Jesus'** body was resurrected—our bodies will be resurrected. And we

will live forever in a very tangible universe—not sitting on clouds, playing harps and making cream cheese commercials.

-Your body is important. It's the only one you have. This is how the Bible describes it.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. (Psalm 139:13-14 NLT)

-Complex. Intricate. Astounding—all words that could accurately describe the human body. God's simple instructions to us are: Take care of it! Now if you **doubt** that, think of the pages and pages of instructions in the OT that talk about what to eat and what not to eat; about the kind of stuff to stay away from, about how to clean dishes, deal with mold and mildew and quarantine people who have infectious skin diseases. This was **brilliant** health advice—given long before anyone knew anything about bacteria, AIDS or mold spores.

-Think about the specific instructions God gave for the Sabbath—i.e., a whole day off doing **nothing**. This was a principle that **every** mechanic is familiar with. Run an kind of machinery hard—with no break, no maintenance, no rest—and you'll destroy it.

- c. But the Bible teaches something else quite surprising about our bodies. Paul, an early leader in the church writes these words:

...Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT)

-Do you see the difference between what the world system—aka, Dr. Oz, Oprah says—and what this says? It's health for **your** sake—whether it's living longer or looking great—and having the energy to glorify God and fulfill the purpose you were created for. The world system we live in says, "Do what you **want** with your body! It's **yours!**" Well, if you've chosen to follow Jesus, your body apparently **isn't** yours to do with whatever you want. Through Jesus—God **bought** you.

-In this context, Paul is talking specifically about sexual immorality; and the teaching is clear, "You and I—**if** we want to belong to God—and have His Spirit live in us—are **not** free to just do whatever we feel like doing sexually—or otherwise—with our bodies. Your body is not your personal amusement park—or garbage can—or couch potato—it's the dwelling place of the **God Himself**. And we are to honor God with it.

3. The question is—**how?** Jesus once said that all the commands of law and prophets can be summed up with two. Love God. Love others. We use this a lot—but let me read it again.

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31 NLT)

-Notice how this passage says to love God. With all your...**heart**—your desires and choices, all your...**soul**—your personality, all your...**mind**—your thoughts, and all your...**strength**—what we’re talking about; your energy. That’s pretty comprehensive, isn’t it? To love God means to honor Him, to respect Him—to offer Him the best we have from all these areas of our lives. Including our **strength**.

-We are also called to love others as we love ourselves. To love someone else means to respect them, right? To watch out for them. To not harm them—or allow them to be harmed. To not do anything to them that would send them to the hospital or the funeral home. Think of someone you love. A lot. How many of you would say, “I want them around for a **long** time!” Well, do the same for yourself!

-Another important distinction between what God says and what the world system says. In our world—taking care of the body is not necessarily about building physical energy so you have what it takes to love God and love others. We live in a world that is **obsessed** with the body—particularly the outer ¼ inch. Let’s be clear: Taking care of your body is **not** about how buff you are; how cool your hair looks, how smooth your skin is, how slim your waist and thighs are, how great your nails look, or how long your eyelashes are—or how nicely your clothes cling to your body.

-Some people become fixated on their **image**—and totally lose the plot in life. Some people are actually so obsessed with how they **look**—that they’ll **destroy** their health for. We read about it all the time: eating disorders, diet pills, steroids and unnecessary surgeries. Narcissism can take us in some **very** weird directions and burn through a bundle of cash and energy.

4. The issue isn’t how **good** you or I look; it’s having the health and strength and energy we need to live God-honoring lives in a stressful world. How do you make sure that you have energy margin?

-Our bodies, as Richard Swenson puts it, are sophisticated energy machines. If we properly care for the engine and load the appropriate fuel and give it the appropriate down time, this machine will operate reliably. If we care for it well, it can double or triple its performance when necessary by tapping into the energy reserves. **That’s what margin is about.** What you and I **don’t** want is having our bodies give out when we ask for more! Right?

-See, when we try to burn energy we don’t have—we get sick. There are three basic things that reduce our energy levels. Can anyone guess what they are? Eating too much of the wrong kinds of things—resulting in being overweight; poor conditioning—i.e., getting too little cardio-vascular exercise—and sleep deprivation.

- a. I think we’re all grateful for the advances that science and medicine have made over the past 100 years. Some of the diseases that used to take people down

have been virtually eliminated—and we now have a whole arsenal of antibiotics and surgeries and miracle drugs!

-Do you realize that, according to research, at **least** 50% of our health issues in North America are the result of **lifestyle choices**? For example, one stat that blew me away was the effect of cigarettes on our overall health. More North Americans are killed by tobacco related illnesses every **18 months** in North America—than were killed in all the wars in the past 100 years.

-Alcohol abuse is the second leading cause of premature death in North America. In fact, alcohol is to blame for half the homicides, suicides and traffic deaths that take place.

-Another cause of health problems is our culture's lack of sexual restraint. There are 22 possible infections you can get through a single act of sexual intercourse. God has given us guardrails in this area for a whole bunch of reasons—and when we defy what He has said—there clear consequences.

- b. I think the single most common lifestyle issue that we in this room have to do something about is the stress level we're living under. Stress drains our battery and burns through our reserves and grinds up our insists and makes fat stick in our arteries. I'm going to deal with this issue next week—but it is **very** important to understand that you and I can't live overloaded, stressed out lives—and emerge as healthy, energy-filled people. Most physicians will tell you that a large percentage of what they deal with is related to stress, overload and worry.

-You can lift weights, run, eat tofu and veggies—and impress **everyone** with your bulging biceps, six-pack abs and buns of steel—and **still** get taken down. We live in a world that has ignored God and ignored the guardrails He—the One who **made** us—has put in place for a **purpose**, I presume. I am **not** God—and you are **not** God. That means we have limits—and we need to be wise enough to live within them.

5. Now. Here's a fundamental question when it comes to having margin; energy reserves for when we have to go over the top—shovel snow, work late, stay up all night with a sick kid—or whatever it is that leaves you groaning and breathless. And that question is: How do you create reserves—i.e., margin in **any** area of life. For example, financial margin. How do you have cash reserves in case your furnace goes, or your transmission blows—or your 3 year old plugs the sink—and leaves the water running for 5 hours?

-How many of you think that these reserves just miraculously pop in out of nowhere. That the cash just appears in your bank account from the money fairy? That's pretty naïve, isn't it? Now, God cares about emergencies--and he tells us not to worry about them—but the Bible's pretty clear that wise people prepare for the future.

-And **how** do we do that? Think about; if you're going to run a marathon—when do you start preparing? Do you look at the calendar, say, "Oh my goodness! The

marathon is next Sunday—I'd better start eating right and exercising." Or, "Oh no! Harry starts university in two weeks! I'd better start saving so I can help him!"

-We build reserves—margin—in energy, money, and emotional strength—a little at a time. Because life is a marathon—not a sprint.

And when we build into our energy reserves through eating right, exercising and getting our rest, we feel better about ourselves, better about life and better, strangely enough, about our soul.

- a. This past week, I read some of the best advice I've seen in years by a guy named James Fell. I believe him because he's a middle-aged guy with a desk job with not a lot of spare time—like me. What he says fits squarely in the common sense grid I use. He writes:

Many people wake up on Jan. 1st with plans to quit smoking, quit drinking, start exercising, start eating healthy, and lose forty-eleven million pounds. A lot of them don't last past noon. ...So, what's someone who is seeking personal improvement to do? The answer is: *not much*...That doesn't sound very inspiring, but allow me to elaborate. The answer is: not much, with a focus on continuous improvement. If you try to do a complete lifestyle overhaul in one day then it's going to be such a shock that you'll end up saying, "...Too hard. I quit."

-See, we'd like to think that we can make a magic phone call and kind of microwave ourselves into shape—when we've been seriously working at getting out of shape for years! Instead, you and I need to take the marathon approach; go for long-term lifestyle change. Very few people can handle the stress of a 180 turnaround in lifestyle. Research seems to show that exercise is the starting point—the gateway to dietary change. Start there with **very** modest, reachable goals.

-Physical fitness has five components: cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, muscle endurance, flexibility, and body composition—i.e., muscle to fat ratio. The heart is the workhorse; the engine room. Did you know that every day your heart beats 100,000 times and pumps 1600 gallons of blood over 60,000 miles of blood vessels? If, through cardio-vascular exercise—even walking quickly for 30 or 40 minutes several times a week—you can drop your heartbeat by 10 beats a minute—your heart will save 14,000 beats a day—and **5 million** beats a year!

- b. I don't know where you are right now. Some of you are doing great on this stuff. Way to go! But it's possible that some of you may be discouraged—and you know you're not in shape. The body is amazing in its ability to come back. That's a good thing! What is **not** a good thing is to try to make the comeback in a week. Or a month. If you try that, you will just get sore and discouraged—and you might injure yourself.

-You may need the advice of your physician. But why not start by just walking? Do some stretching first; then walk around the block to start. Then go further.

What you'll find, over time, is that you'll feel better, your stress level will go down—and your energy reserves will go up. There are a **lot** of resources out there that can help you develop a reasonable plan that will help you build the strength and physical energy you need. Wouldn't it be cool if you could clean the garage without needing a week to recover!!

6. The second issue we face is our eating habits. Wrestling down the food demon is **hard!** But if we just coast downhill on this issue, we will tend to eat way more fat and sugar and red meat than we probably should.

-And the whole fat to muscle ratio thing is pretty discouraging, isn't it? A comedian named Ken Davis says that he's come up with a cheap, fast way to figure this out. He says, "I stand totally naked in front of a mirror with a stopwatch. I click the stopwatch and jump—and see how long it takes for the fat to stop jiggling!"

-There is **so** much information on how to eat healthy out there, I'm not going to venture into it too deeply. I just know that the route of fad diets and eating systems is not sustainable. We need a lifestyle change.

-Sometimes it takes a defining moment. I had a defining moment at 20 when I shaved off my beard and found another chin hiding under it. I thought, "If I'm not careful, I'm going to have so many chins I'll need a bookmark to find my mouth! My brother's defining moment was a mild heart attack last year. He has taken a radical approach to diet and exercise—and what helps him stay with it is accountability. We need accountability—someone who will travel with us and ask the hard questions without making us wear a pig mask if we have a bad week.

-Maybe the biggest thing for most of us is just being careful what kind of stuff we buy, making sure we have fruit in the house, and McEating out less. But the kind of fuel you and I put into our bodies does make a difference! And most people who give advice in this realm tell us to simply eat less--more frequently, eat more roughage and watch the fat and sugar content.

-The thing about physical energy is that if you put **too** much fuel—or the wrong kind of fuel in the tank, it can slow you right down!

7. There's one more arena that you and I need to pay attention to when it comes to building physical margin into our lives. It's sleep. Rest.
- Think for just a moment about Jesus' life. Jesus didn't stay up late studying, writing papers, and sending emails. The food that was available to most people in his culture was pretty healthy: a lot of fish, whole grain bread, and not much sugar. Was there pressure? Of course there was—but there were long walks between most of the encounters Jesus had which gave him exercise, breathing room, and time to emotionally recuperate. And then he got a great rest—because people went to bed when the sun went down—and got up when it showed up again. And people observed a gift God gave to people because He wanted them to live longer. Know what it was? Sabbath. A day off—with no work.

-Think of how Edison changed our world. Toronto is a fired up, well-lit, exciting, 24/7 place—humming with activity—and **filled** with people who are **chronically** sleep-deprived. How many of you have ever had someone wink their puffy, red little eyes at you and **brag** about how little sleep they get? There's almost this **shame** thing about getting 8 hours of sleep—like you're a sluggard or something.

-Think about sunrise—and sunset. The **shortest** interval between the two—unless you live in Timmons—is about 8 hours.

The longest interval is about 16—unless, of course, you live in Timmons. Does anyone remember who invented sleep? It wasn't the sloth. It was God. Sleep is your friend, not your enemy. The Bible says:

It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones. (Psalm 127:2 NLT)

-Are there exceptional people who can thrive on 5 or 6 hours of sleep a night? Of course. But very few—and, BTW, you're probably not one of them. If you want energy, **sleep** is a critical component. that builds those reserves into our bodies. The best research says that most of us need about 8 hours of sleep per night. When you get enough sleep, it leaves you more emotionally fit to handle life—and you get **more** done in **less** time. Again, I know it's cool in this part of the world to brag about how many hours you work and how little sleep you get—but you **cannot** cheat in this area. Know why? Cause you're not God—you're human—and you have **limits!**

-Just a tip. The best way to get the rest you need is to give yourself some time to chill out before you go to bed—and to add sleep on the right side—which would be the evening. And develop some consistency—like going to bed at the same time, getting up at the same time—and not having tough conversations or doing other upsetting things that keep you awake. If you need help—get it! You can have an excellent diet and exercise religiously—but a lack of sleep can totally drain your tank!

8. Why should you take your health seriously? Because loving God and loving others is not just a feeling; it requires action. Energy.

-Because your body is God's gift to you—for making that happen. Because you have **one life** to glorify God and build into the lives of others. Caring for your body properly is a **very** spiritual thing. God will **help** you—He does care, you know—but He won't do it for you. That's your responsibility.

I remember hearing a speaker named Bill Hybels talk about how his Dad was exceptional in just about every area of his life—except that he took horrible care of his body. Then Bill said, "You can be exceptional in 9 out of 10 areas of your life—but if the 10th one kills you, it doesn't matter! My Dad died at the age of 49 of a heart attack."

-This body God has given us is amazing! It is intricate, self-healing, strong—amazing, really. But to do what it needs to do, your body needs energy. And we are called to honor God with them.

HOMEWORK: Baby steps in the right direction.

Your homework this next week is to choose one of these three areas where you want to make changes. Paul says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. (Romans 12:1 TNIV)

Try that—every morning. “God—I offer you my body as an act of worship. Help me to care for it—so I can have the strength to honor you and help others.”

- a. If it's exercise: Take a one-mile walk 3 times.
- b. If it's diet: Replace any snacks after 5 p.m. with fruit
- c. If it's sleep: For 3 nights—go to bed one hour earlier

-Try this—and we'll report back next week!