



**Out of Chaos with 3 Big Words
"Saying No!"**

(Biblical Text: Luke 10:25-37)

*Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor
Old Mission Church, Fairway, Kansas*

I am convinced that most of our lives are just a little crazy. We struggle with multiple priorities, trying to find enough energy, time and money to handle them all, but often come up short. And it's not age-specific, either.

Parents and grandparents exhaust themselves supporting over-committed students who multi-task as a way of life. Longer days and larger workloads are a daily reality in everyone's career. And extended lifespans, declining energy, increasing insurance and medical costs, and diminishing resources make the golden age of retirement look less golden than we had hoped.

Sometimes we get an unanticipated burst of relief, excitement and laughter, like an invitation from a friend to dinner. Or, I just have to say it, the Royals winning again Friday night in extra innings! *Thank God for a blue October!*

But even then – we juggled multiple priorities to make room for baseball. Our Church Trustees traded dozens of emails and four strikeouts in a row before we got a hit for moving this Tuesday night's meeting. Why? Because we are so overscheduled that moving a meeting was almost impossible!

I am convinced that overload may be our primary cultural addiction.

I am not alone in my observations. Dr. Richard Swenson, who is not a theologian, but a medical doctor who happens to be a Christian, defines "margin" this way: *"Margin is the space between our load and our limits."*

He is convinced that we live in a margin-less culture which runs at an exponentially crazy pace. And our physical, mental, emotional, relational and financial health suffers. His book, Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives is worth the read.

He describes our lack of margin in this way:

*"Margin-less is being thirty minutes late to the doctor's office because you were twenty minutes late getting out of the bank because you were ten minutes late dropping the kids off at school because the car ran out of gas between your house and a gas station, and you forgot your wallet."*¹

¹ Swenson, Richard. Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives, Copyright © 2014, NavPress,

It would be funny if it weren't so often true. I don't have to ask if something like that has ever happened to you. I see it every week, almost every day.

I believe that God has a plan and a purpose that looks different than that for our lives - if we would allow ourselves space enough to find it.

And we can start by learning to say "no." You don't hear much about saying "no" in Church! Most of the time, preachers like me spend our time trying to convince people to say "yes." We ask you to say "yes" to following Jesus.

At Old Mission, we then ask you to say "yes" to worshipping regularly. We ask you to say "yes" to joining a Bible Study, Sunday School Class or Life Group so you can grow spiritually. We ask you to say "yes" to serving others. We ask you to say "yes" to supporting the Church financially. And we ask you to say "yes" to sharing your faith with others. We ask those people to do those things every time someone joins Old Mission, like Lisa will today as she is baptized this afternoon.

I make no apologies for being simple and clear about what it means to be a Christian. The problem is we don't help people find the kind of margin in their lives which helps them live out saying "yes" to those things.

But saying "no" is as Biblical as saying "yes." In Ephesians 5:17, Paul writes *"Don't be foolish with your lives."* Spend your life on things that matter! But here's the thing - we have to say "no" to some things so we can say, "yes," to God. Luke 10 is a great example of somebody who created enough *margin* in his life that he could do so. Let's open our Bibles and take a look.

It begins with Jesus, in verse 27, reminding the lawyer who asked him the question what it means to truly live - *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* (Loving God and Loving People.)

But the young lawyer couldn't leave it alone with that spiritual answer. Just like a lawyer and like most of us, he pressed for the specifics, the time commitment, the limits of loving, asking *"Just who is my neighbor?"*

But Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie says this: *"This parable is not about helping us determine who our neighbor is and to whom we are to show love; its focus is on teaching us about the kind of people we are to be."*² She, of course is right. Jesus didn't answer his question, but instead told him the story of the Good Samaritan, with a conclusion that even our children can understand.

² Alyce M. McKenzie is Professor of Biblical Studies at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

³⁰ ... *“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.”*

Jesus lays out three responses to the man in need. ³¹ ...*a Priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, passed by on the other side.* ³² ...*likewise a Levite, came to the place and saw him, and passed by on the other side.*

Not shining examples of compassion. Why? They weren't bad people – the text doesn't support that. I wonder what their lives were so full of that they didn't have or take time for what clearly Jesus thought was important.

But someone did take time to stop. ³³ ...*a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* I've talked before about the relationships between Jews and Samaritans. It wasn't good. But that's not the main point here. The point is that he **did** what we all **want** to do for someone in need, but usually too busy or overcommitted to actually do.

³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds... He brought him to an inn, and took care of him.* ³⁵ *The next day he took out two denarii, (today it would be our American Express card,) gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'*

Then Jesus asked, ³⁶ *“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”* We all know the answer. But what on earth does that story have to do with making choices, setting priorities and creating margin? **Only everything I am trying to say!**

Did all three of them have other places to go or to be? **We all do.**

Did all three of them have other things to do with their money? **We all do.**

Years ago, a legendary test was given at Harvard Divinity School. It was a three-hour essay on *“Being a Moral Christian in An Immoral Society.”* Half way through the test, the professor arranged for a break. The students were to leave the room for ten minutes, get fresh air and refreshments in the courtyard, and then come back and complete the test. Unknown to the students, the professor arranged for there to be a homeless man, sitting on a bench in the courtyard. But the students just drank their tea and ate their cookies and said to themselves: *“We better hurry back. We have this test to take.”* And every one of the students hurried back into the classroom to finish the test. And the professor flunked them all.

We all have to say “no” to something else to say “yes” to God. It's the hardest part of the parable Jesus told long ago to the lawyer who asked. His last words were these: *“Go and do likewise.”* **It's still his message today.**