



Manna in the Margin

Lately, I've been thinking about margin. My wife mentions it a lot, mostly to tell me that I need more of it. A little more time, cash, or space to manage the details. In that sense, a little margin goes a long way.

And yet, margin doesn't inspire on the same scale as, say, beauty, grace, or righteousness. People rarely record ballads about margin. Except for my friend Erika Haub's blog ("The Margins" at erika.haub.net) I don't see much talk about it online. It's not a very popular idea.

Few of us, in praying God's favor over our lives, exclaim, "Lord, please, marginalize me!" And it's not always clear what we mean, even when we *do* discuss it. Because to be marginalized is to be pushed to the side, into the less desirable periphery. So by its most basic definition, margin is just extra space around a border. Whether good or bad, margins are defined by not being the main thing.

But those spaces are far from empty. That's where all of us live. Just like margins can separate page from page, margins also delineate the in-between spaces, times, and places that we occupy in transit. As John Lennon famously wrote, it's what happens while we're making other plans.

But life in the margin gets overlooked because it seems inconsequential compared to the next big thing.

As of this writing, what's next for me is, hopefully, a new job. Being in a season of underemployment means I'm constantly juggling relational, fiscal, and logistical responsibilities, all the while trying to maximize as many employment opportunities as possible. It is, at times, exhausting and demoralizing. And it's tempting to put everything else on hold until I get the job thing figured out.

This is especially true of my prayer life. I find myself praying, literally every day, for wisdom and guidance surrounding my next season of ministry and employment. (Hopefully they converge, but alas, there are no guarantees.) But rarely do I remember to pray for what's happening *right now*. When I do, that's when I discover our God is active in the margin.

God has been, slowly but surely, re-awakening hope and courage in my heart, especially in ways that wouldn't have happened while I was working full-time.

Even so, I'm still confronted with the fear of the unknown on a daily basis. So my challenge is to keep coming to God, asking him not only for wisdom for the next thing, but for the passion, humility, and obedience to embrace *this thing*, this moment, even if I don't know what to do with it or how long it will last. Because there's *always* a next thing.

It helps to remember testimonies like that of actor Tony Hale, most popularly known from the cult-favorite comedy *Arrested Development*. (Bet you didn't know he was a Christian, didja? Add another marker on your Christian celebrity bingo board.) At a conference, I heard him speak of a period of deep depression early into his run on the Fox comedy. Since being a kid, he had dreamed of being on a successful TV sitcom, and when it finally happened he thought he was supposed to feel a glorious sense of accomplishment—but he didn't.

Tony Hale learned a valuable lesson about contentment—it's not an outcome, but a discipline. If we get too focused on anticipating the promised land, we miss out on the manna that God gives us each day.

And quite often, that manna waits for us—where else?—in the margin. ■

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