

Margin

"the balanced life"

Glance at the following two documents. How does looking at each make you feel?

A pastor was speaking at a college, and after one of the meetings a young man came to talk with him. The young man was quite upset. He told the pastor he felt that God had given up on him. He had grown up in a religious home, but when he came to college he had rebelled against everything he had ever been taught. He had broken his own standards and he had broken God's standards. He had gotten in trouble with the police. He had made quite a mess of things. What bothered him most, though, was that he had done the same wrong acts over and over again. He knew better, but he continued doing what he knew was wrong. He once thought of himself as a Christian, but no longer. He was convinced that God had given up on him. He felt that he was *beyond hope*. Perhaps you can identify with that young man. Perhaps you've done things you're ashamed of. In fact, you may have a dirty little secret that you keep bottled up in your life. You don't want to think about it, and you live in fear that someday somehow somebody will find you out. Deep down inside you are uncomfortable and even afraid. Once, perhaps, you may have been a regular part of the worshipping community, but no longer. What caused you to give up your faith was that you think that God might not tolerate someone like you. You, too, may feel that you are *beyond hope*. If you feel that way you are not alone. I'd like you to meet someone who messed up big time! In fact, he turned his back on God completely. You couldn't blame God for giving up on him. Peter was one of the best known of Jesus' disciples, and he served as a kind of unofficial spokesman for the group. Although Peter was brash and outspoken, he was intensely loyal to Jesus. Yet, in a way, Peter became a tragic moral failure. Here's what happened. Jesus was arrested and put on trial. Peter lingered outside the courthouse warming himself by a fire. As he stood there trying not to be noticed, a young woman spotted him and accused him of being a follower of Jesus. Peter was probably frightened by the accusation so he denied it. But the young woman wouldn't back off. She accused Peter a second time. Again Peter denied any association with Jesus. Then as he made his loud denial the crowd picked up on his accent. The accent was a dead giveaway. Peter wasn't from their part of the country. He was from up north. So the crowd joined the young woman in accusing Peter of being a disciple of Jesus. Then Peter cursed and swore and denied that he even knew Jesus. In that hour of crisis, Peter betrayed his good friend. If you had been there and heard Peter utter a stream of profanity to deny Jesus, would you have written him off? If you were Jesus would you have given up on Peter? If a friend did that to you, would you forgive her? That was a grim episode in Peter's life. And later, when he realized what he had done, he wept bitterly. Peter must have wondered if there was *any hope* for him. After all, in a way, he was no better than Judas who had betrayed Jesus. Peter had betrayed a friend, someone he had once sworn to protect. Jesus did exactly what He said He would do; He rose from the dead! And Peter was overjoyed. Yet at the same time, he was sick to his stomach. The kingdom of God had come in Jesus. Yet Peter felt he would never enter God's kingdom ... not after what he had done. He had rejected Jesus to save his own hide. When Jesus needed him the most, Peter could only think of himself. So when Jesus appeared alive on the third day, Peter was overjoyed and Peter was sick to his stomach. Sick of himself. Sick of thinking about it all. To get his mind off everything, he went fishing. Fishing was familiar. Fishing was work. Fishing might clear his mind and ease his stomach. Some of the other disciples joined Peter and they fished all night, but caught nothing. As the sky grew light in the east and the sun began to peak over the horizon, they noticed someone on the shore, but couldn't make out who it was. The stranger yelled out, "Good morning friends. Catch anything?" "NO", one of them replied. "Throw your nets on the right side of the boat and you'll get some." Immediately, John stood up in his boat and swept his net open and cast it to the right. It sank for a moment, then it came to life, the water boiling and churning with fish. The net was so full they couldn't get it into the boat. "Simon!" John was calling "Simon, it's Jesus! That is the Lord on shore!" Peter felt a sweet, terrible pain. He was excited, yet the sickness returned to his stomach. He jumped in the water and swam to shore as quickly as he could. Jesus had kindled a fire. Bread and fish were already laid on it. Breakfast was set. When the other disciples arrived, Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish. Come and have breakfast with me." As the other hungry disciples enjoyed their breakfast, Peter sat quietly. He didn't touch his food. He couldn't eat. He stared at Jesus and Jesus stared back at him. Peter wanted to crawl under a rock, and he would have, but Jesus opened His mouth. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Peter had once swore his allegiance to Jesus, saying, "Even if all fall away on account of you ... I never will. I'd die before I would ever disown you!") And so, the question, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Peter wondered, "Did he mean it? Was He granting me a place with Him?" Jesus spoke again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" The same words. The second time. "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." He said, "Tend my sheep." Jesus began to speak a third time, and Simon knew what was coming. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter bowed his head and started to cry. He knew. He knew. He knew how many times Peter had said he did not even know Him. Unable to raise his face to Jesus, Peter quietly responded, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus knelt down in front of Peter and lifted his head. "Feed my sheep." Yes! Jesus was offering him a place in the kingdom. *Shepherd my flock.* "Peter, when you were a young man, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wanted to go. But when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you don't want to go." *Peter, do you understand? I am telling you the sort of death you will die, by which you will glorify God.* He nodded. He understood. So Jesus stood up and said to Peter all over again what He had said at the very beginning. "Follow me." (from *"The Book of God"*) All of us can understand Peter. We've messed up more than once. We've made bad decisions. We've done the same wrong acts over and over again. We feel like God could never use us again. Three years earlier Jesus had called Peter to come and follow. Now He asks Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" Jesus gave Peter a second chance to do what he hadn't done that night outside the courtroom. He blew it big time the first time - in public. Jesus gives him a second time to publicly do it over. That's the good news of the grace of God. That's the good news of the forgiveness of sins. That's the Gospel of the second chance, of a third chance, of the hundredth chance. We live in a throw away society. What do we do when things break? We throw them away. It's not worth the time or money to try and fix them. Three strikes ... and your out! "Lock them up and throw away the key!" Earlier, Peter had turned his back on Jesus. Yet, after his resurrection, Jesus did what? He went looking for Peter. You see, Jesus had died for Peter. He died so that Peter's sins could be forgiven and so that your sin could be forgiven. What is more, Jesus restored Peter and set him free. In a matter of a few weeks Peter preached the first Christian sermon. Guess what his first sermon was titled? ... *"The God of The Second Chance"* No matter how great our sin, God's love and mercy are greater. You may be broken. You may have made some pretty big mistakes. You may have failed big time. You may feel quite worthless to God. But God doesn't live in a throw away society. When you are broken, God doesn't throw you away. He forgives you and restores you ... better than the original. There is room in God's kingdom for those who fail again and again. And that's good, for who of us doesn't continually fail? When God forgives you and restores you and gives you a second chance, what do you do with your second chance? "Simon (... *put in your name*) do you love me? If you do, feed my lambs. Care for my sheep. Look out for them. Help them. Feed them the Word of God." "Follow me!" More than anything, Jesus loves His sheep. So there's no more important task for you than to be part of His ministry of caring for His sheep. Who would have thought Peter could be forgiven, restored and used by the Lord after falling so far? But with Jesus all things are possible." So if you ever feel that you have drifted so far that you could never be of much use to God again, remember Peter and how Jesus gave him back his faith, his love, his hope, and made him a blessing to the entire church down through the centuries. "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his

The God of the Second Chance

John 21:15-19

A pastor was speaking at a college, and after one of the meetings a young man came to talk with him. The young man was quite upset. He told the pastor he felt that God had given up on him. He had grown up in a religious home, but when he came to college he had rebelled against everything he had ever been taught. He had broken his own standards and he had broken God's standards. He had gotten in trouble with the police. He had made quite a mess of things.

What bothered him most, though, was that he had done the same wrong acts over and over again. He knew better, but he continued doing what he knew was wrong. He once thought of himself as a Christian, but no longer. He was convinced that God had given up on him. He felt that he was *beyond hope*.

Perhaps you can identify with that young man. Perhaps you've done things you're ashamed of. In fact, you may have a dirty little secret that you keep bottled up in your life. You don't want to think about it, and you live in fear that someday somehow somebody will find you out. Deep down inside you are uncomfortable and even afraid.

Once, perhaps, you may have been a regular part of the worshipping community, but no longer. What caused you to give up your faith was that you think that God might not tolerate someone like you. You, too, may feel that you are *beyond hope*.

If you feel that way you are not alone. I'd like you to meet someone who messed up big time! In fact, he turned his back on God completely. You couldn't blame God for giving up on him.

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Here's what happened. Jesus was arrested and put on trial. Peter lingered outside the courthouse warming himself by a fire. As he stood there trying not to be noticed, a young woman spotted him and accused him of being a follower of Jesus. Peter was probably frightened by the accusation so he denied it. But the young woman wouldn't back off. She accused Peter a second time.

Again Peter denied any association with Jesus. Then as he made his loud denial the crowd picked up on his accent. The accent was a dead giveaway. Peter wasn't from their part of the country. He was from up north. So the crowd joined the young woman in accusing Peter of being a disciple of Jesus. Then Peter cursed and swore and denied that he even knew Jesus. In that hour of crisis, Peter betrayed his good friend.

RX: from the desk of Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

Overload is not having time to finish the book you're reading on stress.

Margin is having time to read it twice.

Overload is fatigue. Margin is energy.

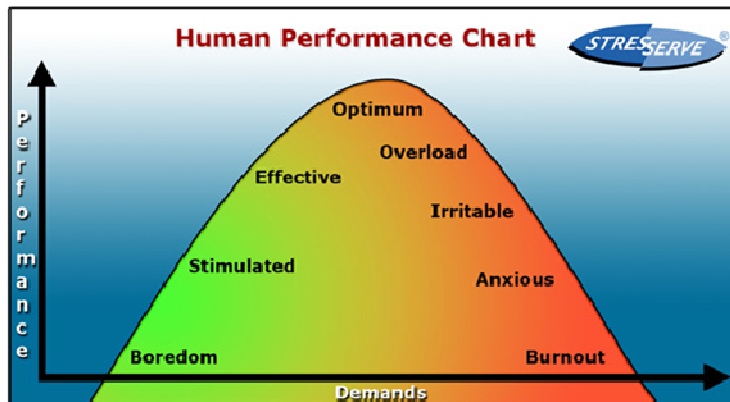
Overload is red ink. Margin is black ink.

Overload is hurry. Margin is calm.

Overload is anxiety. Margin is security.

Overload is the disease of the 90s.

Margin is the cure.



RX: from the desk of Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

Symptom: PAIN

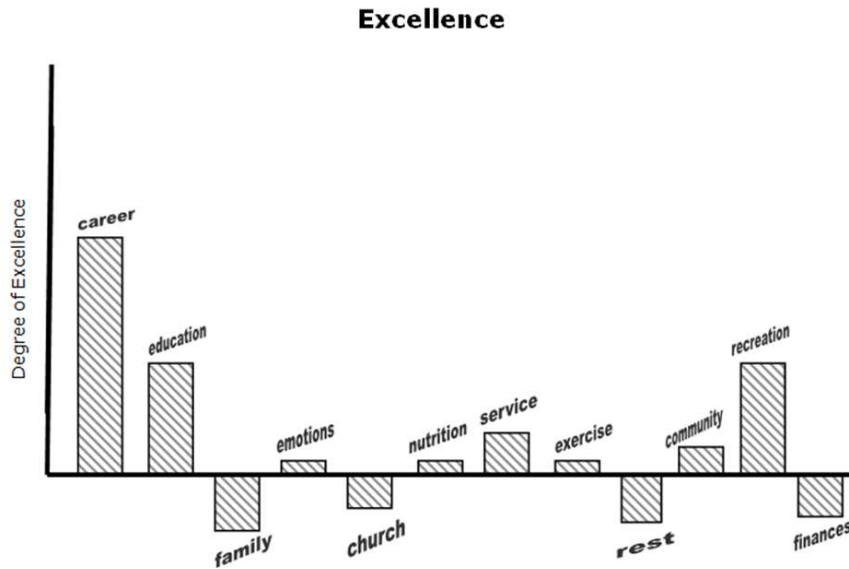
Diagnosis: OVERLOAD

Prescription: MARGIN

Prognosis: HEALTH

Therapeutic Goal: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

two views of excellence ...



Health

