

## Coffee with Phil. 28. What is margin

### **Introduction.**

Well, good day and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to Coffee with Phil. My name is Phil Strong and you are with me at home today. Yeah, a little bit more on that shortly. But I just had a cup of tea. Yeah, a cup of tea is always good when you're not well, and I roasted coffee though, just before I came into the office. So, the house is full of the aroma of freshly roasted coffee beans, and for that I am highly anticipating my coffees over the next few days.

But yeah, no, I haven't been well, in fact I just got out of hospital and that's not being a fun couple of weeks for sure, and look, I am going to talk about that in the upcoming episodes, but not today, and you're gonna, I'm just grinning as I look at my notes for today, which we're prepared several weeks ago, and I didn't quite make it into the studio to record, so here it is today, and ironically, as you can tell by the title of the episode, this is Coffee with Phil episode 28, and we're asking 'what is margin?' And so, I'm gonna talk about margin and I better define it first, but then I think you're gonna see how ironic this subject is in relation to the fact that I've just had to have a week holiday in hospital to get myself better. So, let's try and prevent that from happening again.

The key question I asked myself in preparing this podcast plan was, how can I have a healthy level of margin in my life, so I don't feel so overloaded. And so to understand that, we've got to understand what margin is, and, hmm, there's a whole bunch of ways you can look at this I'm gonna describe it to you this way, and let's see if we can get on the same page.

My definition of margin is the measured space between my current activity, or my current expectation of what my activity should be, and my anxiety line.

Now you're listening to this, some of you and you're thinking well, I don't get anxious. Yeah, look, I think the same. But what I mean by my anxiety line is my personal limit, and so each of us, doesn't matter whether you're a Superman, Batman, or Robin, you will have a personal limit and that personal limit, I am calling your anxiety line.

So, your margin is the measured space between your current activity or your expected level of activity and your personal limit which we call your anxiety line. Now, here's the thing, this needs to be a space greater than 0. So how can I have a healthy margin in my life so I don't feel so overloaded.

And herein lies my problem. Because there is a problem when we have 0 margin, when I operate at such a level that my current activity, or my current level of expected activity that I impose upon myself is so high that I am operating at the threshold of my personal limit, which becomes my anxiety line. This is called 0 margin and this means you're operating at full noise all of the time with no room for rest and this is really, I suppose, the crux of what I want to discuss today.

And speaking about anxiety lines, sometimes I open up all kinds of thoughts around what that might mean. But look, I understand this, please don't judge me by your limits. So don't look at me and say oh look, you're way too busy. No, no, no. I need to measure that based on my personal knowledge of what my limits are. Everybody has different limits, and I'm not judging you for your limits, whether they're high or low, and I don't want you to judge me for mine.

So, let's do this journey as a personal assessment of ourselves, but it's not a bad idea to be accountable to someone in how you're going in that journey.

Some of you will know that I'm a bit of a car guy, and so I like engines, I like going fast, and so I like to think of my activity in life like the rev speed of an engine. I'm guessing everyone that's listening to the podcast is old enough to drive. You've looked at a dashboard before. Most people have looked at a dashboard and at least acknowledged that there's a rev counter on the screen in front of them, and that is the number of revolutions that your engine is doing per minute, and so when your car is idling or you're cruising along in a school zone at a safe speed, your engine is doing maybe about 1000 revolutions per minute, and that means the needle is low on the dial. If suddenly you wanted to escape from Mr. Popo, who was chasing you because you hit a letter box and you sped, and went fast, and the engine speed increased, the rev speed would go up, and you see that needle go round to maybe 4 or 5000 depending on what you're driving.

Well, you need to think about this. What if you chose to operate your life at maximum revs for too long? So, you drove everywhere at 5, 6, 7000 revs? And like this is fine if you're a race car, because race cars are designed to go fast, but also, did you know that after every race, a race car engine is pulled completely to pieces and rebuilt to make sure that it's been inspected, and it's been cleaned, and it's been prepared for the next race.

But let me be honest with you, about me, I'm not a race car. I might be a Toyota Corolla, but I'm probably more like a Morris Minor and so not designed to operate at high wave speed for high lengths of time.

So, this is the way we need to look at margin. The reason we need margin in our lives is because we must put room in between the level that we expect to operate in, and what our personal limit is.

The final thought I'd have around this before I give some thoughts on how to track with this, is the personal limit line I've noticed in my life changes from season to season. I have seasons where I'm incredibly busy, and I'm thriving, and I'm getting stuff done man, and that's what I call an up season. It's a busy season and my tolerance levels are high, sometimes because they need to be, sometimes because I make room for them to be.

But I also know that there are seasons in my life where I have to have lower limits, less expectation. Less performance. Now in that season, I still need to have margin. So wherever I'm at, I need to know what my limit is, and I need to know where I'm choosing to operate, and I need to see a healthy fat piece of space between the two.

So, let's talk about that a little bit more, because I want to jump into the areas of our life that we might consider putting margin into, and by why we I mean me, and as you know, I'm on this journey with you to talk about what I'm doing, to be honest, to be open, to be vulnerable. But really 'cause I hope by sharing with you, you might gain some insights for yourself, so let's jump into this, see what we discover.

OK, what I want to do now is I want to jump through some key areas of our life that we could look at putting margin, inserting margin into our lives, and I think what I'm gonna do is I'm just gonna talk about it as it is today, and then you're probably gonna wanna follow the conversation because this could get real as I continue to unpack this over the next wee while.

Episode 29 has already mapped out and I should expect to see from episode 30 and onwards that there's going to be some diving into some of these conversations and a little bit more depth, you know, because I think that's really what God's got his finger on, not just for me, but for others that are feeling weary.

So let me talk about four areas of your life where you might want to put margin in, and let me speak personally and honestly about what I'm trying to do about it, and then you can decide what you're gonna do, if anything.

### **Put margin into your time.**

The first one is, let's put margin into our time.

OK, stop laughing. Here's what I keep saying to myself. I must stop cramming my day to overflow, and you've heard me speak about this before. You've heard me speak about the idea to slow down, to find room for quiet space to find room for less.

And so one of the things that putting quiet space into my day has done is to help my mind slow down, and so one of the things I don't like doing, is I don't like working right up till bedtime, or I don't like doing taxing activities just before bedtime, and what I'm trying to do physically is slow my mind down so that I can sleep well.

And one of the ways that helps me to do that is to put space in my schedule for nothing, and so I'm learning this discipline of just stopping pausing in my day, maybe once, maybe twice, maybe three times. Let's say minimum one time, and I'm trying to do nothing, I'm just trying to re-center myself to make sure that I'm not in a constant phase of manic activity, and the other thing that I've spoken to you about a couple of times recently is the new discipline in my life of adding silence to my daily discipline, so just being quiet before God, not even thinking I have to pray, not even thinking I have to listen to words that he might be saying to me, but just to be with him. And a friend of mine this morning reminded me of a phrase that was discussed recently, and a book we're working through, and that's the idea that we would remember we are human beings, not human doings.

I believe, personally the theology of creation, is that God created us because he wanted to be with us, not because he needs us, but because he desires to be with us. So, let's reflect that back to him and say God, I'm with you because I don't want something. I'm with you because I just want to be with you, and this is going to only happen if we choose to put margin into our time.

### **Put margin into your health.**

The second thing I wanted to talk about up front is to put margin into your health. I think too many of us ignore our health and usually we do that at our own cost, but also the cost of the people around us.

So let me say this. When was the last time you measured your weight, your body mass index, and when was the last time you had yourself assessed physically?

I can say this with some sense of pride because look at me, I'm doing what I'm preaching. But 4:30 this afternoon I'm off to the doctor to have a regular health check. It's a discipline that I started actually a long time ago when I was 40, not because I needed it then, but I knew that I needed it one day. And so that means we've got track record, we've got history, we've got markers and all the testings, and it's just a good thing to do.

The other way that you can put margin into your health is commit to exercise, like simply like walking. But a decent walk three times a week. One of the things that I suppose I'm concerned about for me, but more for some people, you know like generally, is that we live in an unhealthy space far too long, and by the time we need our health, it's too late to fix our health. And a wise person said to me years ago, it's way easier to fix your health in your 30s than it is in your 60s. And so, I haven't been awesome at that, but I am comfortable that I have margin in my health currently, and yeah, there could be more, so I can increase margin by eating healthy, or by cutting out unhealthy habits, or by picking up healthy habits, and that's one of the things that I think we all need to do.

### **Put margin into your emotions.**

The third area I wanted to reflect on was putting margin into your emotions. You know, we're all emotional creatures. Some of us wear our emotions close to the surface, and others hide them, but essentially you can't argue, we're all emotional creatures.

And so one of the ways that you can put margin into your emotions, to increase that space between your threshold, your limit, and where you are, is to remove pressure points. And so what are, seriously contemplating is how I can find, isolate, 2 pressure points in my emotional life that I can adjust.

So, let me say it this way, if you're thinking about reducing stress by removing pressure points you're going to increase your margin.

So, work is obviously a key thing for me that has a lot of demand, a lot of moving parts, and a lot of people as part of that circle. So, I need to think very carefully about the decisions that I make and the impact that it has on other people, but also my ability to function in the capacity of the role that I have to serve those people, and so I've gotta be very careful about making sure that I make the right decisions to put margin into my emotion so I continue to do the job that I'm called to do.

The other way to look at it is to think about, well, who are the people in my life. But what I was saying is look, maybe there is a person who is the problem that's creating the pressure that is sucking up the margin in your emotions, and quite frankly, I think that you might need to do something about it, and I know that I've been working on healthy ways to do that.

This is such a big deal that I'm going to dedicate Episode 29 to putting in boundaries and creating space, so watch out for that shortly.

### **Put margin into your spiritual health.**

And the final area that I wanted to talk about today was. I think we've got to each and everyone of us put margin into our spiritual health.

I've been talking about this journey I'm on at the moment around my spiritual health, and we're doing this with a group, and we're talking about being emotionally healthy and having an emotionally healthy spirituality, and the spirituality part of the conversation is really how, well to be honest guys, here's a way to look at it. How wide am I willing to open the door to allow God in to access every area of my heart? And if I wanna be spiritually healthy, then I really need to allow the Lord access to all the areas of my heart, even the darkest corners of my heart. The areas where I don't think he's going to want to go. And I can tell you friend, that's exactly the area that he does want to go.

But you know what? I don't think people really want to have that conversation, and I'll talk about why in a minute. So, the benefit of having margin in our spiritual health, margin is what I would say is the amount that you trust God with. So, most Christians do life where they say 'Yip, thanks, Lord, that's awesome, I got my bus ticket to heaven, I've got it from here' and they do everything in their own strength.

Whereas I find spiritual health with margin, is that that's the part of your life where you go 'I'm out of control because God's in control' and so when I talk about that, perhaps by addressing some of the challenges that we bring to the equation, and I want to finish with this in the podcast today.

## **Why don't we do these things.**

But before I get to the 'what are we going to ask God about' I thought I might reflect personally on why don't we put margin into our time? Why don't we put margin into our health? Why don't we put margin into our emotions? And why don't we put a margin into our spiritual health?

Well as I reflect on this I've come up with four questions that I've been asking myself, and I think they kind of reflect perhaps why we might avoid the self-care that's necessary to put margin in our lives to take care of ourselves to do the work God's taught us to do.

And so one of the questions I've been asking myself is 'what does my behaviour look like when I have FOMO?' FOMO as a phrase that we use a bit in our family. It's called, it just stands for fear of missing out. And if I have a fear of missing out I tend to act differently, irrationally, or in an unhealthy way.

So, the reason that I won't put margin into my time is I think I'm going to miss out on something. I think I'm going to fall short in a certain area, or perhaps I might think I'm going to miss the mark in getting the praise of the people that I'm looking to please.

But behaviour, just because you identify the behaviour doesn't make it good, and so the next part of that question really has to be what I'm going to do about this, and learning not to be driven by FOMO.

I'm going to move through these quickly because we could be here all afternoon otherwise, the second question is, 'what choices am I making when I fear lack?'

Lack is a crazy situation that occurs when we take our eyes off God and put our eyes on the problem. We start worshipping our circumstances and not the promise, and when we make choices out of lack fear of lack. We think we're not gonna have enough, we're thinking not good enough, we think God's not going to come through for us, we think we don't even have the faith that's necessary to be called a Christian, we make bad choices.

And I think the lack of margin is the evidence of bad choices. And so what I'm doing is I'm backtracking through some of those decisions I've made and I'm saying 'did, I fear? Was I afraid that lack was gonna rule that situation? And if lack was gonna rule, that means God's not ruling, and so how am I going to change that?' Because ultimately my choice is my behaviour, but that reflects my position of faith. So what choices am I making that promotes lack of my life?

The third question is, 'is my ignorance of my health going to catch up with me soon?'. So you can ignore margin and your time and your health, physical health, and your emotional health or your spiritual health, you can ignore it. But it's going to come knocking at some point. And, I'm happy to say, I mean you can tell that I'm doing a bit of a reflective journey at the moment, and I hope it's not a short journey in time, because there's a lot of work to do for all of us, but, I'm not ignorant of this, you know, I'm aware of where there's a lack of margin. I'm aware there's a shortfall in certain areas. I'm aware that there needs to be a bunch of work done to heal the past to improve the future.

So, I'm not worried about this one. But, I look at some Christians in my world, and I think maybe you got your head in the sand. Why would you ignore the problems that are building up in your life? Just because you could think you can carry them today? Cause you ain't gonna carry those long term. They get heavier, and heavier, and heavier. So please don't disregard the importance of this conversation.

And finally, here's the clincher 'Is it possible that I don't like myself enough to fully love and respect my time, health, emotions, or my relationship with God?' This is the slap across the face that we all were expecting me to bring at the end of this episode. 'Is it possible that I don't like myself enough to fully love and respect my time, my health, my emotions, or my relationship with God?'

You know, sometimes we ignore, or we disregard our own personal needs because we just don't like ourselves enough.

And that's, if I was going to dive super deep on that it would be called self-hatred. Self-hatred is usually because we haven't got through the resolution of issues of our past, and what's happened is we've left those issues sitting there and we've then turned those issues that are unresolved into judgement, therefore judging ourselves not to be worthy of God's forgiveness, and that's called self-hatred. And I reckon that's what people are doing, and I've been very careful to go through this, and I'm not quite through it, but I'm a long way through it.

But the thing is, sometimes the devil tricks us into thinking that we don't need to deal with issues because it's just between me and me, and we're all good aye, and those become massive millstones around our neck, and we end up having this self-condemnation, self-hatred, self-destructive behaviour, and it's going to cripple us because what we do then is we beat ourselves up, we abuse ourselves, we destroy our margins, we operate beyond our limits, and we burn ourselves out, or we thrash ourselves to death, or we fall off a cliff, and we're actually no good to anybody.

The Lord will wrap us up in his arms, he'll love us for eternity, that's not going to change, but we didn't help anyone along the way.

## **Ask the Lord.**

So, as I close I want to give you one of the tools that I use all the time, for myself, in the private of my conversation with the Lord, and maybe it would help you as well.

So, what I do is I ask the Lord this 'Is there something I need to forgive myself for that will set me free?' And the Lord's gonna bring to mind a situation of circumstance, perhaps you even thought you dealt with it, and he's bringing it to your attention because he thinks there's a little bit more work to do in that area.

Or sometimes it's this, 'whoa, I had forgotten about that, but yes, that is a major issue, and I've never, ever dealt with it, and OK, Lord, I'm ready to deal with it'. Or you're gonna be like, 'oh, no, Lord no, no, you don't get to go there, that's not fair, you can't do that' and you shut the door, and we're back to square one again.

So, one of those will apply. But look, the Lord doesn't reveal these things to judge or condemn you. He brings these to attention to help you find freedom. So if you're willing you then take that situation, and you say 'OK. Lord, thank you for revealing it, your gift to me is healing, so I choose to forgive myself. For in any way that I have caused issues, sin or a breakdown of my connection with you, and I ask you to also forgive me for my behaviour in the way that I was living my life'. And you can thrash that out with the Lord, it could be like a sin of omission, or a sin of commission, a sin you do, or something you didn't do. It could be behaviourally, it could be spiritually like there's so many things here, it could be just the way you view yourself 'I forgive myself for judging myself continually as never being good enough, and I renounce the lie that the devil keeps playing in my head as this replay, that I can't be loved by God ever because of what I did. I renounced that lie. I break the power of that lie in my life and I hand that lie over to God and I ask him to take it away', and while I'm doing that, I'm handing over the pain I'm handing over the fear I'm handing over the lack. I'm handing over rejection. I'm handing over isolation and breakdown and I'm giving it all to God so he can set me free, and as I finish, I say 'Father God, I receive your forgiveness and I ask what gift of love would you like to give me as part of this exchange?'

Hey, that's pretty deep and sometimes that's where we go, right? But finally, I just want to say, I've just got this in the notes, and I want to close with it, sometimes the best prayer we can pray is 'Father God, please help me to love myself well', and so that's a bonus you can have that for free today, no extra charge, you're welcome, 'Father God, please help me to love myself well' that's a good prayer, put it on your daily list.

Hey, well, I want to say thanks for being with me. Thanks for your journeying with me and not been well. Hope you've got the audio through OK today. If not, grab the transcription. It's always available Free, you can download that or get that where the podcast is. You can get the references and the notes, and make sure you subscribe, but do one thing better, make sure you share this podcast with someone else, because I know that you know someone that's struggling with this situation and if the Lord put it on my heart, and he's stirring you about it, then it's probably a deal for someone else as well. So go on, share the link for the podcast episode and they will thank you for it.

Well, God bless you guys. Look forward to seeing you once again for Coffee with Phil someday soon.