



Seventh-day Adventist  
Theological Seminary  
Andrews University

DSRE 541  
**Foundations of Biblical Spirituality**  
Spring 2026  
Southern Union  
*Allan Machado*

This course examines the essence of biblical Christianity and its connections to faith and practice. It places particular emphasis on spiritual growth through prayer, fasting, Bible study, journaling, stewardship, meditation, and personal retreats. The lectures present a framework for spiritual growth and maturity that impacts both individuals and the church. The course aims to cultivate a practical biblical definition of spiritual foundations, encouraging a deeper desire to know and serve God.

## Class & Contact Information

<b>Class location:</b>	<b>Forest Lake SDA 515 Harley Lester Lane Apopka, FL 32703-6129</b>
<b>Class Day/Time:</b>	<b>January 18 (6 pm-9 pm), January 19- 22 (8 am-5:30 pm)</b>
<b>Credits offered:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>Allan Machado</b>
<b>Telephone:</b>	<b>(786) 208-1964</b>
<b>Email:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:allan.machado@floridaconference.com">allan.machado@floridaconference.com</a></b>
<b>Office location:</b>	<b>Florida Conference of SDA</b>
<b>Office hours:</b>	<b>Email appointments</b>
<b>Class web</b>	<b><a href="#">Learning Hub</a></b>

## Course Prerequisites

### Prerequisites:

#### *Reportes de Lectura—30 points*

1. Leer 30 horas de los libros recomendados.
2. Este requisito cuenta por **30 puntos** del puntaje total del curso y debe ser entregado el primer día de clase—*enero 18, 2026*.
3. Los informes deberán entregarse por escrito y cada reporte debe contenerlos siguientes componentes:
  - a. Nombre del alumno

- b. Título del libro y nombre del autor
- c. Número de horas leídas
- d. Mención del tema o asunto que trata
- e. Principales ideas de la lectura
- f. Resumen, síntesis o reseña del texto
- g. Opinión del contenido de la lectura
- h. Conclusiones de la lectura.

Debe entregarse por lo menos 3 reportes de los libros recomendados con un mínimo de 4 páginas por reporte. (Siga el formato del “**Book Report**” anexo al final del prontuario). Estos reportes deben ser entregados el primer día de clase **enero 18**.

***Durante el Intensivo:***

1. Asistencia a clase: Los estudiantes deberán pasar 45 períodos de cincuenta minutos durante el intensivo con el profesor. Los participantes que pierdan cuatro períodos de clase sin el consentimiento por escrito del Decano del Seminario (Dr. Jiri Moskala), tendrán que repetir el curso.
2. El curso de Fundamentos Bíblicos de Crecimiento Espiritual envuelve el estudio y desarrollo de conceptos básicos de crecimiento/madurez espiritual, la participación interactiva durante la clase y completar los proyectos asignados durante el intensivo.
3. Retiro Espiritual: La mejor forma de descubrir las áreas en las que podemos crecer es a través del desarrollo de las disciplinas espirituales. Cada estudiante debe participar del retiro espiritual. Este retiro espiritual es requisito inexcusable de la clase. Los detalles del retiro se discutirán durante la clase.
4. Presentación del proyecto del grupo. Parte esencial del crecimiento espiritual es la *koinonia*. Cada estudiante será parte de un pequeño grupo de apoyo y crecimiento. Se reunirán para orar, estudiar la Palabra, y preparar y presentar el proyecto asignado durante la clase.

***Requisitos Post-Intensivo***

Escribir una monografía con un mínimo de 25 páginas compuesta por 5 capítulos. La monografía debe ser entregada para **marzo 18, 2026** en el [Learning Hub](#). Este requisito cuenta por **70 puntos** del puntaje total y deberá enviarse en un archivo electrónico (MSWord).

El proyecto trata de desarrollar, profundizar y poner en práctica las siguientes disciplinas espirituales: ayuno, oración, estudio de la Palabra, diario personal (*journaling*), mayordomía, meditación y retiros personales. El proyecto debe desarrollarse idealmente con una disciplina espiritual que no sea parte de la rutina devocional del alumno. En otras palabras, el proyecto debe estar basado en alguna disciplina espiritual que no sea practicada con regularidad por el alumno.

- **Capítulo 1** (3-5 páginas). Escoger una disciplina espiritual entre todas las estudiadas que pueda ayudar en el crecimiento y madurez espiritual del alumno. El área de crecimiento personal será definida durante el retiro espiritual que tomará lugar durante el intensivo. Describir la importancia de crecer en el área específica y cómo impactaría el ministerio.
- **Capítulo 2** (6-8 páginas). Desarrollar el fundamento teológico sobre la disciplina espiritual escogida. ¿Qué dice la Palabra sobre el tema?
- **Capítulo 3** (6-8 páginas) ¿Qué dice la literatura contemporánea del tema? Usar las fuentes citadas en la bibliografía. Citar por lo menos 10 autores diferentes. EGW puede citarse con frecuencia a través de la monografía, pero cuenta sólo como una fuente.
- **Capítulo 4** (6-8 páginas). Desarrollo del plan de crecimiento espiritual. Poner en práctica la disciplina espiritual escogida. Describir el plan con detalles y llevar un diario con reflexiones y resoluciones que puedan ayudar al momento de escribir la conclusión.
- **Capítulo 5** (3-5 páginas). Conclusión. ¿Cómo ayudó el estudio teológico y la investigación literaria al entendimiento general del tema? ¿Cuán beneficioso fue el proyecto en el crecimiento espiritual del alumno? Testimonio personal basado en las reflexiones y resoluciones tomadas durante el proyecto.

**Nota:**

Los informes deberán escribirse a doble espacio y de acuerdo con las reglas establecidas en el libro: *Andrews University Standards for Written Work*—Este libro puede bajarse de nuestra página: <http://www.andrews.edu/grad/documents/andrews-university-standards-for-written-work-as-of-october-2011.pdf>

La monografía debe tener la primera página o “cover page” con el título y la información del estudiante, la página de contenido por capítulos y al final del documento, la bibliografía. Todo esto en formato *Turabian*.

Cada monografía será calificada tomando en cuenta el siguiente criterio:

Contenido	50 puntos
Organización	5 puntos
Formato	5 puntos
Investigación	<u>10 puntos</u>
	<b>70 puntos</b>

# Course Materials

## Required Reading:

- Bailey, Boyd. *Learning to Lead Like Jesus*. Harvest House Publishers, 2018.
- Bunyan, J. *El Progreso del Peregrino*. New Kensington: Whitaker House, PA 2013.  
(Clásico de la Literatura, siglo XVII. Lectura requerida)
- Machado, A. (2025). *Transformación: Deja que Dios Haga una Mejor Versión de Ti*. Pacific Press Publishing Association.

## Recommended Reading:

- Heath, Chip & Heath, Dan. *The Power of Moments. Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Dick, Dan R. & Miller, B. (2011). *Equipped for Every Good Work, Building a Gifts-Based Church*. Wipf & Stock Pub.
- McNeal, Reggie. (2000). *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cole, N. (1999). *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups*. ChurchSmart/ CMA Resources. (También en español en formato electrónico, 2012)
- Habermas, Ronald T. (2008). *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## REVISION STATEMENT

The instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus for the benefit of the learning process with appropriate notification to the students.

# Course Overview

Course topics and assignments have been selected to contribute to learning and evaluating these Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) as follows:

## **Program Learning Outcomes (PO):**

1. Upon completion of this course, students will understand the biblical foundations and practices of devotional theology.
2. Understand the psychological and sociological foundations for growth in the Christian life.
3. Know the Seventh-day Adventist contributions to spiritual growth and spiritual disciplines in a more holistic approach.
4. Understand that the depth of their relationship with God will be expressed in their relationships with others.

## **Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) The student:**

1. The student will be able to identify their present devotional needs—based on their temperament and interests, the nature of learning, and areas of their lives where growth is needed.
2. Skillfully practice basic Christian spiritual disciplines.
3. Participate effectively in spiritual retreats and small groups for spiritual growth
4. Renew and commit to a personal devotional and spiritual life with Jesus, develop a consistent growth plan through spiritual disciplines, resulting in a deeper relationship with God.

# Topics and Assignments

Month	Day	Class Topic	Assignments Due Dates
January	18	<p>Syllabus review</p> <p>Course introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In search of real transformation. Is it possible to be different?</li> <li>• What spirituality is NOT</li> <li>• Ten truths about spiritual transformation</li> <li>• Jesus grew holistically (He. 5: 7-10)</li> <li>• Paul spiritual journey</li> </ul>	<p>Turn in required reading reports.</p> <p>Mail one MSW document by electronic file before 6 pm to: <a href="mailto:allan.machado@floridaconference.com">allan.machado@floridaconference.com</a> and post in the <a href="#">LearningHub</a> an electronic MSW document.</p>
January	19	<p>General definition in relation to spiritual growth topics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sin</li> <li>• Repentance</li> <li>• Confession</li> <li>• Forgiveness</li> <li>• Worship and communion</li> <li>• Soteriology more as a relationship than Knowledge</li> <li>• The difference between the biblical concept <i>gnosis</i> versus <i>ginosko</i></li> <li>• Maturity versus perfectionism</li> <li>• The influence of the Holy Spirit in</li> </ul>	<p>Devotional</p> <p>Group discussion</p>
January	20-22	<p>The influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True worship and spiritual growth</li> <li>• In spirit and in truth</li> <li>• Created to worship, created to grow spiritually</li> <li>• Worship, its true meaning</li> <li>• Worship as a lifestyle</li> <li>• Worship acceptable to God</li> </ul>	<p>Devotional</p> <p>Group discussion</p>

		<p>Spiritual disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fasting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Biblical fasting “The fast that God chooses” (Is. 58)</li> <li>– Purpose of fasting</li> <li>– Benefits of periodical fasting</li> <li>– Fasting could be more than ceasing eating</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Jesus and prayer</li> <li>– Seven elements of efficient prayer</li> <li>– How to spend an hour in prayer</li> <li>– “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Church prayer ministry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The study of the Bible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The Word of God. Solid foundation</li> <li>– EGW and the preeminence of the Word</li> <li>– Relationship with God and the study of the Bible</li> <li>– A church founded on the Word (Sola Scriptura)</li> <li>– Daily Bible reading plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Journaling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How to make a daily journal</li> <li>– Write with your heart</li> <li>– Find time to write</li> <li>– Daily reflections on the Word</li> <li>– Practical tools to make a daily journal</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– God is the owner of everything</li> <li>– God honors our faithfulness</li> <li>– When we give we are transformed as others benefit</li> <li>– Give without expecting anything</li> <li>– Being faithful must be the priority of your life</li> <li>– The joy of giving</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Devotional</p> <p>Group discussion</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Teaching by example</li> <li>• Meditation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To meditate in Jesus should be our first daily priority</li> <li>– The merit of silence</li> <li>– Learning to listen to God</li> <li>– Reflection at days end</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal Retreats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Take charge renewals (vacations)</li> <li>– Take time for spiritual retreats (at least once a month)</li> <li>– Remember the Sabbath day</li> <li>– Find time during the day to grow in a specific spiritual discipline</li> <li>– Find time during the day to disconnect in healthy and physical activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>January</b>	<b>22</b>	<p>Spiritual inventory (Questionnaire)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal core values</li> <li>• Spiritual maturity and true transformation</li> <li>• The Holy Spirit's ten answers</li> <li>• The super seven</li> <li>• Designing a "Rule of Life"</li> <li>• Self-assessment of spiritual maturity</li> </ul> <p>Spiritual retreat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a spiritual retreat?</li> <li>• Retreat objectives</li> <li>• God's presence in my past, present and future</li> <li>• The prayer-walk and the promises of God</li> <li>• Meditate on the Word</li> <li>• A joyful heart</li> <li>• Reflections</li> </ul>	<p>Spiritual Retreat</p> <p>Group Discussion</p>
<b>Mar</b>	<b>18</b>		<p><b>Post intensive project due March 18, 2026.</b> E-mail the MSW document by 6 pm to <a href="mailto:allan.machado@floridaconference.com">allan.machado@floridaconference.com</a> and post it on the LearningHub.</p>



# Attendance

Regular attendance is required at all classes and other academic appointments. When the total number of absences exceeds 10% of the total course appointments, the teacher may assign a failing grade. Merely being absent from campus does not exempt the student from this policy. Absences recorded because of late registration, suspension, and early/late vacation leaves are not excused. The class work missed may be made up only if the teacher allows. Three tardies are equal to one absence.

## Time Expectations for the Course

### US Credit-Hour Regulations

For every semester credit, the Andrews University credit hour definition requires that:

- **Courses for professional masters' degrees (e.g. MDiv)** include 15 instructor contact hours and 30 hours of independent learning activities.
- **Courses for academic masters' (e.g. MA [Religion]) and all doctoral degrees** include 15 instructor contact hours, and 45 hours of independent learning activities.

**The calculation of hours is based on the study skills of the average well-prepared graduate student.** Students weak in these skills: 1) may require more time and should consider taking fewer classes each semester; and 2) can find skill development assistance through the Seminary Study and Research Skills Colloquia, the AU Writing Center, and AU Student Success office.

In order to achieve the outcomes of this course, learning time will be distributed as follows:

Professional Masters' Program		
		3 Credits
Instructor Contact Hours	Face to Face Instructional Time	45 hrs
Independent Learning Activities	Assignment #1   Pre-Intensive Reading Book Reports	30 hrs
	Assignment #2   25-page project/paper	60 hrs
Total Hours:		135 hrs

**Note.** To ensure fair grading for everyone, grades will be assigned based on the above requirements alone. No individual arrangements will be made for those requesting last-minute grade adjustments or extra credit.

### **Submission of Assignments**

Assignments are to be turned in on Learning Hub before the dates indicated in the Course Overview--Above.

### **Late Submissions**

Because student assignments are an essential part of class activities, assignments turned in after the time they are due will be worth a maximum of 50% of the possible points. For this course, see penalties posted on the ***Course Overview Table***. Any requests for extra time on an assignment must be made in advance with the professor. Such requests should be rare and accompanied by a valid reason why the work could not be done by the due date.

## About your instructor

Pr. Allan Machado currently serves as the President of the Florida Conference. He has served the church in various places and capacities, including as pastor, Youth Leader Director, Volunteer Lay Ministry Coordinator, VP Ministerial Department, Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning, and Senior Management for Communication and Executive Secretary.

Pr. Machado holds a DMin in Pastoral Ministry from Andrews University and is an adjunct professor in the University's Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Pr. Machado is working on a second doctorate, a PhD with an emphasis in Religious Education. He is also the author of "Creados para Adorar," "Transformación: Metamorfosis Espiritual Bíblica," and "Transformation: Biblical Spiritual Metamorphosis."

His desire is to serve Christ Jesus by advancing the gospel for God's glory. He has dedicated his life to proclaiming with passion God's love and saving grace. His greatest pride and joy are his personal relationship with God and the love of his wife, Elsa, and their children, Alan, Erich, and Tatiana.

# OTHER COURSE-RELATED POLICIES

## **Academic Integrity**

The Seminary expects its students to exhibit rigorous moral integrity appropriate to ministry leaders representing Jesus Christ. Complete honesty in academic matters is a vital component of such integrity. Any breach of academic integrity in this class is subject to discipline. Consequences may include receipt of a reduced or failing grade, suspension or dismissal from the course, suspension or dismissal from the program, expulsion from the university, or degree cancellation. Disciplinary action may be retroactive if academic dishonesty becomes apparent after the student leaves the course, program, or university. A record of academic integrity violations is maintained by the University Student Academic Integrity Council. Repeated and/or flagrant offenses will be referred to an Academic Integrity Panel for recommendations on further penalties.

Academic Dishonesty includes:

- Plagiarism in which one fails to give credit every time use is made of another person's ideas or exact words, whether in a formal paper or in submitted notes or assignments.  
Credit is to be given by use of:
  - Correctly designed and inserted footnotes each time one makes use of another individual's research and/or ideas; and
  - Quotation marks placed around any exact phrases or sentences (3 or more words) taken from the text or speech of another individual.
- Presenting another's work as one's own (e.g., placement exams, homework assignments);
- Using materials during a quiz or examination other than those explicitly allowed by the teacher or program.
- Stealing, accepting, or studying from stolen quizzes or examination materials.
- Copying from another student during a regular or take-home test or quiz.
- Assisting another in acts of academic dishonesty
- Submitting the same work or major portions thereof, without permission from the instructors, to satisfy the requirements of more than one course.

For additional details see: [https://www.andrews.edu/academics/academic\\_integrity.html](https://www.andrews.edu/academics/academic_integrity.html)

## **Academic Accommodations**

If you qualify for accommodation under the American Disabilities Act, please see contact Student Success in Nethery Hall 100 ([disabilities@andrews.edu](mailto:disabilities@andrews.edu) or 269-471-6096) as soon as possible so that accommodations can be arranged.

## **Use of Electronics**

No recording or streaming is permitted in seminary courses.

Courtesy, respect, and professionalism dictate that laptops and cell phones are to be used only for

class-related activities during class time.

### **Communications and Updates**

Email is the official form of communication at Andrews University. Students are responsible for checking their Andrews University e-mail, Moodle, and iVue alerts regularly.

### **LearningHub Access**

Andrews University Learning Hub hosts this course online. Your Learning Hub username and password are the same as your Andrews username and password. Use the following contact information if you need technical assistance at any time during the course, or to report a problem with Learning Hub.

Username and password assistance	<a href="mailto:helpdesk@andrews.edu">helpdesk@andrews.edu</a>	(269) 471-6016
Technical assistance with Learning Hub	<a href="mailto:dlit@andrews.edu">dlit@andrews.edu</a>	(269) 471-3960
Technical assistance with your Andrews account	<a href="http://andrews.edu/hdchat/chat.php">http://andrews.edu/hdchat/chat.php</a>	

### **Emergency Protocol**

Andrews University takes the safety of its student seriously. Signs identifying emergency protocol are posted throughout buildings. Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting that specific location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during any evacuation or sheltering emergency.

***Please Note: The instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus, with the consensus of the class, at any time during the semester for the benefit of the learning process. The up-to-date Course Description for this course may be found at [www.learninghub.andrews.edu](http://www.learninghub.andrews.edu) .***

# APPENDIX 1: INTERPRETING LETTER GRADES

## Letter Grades and Percentages

95-100%	<b>A</b>	80-84%	<b>B</b>	65-69%	<b>C</b>
90-94%	<b>A-</b>	75-79%	<b>B-</b>	60-64%	<b>C-</b>
85-89%	<b>B+</b>	70-74%	<b>C+</b>	55-59%	<b>D</b>
				58-Below	<b>F</b>

### ***THE A GRADE***

An A grade is given only when a student not only fulfills the criteria for a B grade, but in doing so demonstrates an advanced academic aptitude for content knowledge, critique, synthesis, and independent insight, while exhibiting highly developed communication skills and professional publication standards that would allow them to pursue a highly competitive academic career.

### ***THE B GRADE***

The B grade is a sign that you have competently fulfilled all the requirements stipulated for an assessment or competency evaluation. It is a very good grade and demonstrates a high level of the knowledge, insight, critical competence, and professional presentation standards essential for an individual wishing to pursue a career as a professional leader in ministry.

### ***THE C GRADE***

The C grade differs only from a B grade in that the traits outlined in the B grade above are not consistently applied. However, with diligence and by applying feedback from your lecturer, the academic process can provide opportunity for a student to improve their consistency, and hence, their grade.

### ***THE D GRADE***

The D grade points to a limited level of knowledge, insight, and critique, as well as to inadequate quality of written work. This may be because of a lack of time management on the part of the student, difficulty grasping the concepts being taught, use of English as a second language, or a personal issue that is affecting one's concentration and motivation levels. Again, with diligence, applying feedback from your lecturer, and seeking services offered by the University like the writing lab or the counseling center, the academic process can provide an opportunity for a student to significantly improve their performance.

### ***THE F GRADE***

A failing grade is given when very limited or no demonstrable competency has been observed or when the final assignment is not submitted within the dates indicated in the Course Overview Table.

# ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

## Rubric for Assessing Project Plans

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	(5) Exceptional	(4) Proficient	(3) Satisfactory	(2) Emerging	(1) Unsatisfactory	Score
<b>Title Page</b>	Includes: 1) institution's name, 2) title, 3) name of the course, 4) course period, 5) name of the student, 6) date submitted, 7) follows AU Standards for Written work (AUSWW). Has no errors	Misses 1 of the 7 components	Misses 2 of the 7 components	Misses 3 components	Misses more than 3 components	
<b>Introduction</b>	The introduction is engaging, states the main topic and purpose of the paper, and previews the structure of the paper	Introduction states the main topic and purpose of the paper and previews its structure	States the main topic and purpose of the paper, but does not adequately preview its structure	The introduction states the main topic but lacks a purpose and a preview of its structure	There is no clear introduction or main topic, and the structure of the paper is missing	
<b>Project Description</b>	Project is described in detail. Protocols to be followed are presented. Specific aspects of the organization, implementation, and evaluation are offered. Meets paper length requirements	Project is well described. Some details regarding protocols, organization, implementation, and evaluation of the project are missing. Meets length	Project is satisfactorily described and meets paper length	Project is poorly described and does not meet number of pages.	The report misses entire sections of the project description. Does not meet paper length.	
<b>Organization</b>	Report provides a table of contents, and is organized using different subhead levels, following AUSWW. Subheadings are exceptionally well-worded and reflect upon the main subject. Exceeds all organizational specifications stated in the syllabus	Table of contents and subheading levels follow AUSWW Standards. Subtitles reflects upon the subject, but wording can be improved.	Paper provides a table of contents and is organized using different subheading level. However, does not follow AU standards of written work	Paper provides first level headings, but headings do not clearly reflect upon the subject. No table of contents. Does not follow all specifications stated in the syllabus and AUSWW	Does not provide a table of contents and is not divided under headings and subheadings. Does not follow organizational specifications stated in the syllabus and AUSWW	

<b>Format/Style</b>	All texts and references follow specifications from AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are outstanding. Models' language and style. No errors in punctuation, spelling, and sentence formation	Consistently follows AUSWW with minor flaws. Syntax and semantics are very good. No major errors in style	Consistently follows all AUSWW format. Syntax and semantics are good. Few errors in style	Inconsistently follows some AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are poor	Does not follow AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are deficient	
<b>Conclusion</b>	Conclusion is engaging and provides an outstanding overview of the project and personal reflections on projected implementation. Exceeds expectations	Conclusion restates the purpose, gives a good summary, and provides personal opinions about the outcome	Conclusion restates the purpose and satisfactorily summarizes results Lacks personal reflection on projected implementation	Conclusion attempts to summarize the thrust of the project but is ambiguous. Lacks personal reflection	Conclusion fails to summarize and to express personal reflection on the project	

## APPENDIX 2: Formato a seguir para el “Book Report”

**Student Name:**

**Instructor:**

**Class: DSRE 541 – *Foundations of Biblical Spirituality***

**Book Report**

### **“MARGIN, Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives” by Richard A. Swenson**

If your life is overloaded with work, family demands, church activities, and of course, stress, “Margin” is one of the best books you can read in order to be aware of those indispensable elements necessary to find balance in four key areas, good health, financial accountability, relationships, and spiritual stability. It is difficult to define “margin” without practical examples of the daily life so the author in simple words puts it like this: “Margin is having breath at the top of the staircase, money left at the end of the month, and sanity left at the end of adolescence.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, margin is the space that once existed between us and our limits. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. On the other hand, living a margin less life is basically running on empty not for a short period of time, but always.

How to simplify our lives so that we can enjoy those irrelevant things nobody seems to enjoy anymore like energy at the end of the workday, time with family, checkbook in black, emotional stability (calm), sense of security, time to relax. The answer of our generation has been “progress”. “Progress has given us unprecedented affluence, education, technology, and

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<sup>1</sup> “Margin” Richard A. Swenson, page 13



entertainment.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, something has gone wrong. Our cars are full of extras, our paycheck is bigger than ever, our washing machines, clothes dryers, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners declare our prosperous culture. There has never been so much progress; nevertheless, at the end of the day we are exhausted, depressed, worn-out. Therapists’ offices are full, sleep is less, and depressant pills are part of our daily life.

Margin has been stolen away, and progress was the thief. There can be little doubt that the contemporary absence of margin is linked to the march of progress. In general sense, those cultures with most progress are the same as those with the least margin. There are natural consequences of how progress sabotages margin. The author mentions a list of 5 of them:

1. Progress works by differentiating our environment, thus always giving us more and more of everything faster and faster. The American definition of happiness is, after all, “more than I have now” and progress provides “more” in abundance.
2. The spontaneous flow of progress is toward increasing stress, change, complexity, speed, intensity, and overload.
3. All humans have physical, mental, emotional, and financial limits that are relatively fixed.
4. The profusion of progress is on a collision course with human limits. Once the threshold of these limits is exceeded, overload displaces margin.
5. On the unsaturated side of their limits, humans can be open and expansive. On the saturated side of these limits, however, the rules of life totally change.

The author does not see progress as our enemy but for sure we need room to breathe, freedom to think and time to heal. “Discerning Christians have long known that God is not impressed with our wealth, education, or power. Nevertheless, we have labored eagerly in those

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Page 15

fields. What if, instead, we were to measure our progress not by our wealth but by our virtue, not by our education but by our humility, and not by our power but by our meekness?”<sup>3</sup>

We really need to go back to a simpler and balanced lifestyle. The spiritually minded have long sought it as a way of giving importance to what really matters most, the lordship of Christ. This means seeking God’s kingdom first, thus giving over our plans, our expectations, our future, our family, our reputation and our possessions to Him. “The simple life sounds attractive when you are in love with the Truth.”<sup>4</sup> Then, after you have freed yourself to pursue a different path, you will not desire more from your days on earth than simply to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (1Tim. 6: 6).

The balanced life today seems inaccessible, too many activities, too many choices, too many decisions, too many commitments, too many expectations, too much change. Overloads, stress, complexity, all are unbalancing pressures. In essence, we need to recognize that everything begins with priorities. In order to find balance, we need to have our priorities well defined, and we need to find the strength to stay in the plan. Moreover, we need to understand that we are limited by our own finite condition. Although we belong to a culture that preaches that everything is possible, the reality is another. God gave us limitations in order to help us find balance. “We should work hard to please our Master, but we also rest confidently knowing that He understands our condition.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 33

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Page 181

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Page 192

Part of living with margin is rest. We are a tired generation; we are sick of “hurry” we are burning up the engine. We are in need of rest: physical rest, emotional rest, and spiritual rest. God has instructed us that life is more than work. It includes relationships, worship, and of course, rest. Gordon Macdonald notes: “We do not rest because our work is done; we rest because God commanded it and created us to have a need for it.” “When our bodies find rest, we feel refreshed. When our emotions find rest, our countenance is lifted. When we find spiritual rest, we find acceptance of God.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, Page 200