

SPACIOUS NESS

Avoid the 8 Traps
that Steal Your Margin

Pete Scazzero

We were made to live every moment in loving union with Jesus. But how is this possible amidst the demands and expectations that surround us on every side? It starts by adopting a lifestyle of spaciousness.

“Spaciousness” is the word I use to describe an active resistance to the cramped, restricted, and over-scheduled way of the world. It’s about carefully designing our days, weeks, and months with ample room and unrushed margin. This starts with choosing to live with a full cup, not an empty one.

The greatest threat to a spacious life is the temptation of *overcommitment*. There are many reasons we find ourselves overcommitted, but the symptoms are often the same:

- You rush and hurry through your day.
- You can't shake the pressure from having too much to do in too little time.
- You're often late.
- You're unable to follow through on commitments.
- You say "I'm sorry" frequently because you have so much on your mind.
- You're tired physically, emotionally, and often spiritually.
- You experience stress, anxiety, and tightness in your body.
- Your co-workers, friends, and family experience you as preoccupied and distracted.
- You say "Yes" to invitations because you are concerned with what others think.
- You don't participate in deep listening (i.e., reflecting on feedback from others).
- You make decisions quickly, and many turn out messy.

Sound familiar? If so, you're not alone.

For many of my early years, I lived at an unsustainable pace of life and ministry. Even as a pastor, my life was on a tailspin, damaging my marriage to the point where my wife finally said, "I quit!" and left our church. This became the genesis of what we now call Emotionally Healthy Discipleship.

When our lives are crowded, cluttered, and cramped, it is impossible to hear God and live in loving union with Him. He did not create us to give ourselves to more activities than our spiritual, physical, and emotional reserves can sustain.

In this eBook, I expose eight traps that steal our margin while introducing practices to help foster spaciousness in our lives.

- What would it feel like to live each day with breathing room?
- How would limiting your commitments and claiming more margin in your schedule feel?
- What if you could build in time for extended thinking, praying, and being?
- What would your week look like if it was marked by joy, peace, and love flowing from within?

This is a life work; by God's grace, it's one of the greatest gifts we can give our scattered, fragmented, and overloaded world. However, it is critical we become acutely aware of the 8 deadly traps around us.

TRAP #1

UNDERESTIMATING HOW LONG THINGS TAKE

When allotting time for tasks and activities, a good rule of thumb is to double how long you think it will take.

I've learned from experience that what I initially think is a 2-hour commitment is more likely four or more hours.

For example, you agree to guest preach at another church. In your mind, it's only a 30-40 minute commitment, and you can easily share a message you've preached before, which means you don't even need to prepare. But have you considered how much preparation is required both spiritually and emotionally? Have you considered travel time and the extra time before and after this event? What about the time you need to pray and consider what unique thing God wants to say to this new audience?

We often severely underestimate what commitments require from us. But if we learn to plan our time realistically, we'll eliminate the pressure and create more spaciousness.

TRAP #2

OVERFUNCTIONING

We overfunction when we do for others what God hasn't asked us to do for them or what they can and should do for themselves. Overfunctioning kills spaciousness.

As Christian leaders, we want to help people. It's in our DNA to serve others. But our greatest strength can often be our greatest vulnerability. Over time, many pastors see themselves as the "savior" of all the problems in their churches and organizations. This mindset hurts us and hinders others.

Early in ministry, I overfunctioned by taking on the responsibilities I should have delegated. I didn't prioritize the development of our leadership team and opted to do much of the work myself.

Overfunctioning has five deadly consequences:

- It breeds resentment.
- It perpetuates immaturity.
- It prevents you from focusing on your life's calling.
- It erodes your spiritual life.
- It destroys community.

Identify the places in your life and work you are overfunctioning and ask God for the grace and timing to let them go.

TRAP #3

GETTING SEDUCED BY A WESTERN DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

It's easy to believe that bigger is always better.

Bigger influence. Bigger social media platforms. Bigger budgets. Bigger profits. Bigger staffs. Bigger outreaches.

The logic is simple: If you aren't getting bigger, you are failing (and potentially on your way to extinction).

When we define success wrongly, we invest our best energies in the wrong things. We compare ourselves to others and allow envy and greed to drive us. Out of stress and anxiety, we make new plans quickly to feel a sense of momentum. When we do this, we put on a heavy yoke that robs us of life.

Success, according to Scripture, is doing what God calls you to do - in His way and according to His timetable.

Success will look different for a vocational pastor, bi-vocational pastor, non-profit leader, and marketplace leader. The key is not to get seduced by the Western view of success. Why? It kills spaciousness.

TRAP #4

SAYING "YES" TOO QUICKLY TO REQUESTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

When we're hasty and say yes quickly, we miss God's way versus being prudent and giving thought to our ways (Proverbs 19:2).

New opportunities can be exciting. But instead of agreeing to every new opportunity, make a habit of saying, "Thank you. Let me get back to you on this one."

For example, it is tempting when someone asks you to commit to an event six months away because it seems far in the future. It's easy to respond, "Sure, I'm not busy then." Before you know it, the day arrives, and you wonder, "Why did I ever agree to this?"

There are times you know right away if an opportunity is not right. You must learn to say "no" immediately rather than being nice and delaying the decision. This eliminates unnecessary back-and-forth phone calls and emails, which also take time.

In short, resist the temptation to say "yes" quickly. Slow down. Separate yourself from the emotion of the moment. Talk with a friend or your spouse. Prayerfully review your calendar and attune afresh to your God-given priorities.

TRAP #5

BEING UNCLEAR ABOUT YOUR MAIN ASSIGNMENT FROM GOD

God has a primary assignment for you – in every season of your ministry.

Though you likely hold many different roles, the truth is that not all are equally important. Many pastors and leaders are bi-vocational, and it's common to have a "side hustle." However, you must remain clear on your primary calling within the Body of Christ.

Years ago, as a pastor, I wrestled with the fact that our church wasn't great at everything. In a large city like New York, I was aware of many churches doing phenomenal work. For example, I knew of pastors committed to having a debt-free church. Others were known for extraordinary Bible teaching. However, the center of my assignment was deep discipleship and leadership development, breaking new ground to integrate monastic, slowed-down spirituality with emotional health. The sense of a clear calling allowed me to remain undistracted from this main assignment.

It's imperative to seek God and get clear on your main priorities. When you have clarity, you can resist the temptation to expand beyond your limits.

TRAP #6

TREATING THE TEMPTATION OF GREED LIGHTLY

You've committed your life to Jesus, no matter the cost. Whether you're a pastor, a marketplace leader, or a non-profit leader, it is unlikely that money is your number one goal in life.

In our society, everything is driven by the economy. It is a powerful force that shapes us and we too can be seduced to say "Yes" to any opportunity that will enable us to generate more income. I realize many pastors are bi-vocational, and the desire to supplement income is not wrong. But we must be aware of the temptation to take on a bunch of "side hustles" rather than doing the hard work of staying focused on God's primary assignment for us.

This issue of greed is a deeply spiritual issue. Jesus talked about it as demonic and treated mammon as a rival spiritual power to God. Paul referred to greed as idolatry.

We often underestimate the pull of money because it represents security. But if you want to live a spacious life, the power of greed and money must be broken.

TRAP #7

OVER-SCHEDULING YOUR DAY

As leaders, we often have more on our to-do list than can be done in our available time. We're always looking for ways to maximize our schedules to accomplish as much as possible. Often, this results in over-scheduled days, which kills spaciousness.

We've all done it. You schedule a meeting from 1 - 2 p.m. The next meeting is booked right after, from 2 - 3 p.m. This pattern of back-to-back appointments continues all day, every day. On paper, it looks achievable. The abrupt gear shift from one meeting to the next, however, prevents us from being fully present and engaged.

To counter this trap, we need to adopt the Christian monastic practice known as "statio." It is a pause that refers to the space as we move from one meeting or activity to another. It's a planned mini-transition between activities to slow us down, allowing us to breathe, surrender to the Lord, and prepare for what is next.

So, instead of ending a meeting at 2 p.m., you end at 1:50 p.m., creating a 10-20 minute margin between meetings to be present with God and yourself.

TRAP #8

FORGETTING THAT BUSYNESS AND HURRY ARE ENEMIES OF SPIRITUALITY

Years ago, Eugene Peterson wrote that the idea of a "busy pastor" is a betrayal. It's on par with saying the "adulterous pastor" or the "embezzling pastor." It's an outrageous scandal. Hilary of Tours diagnosed our pastoral busyness as "a blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for him."

All of our work *for* Jesus can and should be done in the *way* of Jesus. Jesus was never in a rush. Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese theologian, authored a book entitled *Three Mile an Hour God* because the speed of walking is three miles an hour. The gospels do not say that Jesus ran from one place to another. He walked everywhere. He was very slow, yet He accomplished everything the Father asked Him to do. We must not forget that busyness and hurry are among the greatest enemies of true spirituality.

"Hurry delays the things of God" - Vincent DePaul (17th century Jesuit)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Becoming Contemplative Activists

The truth is – I don't believe we'll fully live in this kind of spaciousness until we get to heaven. There's no such thing as a perfectly paced life.

Thomas Aquinas was right when he wrote, *“The mixed life, that is a contemplative life while being active, is the most challenging of all callings.”*

To be a monk living behind walls, inactive in the world, is one thing. But to be a person in the world who's a “contemplative activist” is the most challenging calling of all. This requires great grace from God and a life-commitment to serious formation in Jesus over the long-haul.

Listen and Learn When You Get Off Track

Try as you might, you will occasionally get off track. You'll find yourself over-committed. When this happens (and it will), see it as a maturing opportunity. Listen to the stress in your body when you're exhausted.

Ask yourself questions like:

- “Why am I rushing?”
- “What am I trying to avoid or bypass?”
- “Why didn't I compensate after that big commitment and give myself an extra two days off?”
- “What am I so anxious about?”

Journal through these questions to learn any important lessons.

Anchor Yourself in Life-saving Practices

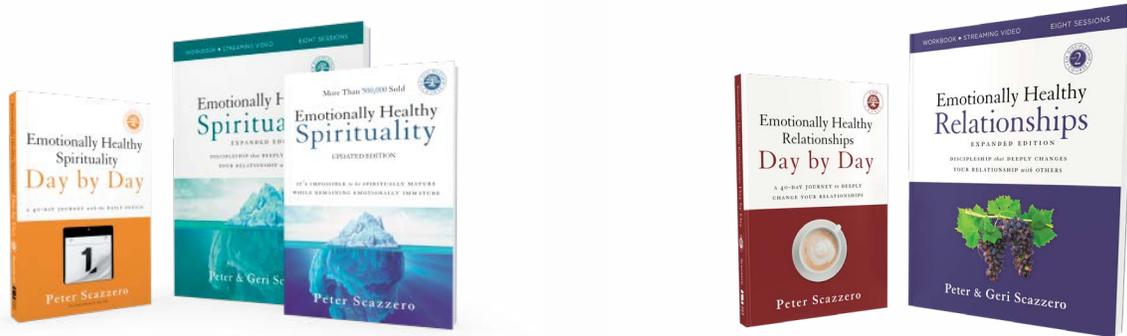
Finally, you must remember that your body is a major prophet, not a minor prophet. God speaks through our very physical beings. We don't get it right all the time.

That's why we must give ourselves to rhythms that anchor us in the love of God. We teach several core practices in the [Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course \(Parts 1 & 2\)](#), such as Sabbath-keeping, stopping three or more times daily to be with Jesus, observing silence and solitude, and creating a “Rule of Life.”

As pastors and leaders, we want to model and offer a great gift to the people we lead – that it's possible to live a spacious, unhurried life in Jesus. And as we do this, we offer hope to others that they, too, can live freely and spaciously in Jesus in the midst of the pressure and demands they face.

NEXT STEPS

The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course was designed to lay a theological and practical foundation for every member your church to slow down and be with Jesus. In this 2-part course, not only will your church learn the countercultural practice of Sabbath-keeping, but they'll learn much more.



Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (Part 1) is designed to deeply change your relationship with God, and **Emotionally Healthy Relationships (Part 2)** is designed to deeply change your relationships with others.

Preview the Course online at emotionallyhealthy.org/preview

ABOUT PETE SCAZZERO



Pete Scazzero, along with his wife, Geri, are the founders of [Emotionally Healthy Discipleship](https://emotionallyhealthy.org), a ground-breaking ministry that moves the church forward by slowing the church down, in order to multiply deeply changed leaders and disciples. This journey began when Pete founded New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York, a large, multiracial church with more than seventy-three countries represented—where he served as senior pastor for twenty-six years.

Pete hosts the top ranked [Emotionally Healthy Leader podcast](https://emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast) and is the author of a number of best-selling books, including *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* and *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*. He is also the author of *The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course (Part 1 and 2)* that has transformed tens of thousands of lives around the world.

For more information, visit emotionallyhealthy.org or connect with Pete on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/petescazzero), [Facebook](https://facebook.com/petescazzero), or [Instagram](https://instagram.com/petescazzero).