



**Marilyn Sharpe**  
Ministries, LLC

(612) 202-8152

[Email Marilyn](#)

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#### THIN YOUR ROWS FOR FAMILIES

- \* As a family, what are your core values?
- \* Looking at your family and individual calendars, are you living those values?
- \* Does your child know that achievements aren't the only things that are important?
- \* What are the character traits you hope your child will assimilate and exhibit, even when you aren't watching?
- \* As an adult, are you modeling a life that you'd like your child to follow?
- \* Do you have family time to just be together, share time, tell stories, explore your neighborhood, enjoy one another?
- \* Does your child have a childhood, that is, time to daydream and be creative, time to play without a jersey, coach, or referee? (Organized sports and activities are wonderful, but make sure they don't squeeze out time for the spontaneous and creative activities of childhood.)
- \* Do you really know your child?
- \* Does he or she really know you?
- \* Do you eat together, having a chance to soak in the presence of one another?
- \* What are the rituals and traditions you have that you hope your children will pass on to their children?
- \* Does each child you love know that you love him or her? How?

- \* For what do you wish your family had more time? How might you make that a priority?

#### THIN YOUR ROWS FOR CHURCH PROFESSIONALS

- \* What are the things you do in your job? Make an exhaustive list.
- \* Which ones are you really good at and do you love doing?
- \* Which ones do you dread or postpone or procrastinate? Why?
- \* Who in your congregation might love to do those things and is just waiting to be invited to use the gifts God has given them?
- \* How many children, youth, families, and adults do you really, really know in your congregation? (You cannot and should not know them all!)
- \* Who else might be a great person to connect with those you simply do not know and with whom you have not connected?

\* Invite others to join you in your ministry by naming their gifts, inviting them to participate in a specific ministry, asking them not to give you an answer right now, inviting them to pray about whether this is a way God is calling them to serve, and telling them you will be praying that God will give very clear direction. Then, put it on your calendar and call them in a week to ask how God is leading them to answer.

MAY 26, 2015

## THIN YOUR ROWS

"Thinning" is the title of one of Wayne Muller's sabbath practices in his amazing book, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. Muller encourages his readers to simplify their lives, make space for the truly important, and not believe that the abundant life is about cramming more things into it. But this beautiful passage was not my first experience with this concept.

Forty-one years ago, I planted my very first vegetable garden. My two year old was my able assistant. We opened the packet of carrot seeds. What??? It looked like a scant spoonful of coffee grounds that had lost their fragrance. I was incredulous that these tiny brown grains would ever become juicy carrots. But we followed the directions: made a shallow, linear indentation in the soil, sprinkled in the seeds, carefully covered them with soil, marked the row, and watered them thoroughly. Every day, my daughter watered the seeds ... and just two weeks later, we were rewarded when delicate, green, ferny carrot tops emerged. We were astonished at this miracle! The directions dictated that now we should thin this row of greens so that plants were 2-3 inches apart. Not on your life! I was not about to throw God's miraculous growth back in the Creator's face.

Fast forward to the end of September, when we went out to harvest our carrots, one of our very favorite vegetables. Grasping the carrot tops, we gave a gentle tug and up they came ... but to our surprise, there were only skinny, hairy, white roots. Not a single carrot. Why? We hadn't thinned our rows.

This became our personal parable: Unless you thin your rows, there is no space for life and growth to happen.

Unfortunately, I seem to be one who needs to relearn this lesson, season after season, year after year. It is not always, or even most importantly, a gardening lesson for me. A quick glance at my calendar - paper or electronic - reminds me that I have said "yes" to too many wonderful things ... and then despair, when my overly full life is not the abundant life Jesus promised, but a harried, frenetic, unsatisfying, and unsustainable race to pack too many commitments into each day. I am guessing that I am not the only one who does this.

Here are some of the lessons I have learned ... and had to relearn:

- A "no" is as holy as a "yes."
- A "yes" is a "no" to something else ... or it predicts that I will do some things less well or intentionally, and find them less soul-satisfying.
- There are many more important things to do than I have time to do and do well.
- There are many more important things to be done than I have gifts to do.
- If I do more than my share of those important things, I am depriving someone else of the opportunity to serve with their gifts.
- "Tired" is my least attractive state. If I am exhausted, I am short tempered, cranky, impatient, and inattentive to the real needs of people around me, especially the ones I love best in all the world.
- Being rushed squeezes joy out of my life.
- Savoring requires time. A buffer of time around

\* Who are the "unlikely suspects," those people that are never asked or invited to serve? Please invite them to use their gifts in service.

\* If those you invite demure because they don't feel they have the gifts, are well prepared, know enough, or can do this alone, let them know how you will train and support them. Invite them to ask a friend or acquaintance with whom they would like to do this ministry. In Luke 10, Jesus sent his followers out two-by-two.

\* Look at your calendar of ministries and ask, "Are there too many things for me to do?" or "Are we involving the same kids or adults too often, keeping them from being present with their families or friends?" Try this exercise to begin to "thin your rows."

\* If you are inspired and feel God is calling you to something new, what will you stop doing to make room for the new?

\* Examine the programs and activities that require a great deal of inviting, begging, or arm twisting to make happen. Pull together a small focus group to help you explore whether or not this is time to stop doing this or to give it a sabbath rest.

\* Bathe all of this in prayer and listen intently for God's answers.

each activity to appreciate and enjoy is essential to really get the most out of everything in my life.

- To be truly present to others, to my thoughts, to my relationship with God, I need to s-l-o-w down to the pace of relationships. Jesus modeled this when he had a conversation with the woman at the well, when he ate with his disciples, when he taught and healed all day and into the evening.
- Henry David Thoreau in Walden said it this way: "I love a broad margin to my life." In contemporary America, "busy" is our red badge of courage. It says we are important. It says that we are essential. Not only have we sacrificed a broad margin; I think many of us live with no margin ... and the world pays a price.

So, how might these apply to your life?

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#### NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning where God is calling your congregation now, and engaging all to participate? This might be the time for **coaching with Marilyn Sharpe**, a ministry partner who will focus, inspire, and walk with you and your ministry team to follow where God is leading.

CALL OR EMAIL NOW!

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**Add to your calendar today!**

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