

January/First Month: Create Margins

Introduction

Has anyone ever told you to give something 110%? Maybe your mum or dad? Maybe a soccer or footy coach or personal trainer? Maybe a youth leader or teacher? Inspiring words right? "Give it 110%. Go hard or go home. Don't just give it everything you've got - give it more than that."

One-hundred and ten per cent. It's a great motivational tool. But if you think about it, that's mathematically impossible. You can't give 110%. It's debatable whether we can even give 100% to anything. If you give 100% of your income, you'll end up naked and hungry. If you give 100% of your time to something, everything else will fall apart. If you spend 100% of your energy, you die.

The reality is we have limits. If you take on more and more projects, or use more and more of your money, or if you manage to fill every space in your calendar, you'll run yourself into the ground. We're just not capable of functioning like that.

God knew this, and so he came up with a brilliant idea: the Sabbath. "For one day every week," he said, "Stop doing your normal work. Just stop. Rest. Have a break. Have a Kit Kat. Hang out with your friends. Have a Sunday roast with your family. Climb a mountain. Go fishing. Enjoy life."

We call this creating MARGIN. God gave his people an amazing gift. The gift of space. Instead of using up all of their time, God's people only used up 6 days a week, and had a spare day at the end. Think about it: a spare day! How good would that be! A day where you could do whatever you wanted.

It's a great idea. But it's not always easy to pull off. Our culture likes to steal time and space from us at every opportunity. "Oh you have some spare money? How come you're still using such an old phone then? Oh you've got some spare time? Well why aren't you doing this?" Our culture doesn't like margins. And it doesn't just come from our culture. Sometimes we can shoot ourselves in the foot too. Many of us tend to feel a little guilty if we're not doing something meaningful, like we're just wasting time. Maybe especially in the church there's the idea going round that "busyness is next to godliness."

But we can't live like this, and this is why God taught us how to create margins. The reality is we need margins to live a healthy life. Space in our budgets, space in our calendars, space in our heads.

Jesus took advantage of the margins already in place from God, and it's vitally important that we too create margins of time, money and energy. We need times of rest, but we also need to make space to care for others. Without a surplus of time, we will constantly struggle to be Jesus to others when they need Him. We also need to set margins in our finances. If we have no "spare" cash, then we will be less likely to give to those who are in need.

I love the story in Mark 8:1 – 21 where Jesus feeds 4000 people. The actual miracle is amazing, and I would love to have been there to be a part of it. But look as well at the last bit. It says, "And when they collected up the leftovers there were seven baskets of food." Seven baskets! That's a lot of leftovers! Why would Jesus perform a miracle and over-estimate the amount of food required? If you follow the story afterwards, it seems that Jesus created a "margin" so that later when the disciples needed food, it was right there.

This month marks the beginning of your BIG YEAR, and it will be a big one. Each month there will be new challenges to go along with each new theme. Many of them will require some of your time, or money, or energy, or brain power. But you won't be able to do any of them if you have no space in your life. You can't add anything to your life if your calendar is already full, or if you're using up all of your energy, or if you are using 100% of your money.

So this first month is all about MARGINS. The challenges this month are all designed to help you create the space in your life that you will need to live out the rest of the Big Year. It's vitally important that you get this right first. Margins are about preparing for the future, whether that is next week, next month, or the rest of your life.

NB. Whenever people start A Big Year, they do the first month on Margins. After this they join in wherever the rest of the community is up to.

Challenges

There are challenges listed for each version of a Big Year. Please select the challenges that best suit you and your group or family. Also, feel free to rewrite the challenges, or create new challenges to better reflect Jesus' teaching in your day-to-day setting.

MARGINS | making space to live differently



- Work out a way to remind yourself to stop for a few minutes three times a day. When you stop, think about the things that you're thankful for and pray a short prayer of gratitude.
- Set aside an hour at the beginning of the month to conduct a 'life audit' - a list or map of all the things that you spend your time, energy and money on. Add a rating to each item which indicates how important it is to you. Put it in a place where you will see it every day and pray about the items you've listed. At the end of the month, go back and add a rating to each item that indicates how important it is in God's plan for you.
- Choose five nights this month where you can deliberately plan the time that you will go to bed. Stop 'doing' one hour before your planned bedtime (this means no internet, no TV, no phone calls, housework etc.). Take that hour to pray, reflect, paint or meditate. Are you able to recognise the still small voice of God anywhere in this?



- Take time to unplug from all technology. In that time, write a card to someone to say thank you or encourage them. Post it or give it to them in person.
- When meeting with friends this month, commit to making space with no electronic media or socialising but putting all your phones into the centre of the table. If anyone touches their phone during conversation, they have to pay for the whole bill!
- Go to one of your friends social media profiles and look at 1-2 of their recent entries. Before moving on, spend time reflecting on what they have posted and what might be happening in their lives. Take a moment to pray for them and provide a response that's encouraging.



- It is often when we make time to be in nature that we slow down our thinking. Connect with nature this month. Try some cloud watching, sitting outdoors and listening, walking rather than bike/car/train, have dinner in the park once a week.
- Set aside 5% of what you earn this month. You will need this money for future challenges.
- In one week this month, set aside a total of eight hours and undertake the following activities: Do something energising (2hr), Help others (2hr), Spend time with family (2hr), Share a meal with someone (2hr). Note: creating this amount of margin in your time in one week will help you in the months to come as there will be one *EIGHT HOUR CHALLENGE* each month.