

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.

MARGINS | making space to live differently



MONK

- Each day for a week, write or draw something you are thankful for. Put your writing/drawing in your jar. At the end of the week, take them out and look at them. Spend some time thanking God for these things.
- Decide on when you can all take one hour out over the weekend. During that time, each member of the family should do something that they enjoy doing but they must do it alone - without screen time and without interacting with anyone else in the family. Come back together at the end of the hour and discuss why you chose to do what you did and how it went.
- Have each member of the family track their 'margin time' for one week using Lego blocks. Put a quantity of blocks in your jar and at the end of each day have each member take out one block for each 30 min 'block' of time that they had during the day that wasn't allocated to something specific (e.g. work, school, household jobs, after-school activities). Each person can make a tower with their blocks and add to their tower every day as they gain more blocks. Over the week, you will begin to see the margin time (or lack of it) that you have available. You might like to repeat the challenge at the end of the month and see if anything changed.



CHEERLEADER

- For one day this month, be on the lookout for someone new to talk to or play with. Let them choose the conversation topic or game. Talk with each other about how it went.
- Make an effort to encourage other people this month. Each night, write down the names of the people you tried to encourage on a post-it note and stick it onto your jar. See if you can cover the whole jar.
- Plan to have one week this month completely screen-free (no TV, games or internet). Do other things with your time either together or alone. Play hide-and-seek, go star gazing or cloud watching, have dinner in the park.



ACTIVIST

- Arrange to look after another family's children at some time during the month so that the parents can have some free time.
- Ask each family member to put aside 5% of the money they receive this month. You will need this money for future challenges.