



# Margins

sunday 28 november  
connect group resource

## How to use this resource

These notes support the message shared each Sunday morning. There are four sections with thoughts and ideas for connect group leaders. Use the bits that best suit your group rather than try to cover all parts of this resource.

Each week there is a one page resource on the [church website](#) for individuals to use for their personal reflection or in discussion with family or friends.



## IN THE BIBLE

In the Bible we find many examples of margins being built into lives by the wisdom of God. If we have a car with a rev counter we know we are not to run it in the red zone for very long because it will ruin the engine. God made us and he knew that we can't run at maximum year after year without damaging the body and the mind and ultimately our spirit. Let's look at some of God's wisdom to build margins into our life. **Invite the group to read a passage and answer this question: how does this law from God help me to have margin in my life?**

**Exodus 16:23-29 & 20:8 & 31:13-16** – the Sabbath

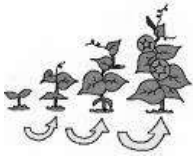
**Deuteronomy 15:1-4 & Leviticus 25:8-17, 29-31** – release from debts and return of land was God's plan to stop borrowers being in debt their whole life - *imagine how this would have blessed the current generation in their 20s & 30s wanting a home*

**Deuteronomy 31:9-13 & Nehemiah 8-18-9:1** – stopping for days at a time while there is the reading the entire Law during a festival.

**Leviticus 25:18-22** – resting the land every seventh year – *are we to maximise profit from all that we do every year?*

**Esther 9:28 & Exodus 12:14 & Luke 22:19-20** – festivals, times and days of remembrance to stop from the ordinary and recall what God has done for us – *how do we do this today?*

**Ruth 2:2-3 & 15-17 & Leviticus 19:9-10** – the principle of gleaning and helping those with little to enjoy some of what we have to share



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In this part of the series you might have heard the term '*less is more.*' I first heard it in relationship to preparing advertising material; we had so much we could say about a product but had to reduce content. The challenge each time was to take more and more text out until we are left with very little. That very little had to have huge impact. Examples are these slogans you will recognise and probably know the product: 'Just Do It!' or 'The Real Thing' or 'Where everyone gets a Bargain'. The Bible is an example of *less is more* when we realise that it could have been bigger than the contents of the entire internet ([read John 20:30 & 21:25](#)). Jesus was a master at *less is more*: look at His parables like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son and His teachings, each one shorter than one of today's sermons yet each sentence enough alone for us to meditate upon for a month (just read the Sermon on the Mount).

The meaning of the phrase *less is more* is 'the notion that simplicity and clarity lead to good design'. It was first found in print in 1855 in the poem *Andrea del Sarto* by the famous UK poet Robert Browning.

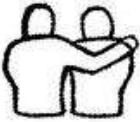
It has been said that if the devil can't trap us in sin to wreck our lives then **he will keep us really busy to stop us being effective.** A guest speaker to our church once said that the devil's strategy for us is **busyness** (which can mean *lively but meaningless activity*) coupled with **apathy** (*a lack of interest or concern for things that others find exciting or moving*) and **passivity** (*not reacting visibly to something that might be expected to produce manifestations of an emotion or feeling; not participating readily or actively*).

After sharing these thoughts and definitions with your group **ask them to share their views about less is more and busyness, apathy and passivity.** Look for common themes in the discussion and spend time identifying if there are similar things which rob members of margin in their life for rest and productive activity.

Research in America recently asked people from busy life-style cities what they would do if they had an extra day in the week, like they had an 8-day week. The most common answer was ..... work more! Check out the non-Christian mini-seminar *The Secret Powers of Time* from [RSA Animates](#) on You-Tube. Everyone gets an identical amount of time each day – the wealthiest, wisest and the poorest all get 24 hours. In this respect we are all equal. How we use our time can not simply be measured in financial or numerical terms; sometimes sitting with a hurting or lonely person for an hour is worth more to God than a full barn (compare [Matthew 25:35-40](#) with [Luke 12:16-21](#)).

If we have lived for a few decades then we will have gathered stuff in our home and in our schedule. Yet when we go on holiday we fit everything we need into a vehicle or a couple of suitcases. Holidays help us prioritise and bring what's essential because space is limited. **Invite the group to undertake this exercise.** Take a sheet of paper and pen and answer this question: if I had to find (not an option) an extra four hours in my week to do something which is now almost my highest priority, and I had to keep it up for four months, how would I do this? A clue: *less is more.*

After everyone has had time to work out their emergency change to life to get four more hours a week **ask them to volunteer to share what they would do.** After this ask would they do this if it was because of a health scare (e.g. you must get fit or you will die) and gather their answers. Then ask would you do it if it was to save a relationship (e.g. you must make time to save your marriage). After gathering answers leave the group with this thought: would we do it to spend more time with God developing greater intimacy with the Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit and serving the call on our life. This is not designed to make us feel guilty but to provoke us to assess whether or not we are utilising our time in the best possible way. The group might wish to discuss this thought and agree upon a decision. **Close in prayer to bless the group to use their time with Godly wisdom.**



## CARING & SHARING

If you do this section this week, you will need to teach a bit then ask the hard questions.

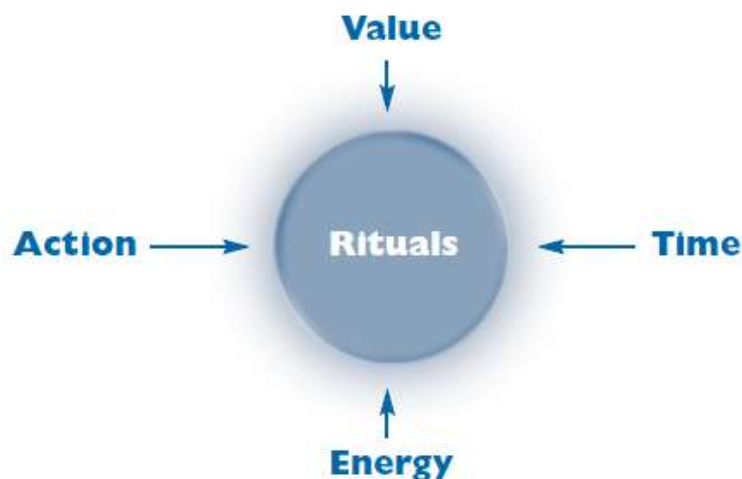
Jack Groppe trains top performing athletes and securities forces and he explained at a Willow Creek Church Leadership conference in 2005 (DVD available from [Richard Devine](#)) that 95% of what we do happens automatically, habitually and non-consciously. Things like breathing, blinking, driving familiar routes, personal mannerisms, sleeping and other routine actions we take every day. Only 5% of what we do is consciously self-regulated. He said we have daily **rituals** which allow us to function and challenged us to change the routine we have to get ready after waking up for the day. If we do something in the wrong order we are likely to find we miss doing something else, e.g. comb your hair first if it is the 4<sup>th</sup> thing you do. **Ask the group what they think of this statement relative to their life.**

Groppe asks people to complete this chart. You'll want to print this chart out (there are copies on the last page). This has been designed for non-Christian audiences as well; if people wish they can substitute *happiness* with *intimacy with God*. Ask each person to put a number in the left hand side rating the importance of each category to their life – 1 being not important and 10 being highly important (you can have multiple numbers the same like several 10s). Once everyone has done this ask them to rate the right hand side based upon the amount of time and energy they devote from their life to these areas – 1 being very little time & energy to 10 being lots of time & energy. Often people find that what they rate highly important gets very little time & energy. This can be a very sobering exercise.

### ALIGNING VALUES & ENGAGEMENT

(1-10)	_____	Job Performance	_____	(1-10)
(1-10)	_____	Health	_____	(1-10)
(1-10)	_____	Happiness	_____	(1-10)
(1-10)	_____	Family	_____	(1-10)
(1-10)	_____	Work / Life Balance	_____	(1-10)

He explained that our daily rituals (what we do and say; how we act and think) govern much of our life. If we want to change to have more margin in our life or to do what we really want to do but find we end up doing the opposite (read Paul's reflection on the power of sin - [Romans 7:13-20](#)) then we must change rituals. Groppe taught that our rituals are made up of four inputs:



We decide what we value then we must give what that time + physical and emotional energy + action/s to change the ritual. For example, if I overwork to the detriment of my family and I want this to change then I must reduce my time and energy at work and give it to my family and take an action I must arrive home earlier or leave for work later to spend time with my family. If I work for money to sustain a life-style beyond comfortable or necessary then I need to also take action not to spend so much money so I don't have to spend so much time at work. If I don't take action and redirect time and energy then it is just wishful thinking and I value work or success or possessions more than family. This can work with our relationship with God as well. The good news is if we keep this up our ritual changes and then it becomes automatic and easy to maintain.

This is a brief extract from a one and half hour talk plus a 45 minutes follow-up talk on how to apply change. Now it is time to guide the group to identify a ritual which they want to change. This is probably done best in smaller groups so each person gets a chance to share. Each person should be able to identify one thing and then work out a plan to change the inputs of time, energy and action. This is best written down. Encourage the other sin their small group to bless the desire and believe in the ability to change.



## REACHING OTHERS

**Do members of the group feel pressured** with narrow margins in life, especially time and financial margins? If many of us do then there is a really good chance that those who are not Christians feel the same. The challenge then is how do we help them gain more margin and discover the wisdom of God in respect to truths like having a day of rest and only serving one master, which is not money, and finding happiness in being a servant to others. **Ask the group to share some ideas.**

**Perhaps as a group we could help someone** through a Christmas Box donation or perhaps we could help someone with their property or vehicle maintenance, or financial management through the likes of CAPS (Christians Against Poverty) or caring for children. We are entering the end of a year which is a busy and expensive time for many people so time and money given now is a sacrifice and likely to be greatly valued by the recipient.

We have been taught to help practically and spiritually. Another way to help is if the group has identified someone in need of margin from the stress of life then we have the authority and power to change their circumstances. The stress might come from lack of a job, loneliness, illness, troubled family relationships, trouble at work etc. **Spend time in your group and afterwards interceding for the person.** Declare the truth of Scripture into their situation. Take authority over the work of the devil in their life with the blood of Jesus and our testimony of God delivering us from stress. Prophesy hope and freedom into their life. We honestly can change their world through intercession if we have faith. We don't just want them saved, we want them saved, set-free and whole by Christmas this year! Jesus did it for the man Decapolis and he was a mess who ended up winning 10 cities within a year or maybe less ([Mark 5:1-20](#) saved and fruit obviously in [Mark 7:31-37](#) when they welcomed Jesus). Amen.

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