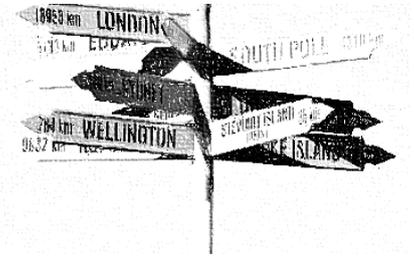


Too many things to do

Dealing with the tension of multiple commitments

'Busy'. It's a word we use often to describe the state of our lives. Although we may sound negative about it, we would probably be more worried if our lives weren't so full. So, should we be as busy as we are? And if we are to do less, how would we know what we should leave out? This study is based on Matthew 6 and explores some of the potential motives we may have in doing the things we do. It's a good place to begin if we are to consider taking things out. Hopefully you have time to do the study.



Things to do/ Questions to consider

To keep it concrete, take a moment to think about your activities for the coming week (or two).

These may include: work, faith commitments (eg mentoring, small groups and/or Sunday church service), people you intentionally see regularly, sports practices (either yours or your commitment to getting your children to theirs), socialising, supermarket shopping, hobbies (eg book reading groups), flat meetings, regular family gatherings....

Keep these in mind as you consider the questions that follow.

Read Matthew 6:1-34.

1. Looking good in the eyes of others

Read Mat 6:1. Jesus goes on to illustrate this verse with regards to financial giving (6:4), praying (6:6) and fasting (6:18), each time saying "your *Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*". Jesus warned them not to do things just so they would look good in the eyes of those around them. That may increase their status with others, but not with God. God was to be their primary audience, and by rewarding those who did things in secret, it was a helpful check on their motivation.

- We have mixed motives about everything. As you think through the list of things you do, which things are *more* motivated by how they make you look in the eyes of others?
- To put it another way, if you knew it wouldn't change the way these people think about you or value you, are there things you would no longer do?

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven..."

Matthew 6:1

2. Motivated by money

Read Mat 6:24. Money isn't evil in itself, but here Jesus warns that God and money can be in competition to be the primary motivator for us. One will always serve – or be in submission to – the other.

- As you think through the things you do, is it possible you might be doing more things than the Lord would want you to do so that you can either make or save more money? (*eg working in a well-paid but ill-fitting and overly demanding job*)

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Matthew 6:24

3. Keeping busy to earn our value

Read Mat 6:26. Unsure of our own worth, we can be tempted to try to earn value with God by doing value-able activities.

- Are there things you do in order to make you feel as though you are more acceptable to God? Given that God highly values you whether you do these things or not, what things could you stop doing?

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”
Matthew 6:26

4. Worrying

Jesus tells his listeners not to worry so much (v25,27,28,31,34) because ultimately worrying won't create anything of substance (eg 6:27 it won't add an extra hour to your life).

- Do your worries cause you to do more things than you would otherwise do if you didn't worry?
- Do your worries create extra 'brain activity' so that your mind feels more full and occupied than it would be without the worries?

“So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”
Matthew 6:31-32

5. Running after things to meet our needs

Read Mat 6:31-32. Jesus says not to worry about the things others 'run after'. Instead we are to trust the Lord to meet our needs.

- In these verses Jesus mentions food, drink and fashion, but what might be some other things our unbelieving friends and world chase after?

- What do you think are some of the needs people are trying to meet through these things? (eg *sense of belonging, value, security...*)

- Are there any of these things that you also 'run after' in order to have your needs met?

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
Matthew 6:33

6. Seek first his kingdom

Read Mat 6:33. Rather than worry about meeting our needs through many other things, Jesus encourages us to trust the Lord first and to ask him what we should do. Ultimately, he is in control; we are not, and he has our best interests at heart.

- In light of what we've covered in this study, are there any things the Lord has got your attention on? Is there anything you believe you need to do as a result?

Thought to finish

We are complex beings! We can have such a mix of motivations that shape why we do what we do. Jesus challenges us to look to God – rather than others or ourselves – to meet our needs, whether they be emotional, intellectual, physical or spiritual. He may well meet those needs through physical things or other people, but we must not lose sight of the ultimate satisfier of our needs. Then, as we trust the Lord and ask him what we should do and not do, we will discover that our worries and activities take their right proportions in our lives. Do less – trust more!