

Study 13

Minimize Multitasking and Live in the Moment

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James 4:14, NIV

The busyness of modern life has transformed us into a culture of multitaskers. It may seem innocuous enough—after all, we’re just getting more done with the limited amount of time available to us—but as we’ll see in a minute, multitasking comes with an exorbitant price tag.

Sometimes multitasking is unavoidable. Just ask any harried mom who has to watch a toddler or two and prepare a meal at the same time. But it’s also the case that we’re willing accomplices to much of our multitasking. Do any of these situations sound familiar? You’re on the phone but sending an e-mail simultaneously. You’re listening to your spouse but thinking about something else you have to do. You’re hearing your child’s account of his day but also scanning the headlines in the paper. You’re driving and eating a burger while talking on the cell phone.

We rationalize that it has to be this way to satisfy all our responsibilities. Consider this, though: there’s a growing body of evidence from psychologists and brain researchers (especially out of the University of Michigan, Harvard, and Carnegie Mellon University) indicating that not only do we perform our tasks more poorly

when we multitask, habitual multitasking also culminates in greater stress and in short-term memory loss.³

Maybe that explains why you have trouble recalling some of your day when someone asks you at dinnertime how your day went. Maybe that also explains why you sometimes walk into a room of your house, looking to retrieve something, but when you get to that room you've forgotten what it was you were looking for. You stand there in the middle of the room, dumbfounded, racking your brain for the reason you're there. But you were so busy mentally multitasking that en route, you lost one of the tasks.

Bottom line: "Multitasking makes you stupid" (to borrow a headline from media reports of these studies). Pretty amazing, huh? We expect bread and get a stone.

There's an even more important reason to minimize multitasking, though: when we do it, we shortchange people. Our spouse, our kids, our parents, our siblings, our coworkers, our friends ... usually, the people who eat the bitter fruit of our multitasking are those closest to us. Those God has entrusted to us. Because of our busy lives, for these people, too often we're there but not there.

Jesus knew better. He lived in the moment, focusing exclusively on the person before him, the situation at hand, the present. The woman at the well, the centurion, the disciples, the rich young man, the blind men, the lepers—they all had his complete attention. Read any Gospel story and you'll see that this is in fact true of every person with whom Jesus interacted, even those who interrupted what He was doing at the time.

Jesus wasn't so overloaded with things to do that He had to shortchange people. As a result, He modeled for us something God wants us to remember everyday: the most important person in the world is the person to whom you are talking. So don't multitask the moment away.

What would it take for you to embrace this lesson? What would it take to discipline your thought life so you could live in the moment and give people your complete,

undivided attention? How much less stressful would your life be if you focused on one thing at a time? How much better would your relationships be if you did?

And most importantly, how much more would people see Jesus in you?

Think About It

Assume you were going to try to minimize your multitasking. List the positive and negative consequences of this change. Do the positives outweigh the negatives?

For Group Discussion

What would it take for you to discipline your thought life so you could live in the moment and give people your complete, undivided attention?

How much less stressful would your life be if you focused on one thing at a time?

How much better would your relationships be if you did?

And how much more would people see Jesus in you?

Talk to God About It

Ask God to show you whom you shortchange by being “there but not there” for them. Ask God to help you be fully present to live in the moment with them.

Your Freedom from Busyness Plan, Part 13

Today, tell someone who knows you well that you’re trying to reduce your multitasking and to live in the moment. Ask this person to touch base with you once a day for the next seven days to ask how you did that day with your commitment.

³Sue Shellenbarger, “Multitasking Makes You Stupid: Studies Show Pitfalls of Doing Too Much at Once,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 27, 2003, D1.