

Michael McLaughlin asks us to reconsider how we spend our spare time

Do what ONLY you can do

You sit at work all day, listening to never ending medical problems, and trying to find solutions. Then you go home and different family situations compete for your attention. And then, on top of this, seemingly endless good causes suck up your precious spare time!

Stop and think. Not everything you do at work requires your individual attention; that's why the NHS has multi-disciplinary teams! And similarly, although no doubt you're brilliant at all these things you're doing outside of work, perhaps you should be passing them on to someone else. Perhaps, instead, you should be *doing what only you can do*.

In too deep

Moses is a good example of a gifted man too involved in the minutiae of life. Whilst leading the Israelites in the desert, he received a visit from his father-in-law Jethro. Sitting in on one of Moses' courts, watching him settle petty disputes and small claims, Jethro pointed out that Moses was wasting his time and his particular gifts. This should have been apparent to Moses himself, but he was in too deep and couldn't see the woods for the trees. He was trying to do everything himself! So, after a rethink, Moses enlisted the help of others to settle lesser cases, leaving ample time for him to deal with weightier matters.¹

Resource allocation

The principle of resource allocation is clearly taught in Scripture. In the early church, the Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts as he willed, intending that each person put their gift to the best possible use.² For example, it doesn't make any sense for a gifted teacher to do church business administration, or perhaps serve meals, when he or she could be teaching. Allow me to paraphrase the Apostles: 'Our time and skills are not best used in organising rotas and soup kitchens, as we have been gifted by God to study and teach the Bible to this growing church. Instead, let's appoint spiritually mature people to organise food distribution for the needy. Then we can get back to the work God wants us to do'.³

Doctors have unique giftings. True, many doctors are talented in various ways that are complementary but not specific to medicine – leadership qualities, organisational abilities, and the ability to think clearly – but then many non-medics also possess these in abundance. Usually, when people approach you for help with their good cause or committee, they are looking to use these more generic skills, not your medical talents.

Lateral thinking

So what can we do when people want to harness our talents to projects outside the scope of our specific giftings? Often a bit of lateral thinking is required, as when my pastor asked, 'How am I going to get you to serve on the church board?'

I was caught on the spot, but managed not to commit myself: 'I

don't think that's something I can do presently' *'You didn't even say you'd pray about it!'*

'I'm not convinced that it's the best investment of my time and gifting. There are many others in the church who can sit on the board. God has entrusted me with other things that only I can do.'

'But how can we influence our church leaders with your insights and wisdom if you don't sit on the board? There are five or six other key leaders like you in our church who serve in national ministries and I wish that you'd all take your turn!'

perhaps you should be passing some things on to someone else

What was my solution? 'Why don't you invite us one at a time to spend an occasional Saturday morning breakfast with the board discussing a critical issue or leadership in general? That way we can still concentrate on the areas only we can do'.

The crucial question

Over the years, I have met with thousands of Christian doctors and dentists. Yet when I ask them to consider using their special skills and gifts to mentor medical students and junior doctors, or perhaps hold the odd session in an inner-city clinic, many have to decline reluctantly as they are too heavily involved in very worthy yet non-medical Christian good causes.

Of course, which ministry each of us gets involved with has to be a personal decision. However, before deciding, I would encourage you first to ask this question, 'Is this something that only I can do?' The answer will help you determine the best investment of the influence, gifts, skills and resources God has entrusted to you.

After I once presented these ideas to a group of doctors, one of them admitted, 'I had intended to resign from discipling medical students. But I guess, after hearing what you've said, I need to continue doing what only I can do'.

Of course, we need to make good on the commitments we've already made. It may take a while to align your gifts and possible ministry involvements more properly. But it will happen sooner, if you keep asking, 'Is this something that only I can do?'

Adapted with permission from an article by Michael McLaughlin, Western Regional Director of Christian Medical and Dental Association, USA.

references

1. Exodus 18:13-26
2. 1 Corinthians 12:4-31
3. Acts 6:1-7