

Making the most of our time

The past year has seen a lot of changes for me. In twelve months there have been: one set of exams, two job applications, three job rotations, more night shifts and on-calls than I wish to count, small groups, CMF, church, sport, one wedding proposal with subsequent planning and marriage, and two house moves. It has most definitely been exciting, but certainly has been busy.

This is not an uncommon list among Christian junior doctors. We spend all day or night busying ourselves at work, but have so many outside commitments that we are just as busy when not at work.

I have had *The Busy Christian's Guide to Busyness*¹ on my bookshelf for a good two years now, but yes, you have guessed it, have not found the time to read it. Or at least, I have felt that I could not prioritise my time to read it. I have been grateful though for the chance to write this article, which has actually made me stop and think through things, and for the opportunity to attend the time management seminar at the junior doctors' conference. (I would highly recommend all junior doctors to fit this weekend into their busy schedules!) I am indebted both to the author of the book, and to Trevor Stammers for some of the following suggestions, which I have found useful over the past few months and hope that you do too.

How busy are you?

Cardiologist Meyer Friedman² described in 1999 a condition he termed 'hurry sickness'. He found that among others, symptoms of this condition included: regularly working half an hour a day longer than your contracted hours, checking work emails at home, not having enough time to pray, driving above the speed limit, and friends and family complaining they do not have enough time with you. Some of these I am sure occur daily for junior doctors.

One of the exercises we did during the seminar was to compose a life matrix. Essentially it is a three-by-three grid into which you put the nine activities that you spend your time doing. Once you have done this, you write what percentage of time you spend doing each one. On adding up those percentages, the majority of us totalled over one hundred percent, and among the common areas missed from the grid were sleeping and eating!

It certainly gave me something to reflect on, and I have found it useful to come back to it as a way of reassessing how I am doing, and what I am spending my time doing that is making me so busy. What has the Bible got to say about time management?

Work and rest

Both work and rest are important in the Bible. Paul writing to the Colossians urges us to work hard in all we do, as though working for the Lord, and not for man.³ Indeed, hard work is commended^{4,5}

and our satisfaction in it is a gift from God.^{6,7} The Bible also commends rest. Rest was the culmination of creation; when God's work was done, he rested.⁸ Jesus also rested, and encouraged his disciples to do so too.⁹ In the same way that God rested, and that Jesus rested, we also are to rest.

The idea is not that one is a means to the other, but that in our daily lives whether at work or at rest, it is all for the glory of God. The invitation is there from Jesus: 'Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.'¹⁰ We just have to take up that invitation.

Setting our priorities

The Bible is very clear on how we should prioritise our time: we are to 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness'.¹¹ Where this world has one set of priorities, as Christians we are called to have Kingdom values. We are urged to be wise in how we live, and to make the most of every opportunity.^{12,13} Paul was able to say that he had been faithful to the ministry that God had given him, and this too is the challenge we have.

Putting it into practice

How busy we are will naturally fluctuate throughout our lives, and although in itself busyness may not necessarily be a bad thing, the reasons behind it may be. Establishing the root of our own busyness can be the start to tackling it.

Identifying the areas that I particularly struggle with has been a start to addressing my busyness. I like having things to do, but I am not good at saying 'no', which means I can end up taking too much on, and being stretched. The result of this does not glorify God in either work or rest. God has given each of us skills and talents, and fortunately we are all different – we need to concentrate on the areas where we are gifted, while remaining servant-hearted.

"The "success" of our lives will be measured not in what we have "achieved", but in our faithfulness."¹⁴

Katy Barker (previously Lane) is a busy FY1 in Leeds, but she's working on that!

references

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| 1. Chester T. <i>The Busy Christian's Guide to Busyness</i> . IVP, 2006 | 7. Ecclesiastes 2:24 |
| 2. Meyer Friedman, 1999. Cited in: Chester T. <i>Op cit</i> | 8. Exodus 20:8-11 |
| 3. Colossians 3:23-24 | 9. Mark 6:31 |
| 4. Proverbs 6:6-11 | 10. Matthew 11:28 (<i>The Message</i> version) |
| 5. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 | 11. Matthew 6:33 |
| 6. Ecclesiastes 3:13 | 12. Ephesians 5:15-16 |
| | 13. Colossians 4:5 |
| | 14. Chester T. <i>Op cit</i> p.47 |