

just ask questions from students

Abigail Randall, a GP in East London and medical school link for Bart's and the London Medical School is now taking on this column.



competitiveness

Medical school seems to bring out my competitive side. I'm constantly comparing myself with others and wanting to do better than them. Is this wrong? Or is it right to want to glorify God by working my hardest and doing the best I can?

It's natural to want to do well in exams and to get the best grades we can. But it can be very hard to unpick our motives in this. There are many good motives for working hard and doing the best we can: avoiding the folly of laziness; wanting to display God's glory; seeking the best exam results in order to open up the maximum number of opportunities to serve the Lord, and so on. We might cite the lazy servant of Matthew 25:14-30, who disastrously buried his gift in the ground rather than putting it to use.

But our motivations can be nuanced and conflicted. It's so easy for pride to creep in. We want to do well by human standards and it makes us feel good when we do.

Beware envy. Wanting to do better than others adds a slightly different twist. If I want to do better than someone else then by the same token I want that person not to do so well as me.

Remember your identity. The world will tell us that our identity comes from what we do – I'm a midwifery student. I'm a medic. I'm a top rower. She runs the homeless shelter. She got 99% in that exam. But this is not the way God thinks of us. Our identity as Christians is based not on what we achieve, but on who we are – all that we are in Christ.

Don't fall into the trap of muddling identity with academic (or any other) achievements – you'll only be disappointed in the long run. For example, what

happens to that identity when you fail an exam, or don't know the answer to a question in the ophthalmology outpatient clinic? (Even if you never fail an exam, and your clinical knowledge is impeccable, these things are temporary and ultimately unfulfilling.)

We may glorify God with our exam results, but let's remember that God's glory is also showcased in the weak things of this world. Human wisdom tells you that the harder you work, the better your exam results. But God in his grace has chosen '...the lowly things of this world and the despised things...so that no one may boast before him.' (1 Corinthians 1:28-29)

Of course human understanding and medical knowledge are of some value, and don't let us waste valuable educational opportunities. But to set our hearts on particular grades above all else? 'Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.' (Colossians 3:1-2)

Practically, try to think more about the manner in which you study or spend your time, and less about the possible outcomes. The Lord is interested in our *doing right*, rather than our doing well. Remember Colossians 3:23, 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.' ■

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