

## What To Do About the Stuff You Have To Do

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My wife and I recently returned from living overseas and will soon move into a rental house here in Kansas City. These two things have made life difficult. Too many things to think about: health insurance, car insurance, car registration, couches, rugs, tables, chairs, plates, cups, mattresses, paints . . . makes me grumpy.



My wife and I agreed a long time ago that we don't do well with this kind of thing. Sometimes it's hard to deal with systemic regulations, like with taxes and recently with our car registration. Sometimes we struggle to make decisions about these things together (this morning, we each felt like the other was being too picky). And most of the time, we'd just plain rather be doing something else.

To be honest, I don't quite know how to deal with it all. It's pretty hard, actually, as I'm sure you all know from experience. How do you keep a heavenly mind when everything you're thinking about is so stinkin' earthly?

One reason that this is hard for us is that we see these "administrative tasks" as less valuable than other things, such as Bible study, prayer, and community life in the church. And actually, I think we're right about that. Jesus and his apostles communicate a worldview in which the eternal kingdom of God is more valuable and deserving of attention than the temporal earth. Because of this, I used to think that I could beat the system and somehow live an administration-free life. Well, I guess I'm learning that it's often a lot more work to try to beat the system than to let it beat you. So I guess I'm admitting that there's some valueless stuff that you have to buckle down and do.

My wife and I have naturally different ways of tackling the issue. Before marriage, she would attack tasks up front and hard. "I'll study the Bible or something like that, as soon as I finish it all." If she had an apartment to furnish, she'd work a week straight until it was done. She would allow it to consume her for a time in hopes that it would free up time for more valuable things later on. But . . . the later on often didn't come.

I, in contrast, would tend to put things off. "I'd rather pray right now, or something like that." Things would then go on until life would become overtly uncomfortable, unhelpful to others, or dangerously last-minute, and then I would have to face up to it, with ample amounts of stress and frustration.

We've tried a number of things to overcome the problem: a blanket "hour-a-day for administration" policy, more acute scheduling, more putting it off, etc. To be honest, none of these have *really* worked, though certain things have helped.

But, before you sign off, let me give you a few ideas that have been genuinely good for us.

**First, check again to see whether this task is really needed.** Have you ever thought that many, if not most, of the errands and tasks you do may be worthless? For example, you may own things that you simply don't need but that require a fair amount of maintenance. Could it be that you're piling work on yourself to support an infrastructure of things that are self-seeking? Or perhaps some of your work just springs up out of the expectations of society. You've always assumed you needed that third car because everyone you know has three cars. Consider cutting these things out and simplifying your life.

**Second, think about how this task serves something valuable.** Administrative tasks may not have inherent value, but they may support something valuable. My parents own a home that requires some maintenance; however, this maintenance allows them to use the home for significant acts of hospitality. We're working on registering a vehicle because our desire to foster community with others requires us to drive a lot (not to mention the fact that we're respecting the governing authority by doing so). We want to furnish our new place decently for the sake of fellowship, so that people will want to be there. Viewing tasks as means to achieving valuable goals can help you do them more purposefully and more joyfully.

**Finally, remember that your attitude is more important than the task.** Think about it. When you're trying to decide on the color of your couch, does God care more about whether or not you pick the right color or whether or not you act with kindness toward your wife? Even the best decisions or most efficiently executed tasks can be ruined by frustration, anger, love of money, contention, and selfishness. With these things especially, I think God cares more about who you are than what you do.