

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

88. The Truth About Multitasking and Distractions

You are listening to episode 88 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "The Truth About Multitasking and Distractions." Welcome to the podcast today! Thank you so much for joining me. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not very often and 10 being very often, where would you rate yourself on how often you multitask? If you never multitask, give yourself a 1. If you multitask multiple times a day, give yourself a 10. I wish I could hear your answer. We'll share them in our Encouragement for Real Life Community this week. Today in this episode we're looking at the truth about multitasking and just how much it affects us when it comes to distractions. You might find all of this very interesting as I did! So, stay with me here for the next short while and we'll explore it all together. Ready? Let's get to it.

She looked at me as if I had three eyeballs.

I'll never forget her face. When I told her I didn't like to multitask. She was the master at it. She had it down and multitasked in everything she did. While working out, she folded clothes. While driving her kids to school, she listened to training CDs (this was a number of years ago before podcasting was really a thing). As she made dinner, she created her to-do list for the next day.

Now, none of this involved a life-or-death situation, even though experts say doing anything else while driving can cause distracted driving. But she did two--or more--things at once, all the time. I felt a bit ridiculous in not excelling at multitasking, so I set out to learn from her. Because it was assumed if you multitasked, your brain was a highly functioning brain. The more you multitasked, the smarter you were! The more you multitasked, the more you got done! Right??

Dictionary.com defines multitasking as: computing the execution of various diverse tasks simultaneously; the carrying out of two or more tasks at the same time by one person. I find it interesting that Thesaurus.com adds the antonym of focus.

So, I guess that means focus is the opposite of multitasking?

And that's what researchers today are saying. Our brains are not created to focus on more than one thing at a time. In fact, it's impossible to do. Yet, multitaskers believe that's what they are doing all the time. But in reality, they are just switching from one task to another very quickly. Even if it may seem they are doing the tasks simultaneously.

Sounds harmless, though, doesn't it?

It does, until we look at research and results.

This constant switching back and forth taxes our brains and tires them out. Multitasking makes our brains less efficient, and it causes us to lose our focus, even during the times we aren't doing more than one thing at a time. That right there makes me nervous. Because, friend, we can't go to the store and

purchase another brain. You and I cannot get an upgraded version of our brains. These are the brains God gave us, and it's wise to take care of them, don't you think?

Because it's likely we don't think too much about our brains. We don't pay attention to them until something goes wrong. Until we begin to lose our focus, or we can't come up with the right words, or we begin to get distracted all the time. It's then we start paying attention to the amazing, what I call a miracle, organ in our heads. It weighs three pounds and is the center of our intelligence, senses, physical movements, and behavior. The National Institute of Health calls it the "crown jewel of the human body."

We each know our brains are important. Yet, we'll do activities and consume products that can do damage to our brains.

Multitasking is one of those activities.

Multitasking is a big distraction, and last week I found myself struggling with it, especially one afternoon. Get this! While attending an online training, I caught myself creating a few social posts. As I listened to a voicemail, I realized I was also trying to skim an article. As I finished my tax prep, I found myself scrolling through my phone. I was doing more than one thing at a time. No wonder I was exhausted at the end of the day!

Now, I know I'm not the only one who does this. I hear from other women they do this all the time. But I believe it's time to stop this kind of behavior, and I'm thinking I'm not the only one believing this.

Multitasking causes us to make more errors, and it relies on our brains much more than if we completed one task at a time. Plus, it's less effective and more time consuming! Studies now show that multitasking takes as much as 40% more time to complete a task than doing one thing at a time. 40%!

Add in the truth that the verdict is out at this point if multitasking behaviors affect our brains in just the short term or in the long term, too. One study had participants memorize letters in sequence while also doing math problems. Interestingly, those who were frequent multitaskers in real life performed the worst, yet the best performers were those who only multitasked sparingly in real life.

This is the motivation we need to make some changes!

Not to mention how multitasking can increase our stress, which affects our cardiovascular and neurological health, and how it is linked to anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders.

No thank you.

Multitasking is one of the biggest distractions in today's world.

For many reasons. But some of the main ones are we have more information bombarding our brains than ever. We have more on our plates and in our schedules than ever. And we're doing the best we can with what we have, trying to live our best lives.

But multitasking isn't the best for us. It's not God's best for us. Because if it was, He would have designed our brains to do more than one thing at a time. He would have equipped us to easily handle focusing on two things (or more) with ease. But He didn't. Because of this, I firmly believe He never meant for us to multitask.

These are the minds he gave us instead:

For God did not give us a spirit of fear. He gave us a spirit of power and of love and of a good mind. 2 Timothy 1:7 NLV

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:5-6 NIV

Some researchers say we aren't interested anymore in staying idle and simply doing nothing. When was the last time we did that? Nothing? Have we lost the ability to simply be alone with our thoughts? When was the last time you just sat and thought? Have we also lost the capability to do one thing at a time?

Let's find out. For the remainder of the day, I invite you to join me in single tasking. Just doing one single task at a time. When you're paying bills, pay bills. When you're doing laundry, just do laundry. Or when you're in a meeting, be all in that meeting. Catch yourself anytime you try to incorporate another task with what you're already doing. See what happens. See if you struggle with this at all. You might not, which is great. But if you do, you might become aware of how multitasking has become a distraction in your life.

Now, there's no shame in that, because of my example from the other day, I know it's become a big one in mine. But I'm working on doing one thing at a time. One thing.

So, how do we stop multitasking after we realize it's become a distraction?

These ideas might help:

- Pray for God's help and equipping to stop multitasking.
- Silence your device and email notifications while working on a task.
- When appropriate, complete small tasks first to get you in the frame of mind of completing one thing at a time.
- Set a timer to work on one task for an allotted amount of time (20 or 30 minutes). Then take a break and switch to another task if necessary.
- Check your email in the morning and an hour before you close down your computer at the end of the work day.
- Set specific times to log on to social media and set a time limit.
- Remove anything that distracts your workspace, especially any sort of clutter.
- Practice focusing only on what you're doing in the moment.
- Make "one thing at a time" your new motto! Write it everywhere and add it to your phone screen. I've created some tools for you in my Free Resource tab on my site. You'll find a new lock screen and more! The link to this is in the show notes.

If we've multitasked for years, changing our habits will take some time. We can't expect change overnight, but with dedicated effort, we can begin to help ourselves--and our brains!--to stop this madness of multitasking. Let's begin building new habits--one-thing-at-a-time habits--today.

We're taking this conversation over to our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. This will be a fun subject to discuss this week. Come on over and join in the conversation. The link to this group is in the show notes. I hope to see you there!

Also, if you found some encouragement in this episode, would you please consider rating and or reviewing it so others can find this encouragement too? This helps so much. Also be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you never miss a new episode.

In closing, sometimes our biggest distractions come from within, and multitasking is one of them. You and I deserve to treat ourselves--and our brains--better. I'm joining you in this endeavor, in this quest to retrain our brains to do one thing at a time. Imagine a week from now, a month from now, how we'll feel in making this positive mental shift and changing our habits regarding multitasking. We can do this with God's help, and I'm cheering you on. God bless you!

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