Matthew 6:19-21 *Navigating Family Priorities: Tattered Ribbons and Rusty Trophies*

***FOMO***There is a new social anxiety being talked about and studied by psychologists and trend spotters. It’s called the “fear of missing out,” or **FOMO** for short.

It works like this: you are sitting at home some evening, perhaps enjoying a bowl of popcorn and watching a movie with your family; when suddenly your phone starts to ding and buzz with all sorts of notifications. You can’t resist the urge to find out what is going on, so you open your phone to find that one of your Facebook friends has just posted a video of little Junior and his flag football team winning the championship. Then another friend sends Instagram photos of their little girls in pretty pink tutus getting ready for the dance recital. Then a Snapchat comes through from friends stopping at a convenience store on their way to the city for a weekend soccer tournament. On and on it goes: an update from your regular babysitter gushing about preparations for the school play; photos of your friends’ kids showing off their ribbons and projects from the Clay County Fair; a fundraising request from a High school band member raising money for a trip to Florida. Status updates, insta-photos, Tweets and texts: all showing you the exciting and fast-paced lives your friends are living.

And here’s what happens: suddenly your popcorn doesn’t taste so good. You look at your kids in their pajamas watching a Pixar movie, and you are filled with self-doubt. You wonder: are you giving your kids enough opportunities? Are you holding them back, limiting their potential? Should you be busier? Should you have your kids out there, involved, doing more things? Are you missing out?

That’s FOMO. The fear of missing out. The uneasy and sometimes all-consuming fear that others are doing something or experiencing something that you are not.

The principle behind FOMO is nothing new. It’s basic social comparison. It’s the old idea of “keeping up with the Joneses.” It’s our inborn desire to measure our lives against those around us, to outdo one another in certain categories of success or accomplishment, to feel like we are doing things as well as others.

The phrase, “Fear of Missing Out” was first coined in the ‘90s by marketers who shamelessly use it to convince us to buy more things. The acronym, FOMO, and the corresponding hashtag have emerged in the last few years as people have recognized the intensifying effect that social media has on this feeling. It seems that getting constant, almost real time updates on your friends’ activities and adventures has a tendency to leave one feeling left out.

A New York Times writer named Jenna Wortham is often credited with pushing FOMO into the public consciousness with a 2011 article. She wrote about a friend who works in advertising who told her that she felt fine about her life—until she opened Facebook. The friend said, "Then I'm thinking, I am 28, with three roommates, and, oh, it looks like they have a precious baby and a mortgage. And then I [wanted to] die." Wortham claims that social media updates can make our simple domestic pleasures pale in comparison with all the fun things we *could* or *should* be doing. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/10/business/10ping.html>)

***Busy Families***We are in the middle of a sermon series called “Navigating Family Priorities.” We are acknowledging that we are all busy, and we live in a culture of busy-ness. And we are recognizing that our busy-ness can get in the way of our relationship with God. That often, we do not feel as connected to Jesus as we would like because our schedules do not allow it. As we’ve been saying: it is a problem for all of us, but we are particularly thinking about what it looks like for families with school-age children.

The passage of scripture that we are using to guide us through this topic is Matthew 6. This is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and particularly the passage where He tells us to not be anxious about anything… “but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” Our hope is to give some Biblical and practical help for families to make Jesus their first priority.

And our topic for today is kids’ sports and extra-curriculars. One of the biggest demands on a family’s schedule—one of the things that keeps families living out of cars—is the effort to move kids from practice to rehearsal to game to club meeting to tournament and so on. We want our kids to be well-rounded; we want them to have great experiences; we want them to have a chance to succeed at activities that they love; and so we keep our kids heavily scheduled.

And, I am convinced, one of the things that is driving us to have our kids so busy is FOMO. We’re afraid that if we don’t have our kids in enough activities, if we don’t let them participate in everything their friends participate in, we’ll let them down. We’re afraid that they will be left out, or they’ll miss the opportunity to discover something they are really good at, or we’ll just look like bad parents.

Kevin DeYoung, in his book *Crazy Busy,* describes it like this:

We live in a new a strange new world. Kids are safer than ever before, but parental anxiety is skyrocketing. Children have more options and opportunities, but parents have more worry and hassle. We have put unheard-of amounts of energy, time, and focus into our children. And yet, we assume their failures will almost certainly be our fault for not doing enough. We live in an age where the future happiness and success of our children trumps all other concerns.

He goes on to quote the writer Joseph Epstein, who calls our current situation Kindergarchy: rule by children. Epstein says:

Under Kindergarchy all arrangements are centered on children: their schooling, their lessons, their predilections, their care and feeding and general high maintenance—children are the name of the game. (both quotes from *Crazy Busy*, p. 65-66)

The desire to give our kids opportunities—and to keep up with the families around us—is one of the biggest factors in our current sense of busy-ness.

***Treasure Storage***What does the Bible say about this? Obviously, the Bible does not touch on travel soccer teams or children’s productions at the local community theater; but Jesus does say something that we can apply to the situation. It’s **Matthew 6, verses 19-21:**

**19**“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This text is pretty straightforward. “There are two ways to live: you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth, or you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things in heaven. Jesus says: the mark of a Christian is that his or her eyes are on heaven and he or she measures all behavior by what effect it will have on heaven — everlasting joy with God.” (John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/dont-be-anxious-lay-up-treasure-in-heaven-part-1>)

Clearly, Jesus is primarily talking about what we do with our money. A couple of verses later, He says: “No one can serve two masters…You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24). When He says the word treasure here, He clearly has literal treasure in mind.

And yet, I think this can be applied to more than just money. The title I chose for the sermon gives you a clue to what I am thinking about. I called this message “Tattered Ribbons and Rusty Trophies.” It’s a recognition that the tangible rewards our kids receive for all their activities—those medals of participation and certificates of accomplishment—are eventually going to be nothing but dust catchers on a shelf. The moths and vermin are going to get to them. They’re going to get shoved to the back of the closet. They’re earthly treasures with little heavenly value.

Jesus wants us to think about what we are investing in, and He wants us to think long-term. I’ll put it like this:

**We need to consider the eternal benefits of the things we give our hearts to.**

Jesus doesn’t want us to live only for the moment, He doesn’t want us to have our eyes set only here on Earth. Rather, He wants us to set our eyes on things above (Col. 3:1), and live our lives with a view to how they serve Him and His kingdom.

Now, does this mean that every Christian family should automatically pull their kids out of every activity that awards a ribbon or trophy at the end? Not necessarily. Remember, I said those are the tangible rewards of participating in those activities.

But most of us would quickly say that it is not the tangible rewards that we want for our kids. There are many intangible benefits to being involved in extra-curriculars that can have a lasting impact for our children. Being a part of a team sport or fine arts program can teach our kids sportsmanship and teamwork and help them to care about others besides themselves. Being in a sport or club teaches our kids discipline and hard work and goal setting. Kids who love Jesus can see their extra-curricular activities as opportunities to witness for Jesus in both their words and actions. If we see them that way, and talk about them with our kids in that way, those activities can have a tremendous eternal impact.

It all comes down to priorities. That’s the name of the series and the main point. What comes first? Are you seeking Jesus first and His kingdom, or has something else taken priority?

Jesus uses the word treasure. **Verse 21**, He says

**21**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Your heart is going to follow your treasure. In other words, whatever you treasure the most, that’s where your heart is going to be.

So the question to ask, as you wrestle with all the opportunities in front of your kids, is what is it you treasure most?

* Is it the rush of competition and the drive to be the best? Or is it a desire to glorify Jesus by using the gifts and abilities you have been given?
* Does your child treasure being popular and involved? Or is it a desire to encourage teammates and share the love of Jesus?
* Do you and your children think about these activities for what they accomplish right now? Or do you have a view to what they can accomplish for eternity?

Jesus wants us to consider the eternal benefits of what we give our hearts to. He wants us to store up our treasure in heaven, not on earth.

***Navigation Advice***That’s our scripture passage. And with that picture of storing up treasures in heaven as the big idea, what I’d like to do now is give some advice for navigating the tricky waters of kids’ activities. This is going to be a little different for me, since these ideas are not necessarily going to be drawn from scripture. But rather, after doing some reading on this topic this week, and doing quite a bit of thinking about it, I’d like to offer these four things for your consideration:

**1. Stop putting so much pressure on yourself as a parent.**

We need to let go of this idea that we are going to irreparably harm our children if we don’t get them in enough activities; as well as the corresponding notion that we can guarantee their future success if we just give them enough opportunities as children. While parenting is undeniably important, I’m afraid we overestimate our ability to engineer what our children will become.

Joseph Esptein, the man I quoted earlier with the phrase Kinderarchy, wrote his article when he was in his sixties. He says that he never recalls being unhappy as a kid, though his experience as a child might be considered borderline negligent today. He writes:

My mother never read to me, and my father took me to no ballgames, though we did go to Golden Gloves fights a few times. When I began my modest athletic career, my parents never came to any of my games, and I should have been embarrassed had they done so. My parents never met any of my girlfriends in high school. No photographic or video record exists of my uneven progress through early life. (quoted by DeYoung, p. 66)

Epstein isn’t a Christian, and he wasn’t raised in a Christian family. I’m not saying that his childhood is a model for us to copy, but I am suggesting that it probably wasn’t so unusual. Personally, I can’t remember my father coming to very many of my basketball games until I was playing Varsity, and even then I’m pretty sure he only made it to the home games. Part of that might have stemmed from the fact that we weren’t very good (we only won 2 games my senior year) and I didn’t play that much. But I will tell you this, I never doubted that my Dad loved me; and it had nothing to do with how many games he got to.

The point is, all of the emphasis on having our kids in a bunch of activities and being there for them every step of the way is relatively new, and there is no guarantee that it will have better results then the style of parenting that came before it.

Kevin DeYoung cites an “Ask the Children” survey that interviewed more than a thousand kids grades three through twelve. One key question revolved around what they would change about their parents’ schedule. The results were striking: The kids rarely wished for more time with their parents, but they regularly said that they wished their parents were less tired and less stressed. De Young concludes: “It would be better for us and for our kids if we planned fewer outings, got involved in fewer activities, took more breaks from the kids, did whatever we could to get more help around the house, and made parental sanity a higher priority.” (p. 71)

Really, what our kids need most from us as parents is consistency, reliability, love, wisdom and patience. The most important thing is not what we do for them or with them as who we are. As DeYoung says: “They will remember our character before they remember our exact rules regarding television or Twinkies.” (p. 73)

**2. We must count the cost of every activity.**

With every opportunity that comes before our children, we must consider the overall cost. And what I mean by that is that we must consider the commitment of time, the lost opportunities to do other things, the earthly verses heavenly benefits, as well as the financial costs.

And let me say just a little bit about the financial costs. Youth sports has become a major economic industry. Between league fees, equipment costs, special training sessions and private lessons, as well as travel and lodging for out of town events; having your children in youth sports can be quite expensive. It is estimated that in 2015 25 million athletes between the ages of 6-17 participated in an organized sport in an industry estimated to generate $9 billion per year. A study by Utah State University in 2016 found that the average cost of having a child on a travel team is $2,292 per year. As the costs go up, overall participation in youth sports is actually going down. For more and more families that have an annual income of under $50,000 participation in organized youth sports is just too pricey.

I found a series of articles online by a newspaper in upstate New York looking at trends in youth sports. It included this quote from a high school athletic director:

“If you want your kid to get involved in sports and you’re going to pay whatever it takes, and you’re going to pay that all the way through high school; if you keep track of all that money — and I mean everything, from the cost of playing to the travel, to the food, to everything else involved with that journey — from 5 year old to 18 year old, if you look at that figure, you’re going to be astonished at how high it is. If you could put that same money away — do it both, if you’re in that perfect world financially — it’d be incredible how much you could pay for that college education. I think it’d be astonishing because the number is off the charts.”

The point is: there is a cost. And as our kids become more and more involved in an activity—whether it is a sport, dance, drama, music—we must weigh out how passionate they are for the activity, where we hope it will lead, and what other things (including Jesus) it can distract them from.

This is one of the reasons many parents use a “one-at-a-time” rule, especially with elementary-aged kids. A one-at-a-time rule says that kids will only be involve in one sport or activity at a time. If they want to be in football, they won’t do fall soccer. If they sign-up for the summer play, they don’t do softball or baseball. Sometimes it can be hard to pick, but it is a good way for parents to have conversations with kids about priorities.

**3. Give yourself permission to miss out.**

If one of the things that drives us to keep our kids busy and overscheduled is the fear that we will miss out or fall behind what other families are doing for their kids; then one of the solutions is to embrace the benefits of missing out.

Soon after FOMO became a popular hashtag on social media, it was joined by another acronym: JOMO. The Joy of Mission Out. People began to post pictures of themselves unplugged, enjoying dinner at home, having a night in as a family. Rather than obsessing about the things happening without them, people began to recognize and celebrate the benefits of just being together without chasing the next thing on the schedule.

And so, I think some of us need to just take a deep breath, look at our schedules and the opportunities in front of us, and give ourselves permission to miss out. Maybe when one kid has a soccer tournament on Saturday, and another a dance competition, and a third is in speech—we don’t need to figure out how to clone ourselves so we can be in three places at once. Maybe we just need to talk with our kids about what we’re going to make it to and what we’re going to miss, and be o.k. with it.

And, by the way, I think this applies to church activities as well. Sometimes the church can be one of the biggest culprits in packing our schedules with things to do. And sometimes we make ourselves feel like we are letting God down if we don’t make every church activity. But I can promise you that you are not less spiritual if you don’t make it to Trunk-or-Treat. You are not a bad Christian if you never manage to make it onto a Haiti mission trip. We offer the programs and ministries that we do at Hope in order to help you seek God’s kingdom first. But that doesn’t mean every one of them is going to fit your family or your season in life. You have to prioritize. And you have to do what works best for you.

**4. The one thing we should fear is missing out eternally.**

Finally, let me take this back to our scripture. The one FOMO that we should have, the one thing we should really fear, is missing out eternally. Jesus is urging us to invest in heaven. He’s cautioning us away from becoming so consumed with activities on earth that we miss what’s most important.

So it comes back to a question every family must answer for themselves: what does it look like for us to put God first? How do we teach our kids to follow Jesus no matter what they are doing? Whether that’s playing in the band, on the soccer field, on the stage, or in the show ring. How do we take advantage of what the church offers in helping us to seek God first?

Jesus tells a story in Luke 16 about a very rich man and a poor man named Lazarus who begged scraps at the rich man’s gate. Throughout his life, Lazarus missed out on a lot of worldly things. His position at the rich man’s gate was like a constant Facebook live stream of all the pleasures that were just out of his reach.

But the twist in the story is that when both men died, it was the poor man Lazarus who had a seat of the heavenly banquet table, while the rich man found himself in the torments of Hell. At that moment, all the deprivations and sacrifices Lazarus suffered on earth paled in comparison to the reward he experience in heaven.

Blogger Tony Reinke writes:

For those in Christ, eternity will make up for every other pinch and loss that you ever suffered in this momentary life. The biblical doctrine of heaven proves it.

Heaven is the restoration of everything broken by sin in this life. Heaven is the reparation of everything you lost in this life. Heaven is the reimbursement of everything you missed out on in this life.

Poor Lazarus learned this blessed truth: Heaven is God’s eternal response to all of the FOMOs of this life. Heaven will restore every “missing out” thousands of times over and over again throughout all of eternity ([Acts 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%203.21)). <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-only-fomo-to-fear>

Setting Biblical priorities for your family may mean you will not be involved in every single activity other families are involved in. But it is better to invest in heaven than to leave everything behind here on earth.