

The Balanced Life:
Recreation—Part 1

We are talking about a balanced life this month. God has created us so that over our lifetimes we should spend about equal amounts of time working, sleeping and in recreation in order to be as healthy, happy and productive as we can be. Healthy youth and adults should spend about fifty to sixty hours a week working. Working includes our jobs, school work, work around the house, caring for family members, and volunteer work in the church and the community. We should be sleeping between seven and nine hours a night. And we should be getting about fifty to sixty hours of recreation a week.

Now, I know that many of you are saying, “Whoa, play fifty to sixty hours a week—I don’t think so.” Well, I actually didn’t say fifty to sixty hours of week for play. Recreation includes playing, but it is much more than playing. It is all the things we do to maintain and restore our bodies, our souls, our spirits and our relationships. It is re-creating ourselves. Building ourselves back up. Work wears you out, even if you love what you are doing. It is the repetition, doing the same thing over and over again. It is the demands and the stress. If you don’t do it right, there will be consequences. Work is serious business. It’s got to be done.

Sleep is vital to restoring ourselves. But it is not enough. There is a whole list of things we need to build ourselves up and keep ourselves healthy and happy, so that our work life is as productive as it can be.

God considered this so important that one of the Ten Commandments is that we spend a whole day, twenty-four hours, doing absolutely no work whatsoever. The Sabbath Day is to be totally dedicated to recreation.

There are pages and pages of rules in the Bible telling the Israelites telling the Israelites what they could not do on the Sabbath. The reason for that is that workaholics will tell you that what they are doing isn’t really work. They like what they are doing, so it’s not really work.

When I was still a workaholic, I was appointed as an associate pastor to a large church, 2000 members. The senior pastor was a wise man. He insisted that everyone on his staff take a day off. My day was Thursday. He would absolutely forbid me from coming into the office on that day. But I was so addicted to work that I found ways to sneak into my office on Thursdays. Eventually he caught me. Then, I started taking things home with me on Wednesday night, so that I could work at home on Thursday. I was a sick man. He found out what I was doing and made me stop doing that. Becky was teaching by then. So, I started doing housework on Thursday. It wasn’t until I collapsed one day while I was vacuuming the carpet that I finally got the message. I ran out of gas. I simply had no energy left. I needed a Sabbath day of rest, a whole day when I did absolutely no work whatsoever. When I began to observe a Sabbath day of abstinence from work, I began my recovery from workaholism and the discovery of the importance of a balanced life.

If God felt that recreation is so important that it’s in the Ten Commandments, it deserves our attention. So, I will actually spend two weeks talking about recreation.

So, what is recreation? Recreation does include playing. It is playing games. It is laughing. It is entertainment. It is partying and socializing. It’s family time. It’s date time. It’s a conversation with a friend. It’s also physical exercise. It’s mealtimes and snack times. It’s

hobbies. It's traveling and vacationing. It's quiet times. It's going to church activities. It's reading the Bible and devotional materials. It's prayer.

We need to spend time in recreation. We do need to play. We do need to set aside time to laugh and have a good time. We need to laugh with the important people in our lives. We need to laugh with our husbands and wives. We need to laugh with our children. We need to laugh with our co-workers and our friends. People who never laugh together have an unhealthy relationship. Laughing together strengthens bonds of love and fellowship.

And laughing lifts our spirits. Laughter is medicine for the soul. We need to laugh every day.

What makes you laugh? Think a moment. Are there times or places or people or situations or activities which usually make you laugh? Regularly do the things or be in the places or with the people who make you laugh. If you are one of those gifted people who has the ability to see the humor in everyday situations, use that gift. And share it with others.

What makes you cheer? We need to cheer regularly. That's why sports events are so much fun. Sporting events give us lots of opportunities to cheer. When our team makes a great play, we cheer. When they score, we cheer. When they win the game, we cheer. And we enjoy it.

I like stories in which I can cheer. I like to cheer when the good guys defeat the bad guys. I like happy endings, when the hero wins the battle. I especially like stories in which the hero doesn't take himself very seriously, and he has a good time during the struggle—you know, the kind that laughs in the face of danger. I'll cheer and cheer for that kind of hero.

I love to cheer for the people I love, when they have a victory. I cheer when one of my orchids produces blooms.

I love Easter because we can cheer Christ's victory over the powers of death. We need to do more cheering in church.

Our recreational time should give us plenty of opportunities to cheer.

Recreational time should be about having a good time. We shouldn't take anything we do for recreation too seriously. That just spoils the fun. When our first child was born, Becky was busy being a mother, so I had more time for myself than I had been used to having. I decided to learn to play the guitar, so that I could accompany the youth. But I got sidetracked. I got a classical guitar, rather than a folk guitar. So I decided to learn to play classical guitar. My goal was to be the best classical guitarist I could be. I don't know why, except that is just the way I did everything. I was serious about everything I did. I was always trying to be better at everything I did. What a shame. I was never going to be a good guitar player. I learned too late, and I didn't have the natural skills. I didn't understand that hobbies were supposed to be for fun.

A hobby is a hobby because, the truth is, whether you do well or not just doesn't matter. Nobody is depending on you to do well. If they are, it's no longer a hobby—it's work. A hobby is something you do just because you enjoy doing. Whether you win or lose, whether you produce a masterpiece or mess, whether anything good comes out of it or not, it doesn't matter. You do it for the fun of doing it. If it's not fun, stop doing it.

I've learned my lesson. I enjoy playing golf, even though I am a terrible golfer. I enjoy golf for two reasons: First of all, I don't keep score. It doesn't matter. Second, when I drive away from a round of golf, I decide to forget all the bad shots and remember the good ones. There may be just three or four in a round. But I will enjoy remembering them for years to come, which may be until the next time I play golf.

Recreation is all the things that are not work or sleep. Now, let me remind you that our purpose in life is to serve Christ. And Christ calls us to serve people in his name. Serving people is work. So, our purpose in life is to work. Life quickly becomes empty, shallow and unsatisfying for those who forget that. Our purpose in life is not recreation. We should not allow our recreational activities take away from our work.

The purpose of recreation is to renew our bodies, our souls and our spirits so that we are more effective in doing the work Christ has given us—in serving people. Once again, if we fail to spend time in recreation, something breaks down—our physical or mental or emotional health, or our relationships. We burn up, burn out or break down. When we don't adequately take care of ourselves and our relationships, we cannot get as much work done. We need to spend time in recreation in order to be as effective as possible in our work lives.

It's all about balance. As Ecclesiastes tells us, it's about doing the right thing at the right time.

Recreation is supposed to balance work, not become work.

So, laugh, cheer and have a good time with your recreational time. Don't confuse work and recreation. Keep them carefully separated. And keep them balanced.

I'll talk more about recreation next week.

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