

The Balanced Life:  
Recreation, Part 2  
Ecclesiastes 3:1

This morning we are finishing this sermon series on the balanced life. God has created us so that over the course of our lives we need roughly equal amounts of work, sleep and recreation to be as healthy, happy and productive as God intended for us to be. We can do more good for the work of Christ when we are at our best. A balanced life enables us to be at our best.

We've talked about a balanced work life being 50 to 60 hours a week, including time on the job or at school, time spent working in and around the house, time spent caring for family members, and volunteer work in the church and the community. We've talked about a balanced life including about eight hours of sleep each night.

Last week I talked about the necessity of 50 to 60 hours of recreation each week, including playing, socializing, eating, exercising, traveling, quiet times, hobbies, and spiritual activities, such as Sunday school and church attendance, small group fellowships and studies, personal times for Bible study and prayer, and so on.

I talked about the importance of laughing and cheering during your recreational time. I warned against turning recreational activities into work by taking them too seriously. Remember that what makes something fun is that the results don't matter. If someone is depending on you getting it done and getting it done right, it is work. Even if you enjoy doing it, it is still work. Recreation are the things you do just because you get some joy or satisfaction from doing it.

This morning I want to talk about the importance of balance in your recreational life.

The first thing we all need to be clear about is that we come into the world as unbalanced people. That's what makes each of us unique. It is what gives us our personalities. All the personality tests are built around the idea that we are unbalanced. We have all areas in which we are strong and areas in which we are weak.

Most of us end up doing work which matches our strengths. We spend 50 to sixty hours a week doing the things which come easily and naturally to us. Otherwise, work would be torture. To spend fifty to sixty hours a week, week after week, month after month, year after year, doing something that is unnatural and uncomfortable would be miserable.

Most of us don't know what our strengths are until we get into the work world. That's why so many young people end up doing something that has nothing to do with their college degree and why they change careers several times during before they settle down to their life's work. Until then, they don't know why, but they just don't enjoy going to work. It's because they are trying to do a job which doesn't fit their strengths.

But when you spend a lifetime exercising your strengths day after day, you become stronger and stronger in those areas. And, if you are not careful, you become weaker and weaker in the other areas of your life. So that you become more and more unbalanced.

I remember talking with an older pastor and saying that I believed that people became wiser and more mature as they grew older. This pastor said, "Some do. But most just become more and more of whatever they are." The gentle ones become more and more gentle. The negative ones become more and more negative. The bossy ones become more and more bossy. The ditzy ones become more and more ditzy.

That's a problem. What happens to something when it becomes more and more unbalanced? Eventually it falls over. And that is what happens to people who are too unbalanced. Their lives tip over and become broken.

Recreation is meant to add balance to our lives. Whatever you do at work, you should pretty much do the opposite in recreation. My work involves nurturing and caring for people. It is something I have always done well. That's my natural strength. Guess what I do for recreation. I play a computer game in which I am the dictator of country and I sacrifice my subjects in battle for the purpose of extending my power and control over the world. Am I expressing some hidden desire through this game? No, not at all. I have no desire in real life to rule over anybody. The idea of sacrificing real people for my selfish ambition is repugnant to me. No, I'm not living out a frustrated fantasy. What I am doing is providing balance to my life.

If you are a stay-at-home mom, your recreation time ought to include getting out of the house and spending time talking to adults. That's balance.

If your work means sitting at a desk most of the day, you need to schedule physical exercise into your recreational time each day.

If you spend most of your day talking to people, your recreation time should have plenty of alone time built into it.

Again, your recreational time ought to be fun. Work is serious. The more serious your work is, the more fun your recreational time should be.

Sometimes balance is something you want to do. How many people in highly demanding jobs dream of the vacation when they can sit on a beach all day long with absolutely nothing to do except listen to the waves roll in?

Other times you have to push yourself to do the things that will bring balance to your life, because they are not the things that come easily or naturally to you, like the accountant whose wife insists that they go to a party at least once a month. Many accountants become accountants because they are more comfortable adding and subtracting numbers than socializing.

It's because of the need for balance that it's so important to include time in our recreational lives for spirituality. God is often forgotten in the workplace. The teachings of Christ get overlooked in the highly competitive business world. God is in the workplace. We can and should serve Christ as we do the work to which we have been called. But if you don't spend time balancing the materialism of the work world with spirituality in your recreational life, you will become unbalanced.

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." He was talking to people who need balance in their lives.

Is it possible to become spiritually unbalanced? Certainly it is. The spiritually unbalanced are called "religious fanatics." The Pharisees were spiritually unbalanced. The spiritually unbalanced are people who are taking their religion too seriously. They have forgotten that spirituality is part of their recreational lives.

There are those of us whose job is to be spiritual. People depend on us being spiritual and doing spiritual things. For us, spirituality is serious business. It is work.

But, let me tell you, those of us who are church professionals understand the importance of balancing our lives. We do spend time in recreational spirituality, that is, reading the Bible, praying and worshipping just for ourselves. But we also spend a lot of recreational time that is not religious in nature. I remember an evangelist told this story on himself. He had been holding revival services for several weeks in a row, preaching, teaching and praying all day long, every day. When he finally got home, he had hardly got settled in his easy chair, when his wife said,

“Honey, there is a special worship service at church tonight I want to attend. Come with me.” And he said, “You go ahead without me. I’m churched out.”

His life had become unbalanced. He needed some recreation time. He wanted nothing more than to sit, watch T.V. and rest. And there’s nothing wrong with that.

Unless you are a church professional, you shouldn’t take your spirituality too seriously. I know this sounds blasphemous to some people. “Preacher, you’re telling us not to take our faith seriously?” Well, no, I didn’t say not to take your faith seriously. I am saying not to take your spiritual exercises too seriously. You should enjoy them. Their purpose is to restore the joy of life to you. They are to remind you to trust the goodness and love of God.

The work world piles a heavy burden on us. It says, “Unless you get this done and get it done right, you are worthless.” Recreational spirituality gives us opportunities to hear Christ say, “Whatever you have done or haven’t done, you are so important to me that I willingly died on a cross for you.” The world says, “It’s all up to you. If you don’t get it done, everything will fall apart.” We are recreated when we hear the still, small voice say to us, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Recreational spirituality is not something you have to do. It’s something you want to do. It restores balance to our lives and brings joy and peace to our souls. It frees us to be happier, healthier and more productive servants of Christ.

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