

64 Leisure time

There are many interesting activities we can do, places to visit, things to see. But before we rush in to enjoy what the world has to offer, we need to stop and think. What would Jesus want us to do?

Focus passage: 2 Samuel 11:1–17

David would normally have been out of Jerusalem with his army, fighting for the Lord. But he chose to remain at home instead, using the time for himself. Consequently, he broke three of the ten commandments: he coveted, he committed adultery and he murdered.

1. Was Bathsheba being indiscreet?
2. What should David have done when he saw Bathsheba?
3. Did David do the wrong thing by not leading his army in battle?
4. What does this incident tell us about how we should spend our leisure time?

Our own time

We all have to sleep and eat, and most of us have to work or have some other responsibilities. Apart from these things, our time is our own to spend how we choose. There are hundreds of things we can do in our spare time—some activities lead us closer to God, and others take us away from God. Whatever we choose to do, it is important to consider how best to spend our time.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.
(Ephesians 5:15–16; NRSV)

Holy days

The Israelites were given specific instructions about how they were to spend their week:

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.
(Exodus 20:9–10)

Some relevant passages

Israel's holidays: Exodus 20:9–10; 23:14–17; Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16:16.

Examples of mis-spent leisure time: 2 Samuel 11:1–17; Acts 17:21; 2 Timothy 2:16.

Make the most of your time: Ecclesiastes 9:7–10; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:15–16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 4:5.

Warnings against laziness and idleness: Proverbs 10:4; 12:24,27; 19:15; 26:13–16; Ecclesiastes 10:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 3:14; Hebrews 6:12.

Enjoy life: Deuteronomy 12:12; 16:14–15; Nehemiah 8:17; Psalm 5:11; 68:3; 98:4–9; Proverbs 5:18; Ecclesiastes 2:24–26; 3:12–13; 5:18–20; 9:9; 11:1; John 15:11; Romans 12:12; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Timothy 6:17.

Instead they were to spend their time on the Sabbath in worshipping God and in doing things for him.

Isaiah 58:13–14

In addition, God prescribed holy festivals at different times of the year in which the Israelites were to participate. In particular, there were three annual festivals (Passover, Harvest, Tabernacles) when they all had to go to the temple in Jerusalem. These were their holidays.

Exodus 23:14–17;
Deuteronomy 16:16

Although we are not required to keep the Israelite festivals, we can learn from them. They show:

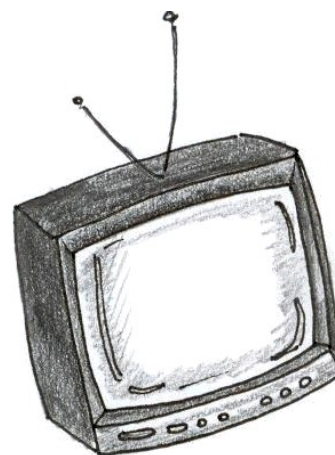
- One day per week was completely set aside for God.
- Annual holidays were spent worshipping, feasting, and enjoying each other's company.
- Travelling time was spent in the company of other worshippers.

Entertainment

These days, there is an enormous range of entertainment available to fill our leisure time—television, movies, videos, theatre, casinos, magazines, and so on. Much of it is full of mindless violence, immorality and other ungodly behaviour, and is of no value to a believer aiming to be holy.

It is important to remember that even our leisure time should be spent profitably.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)



Laziness

It is tempting to spend our leisure time taking it easy. But God specifically warns us against laziness. Paul wrote to Timothy about young widows:

Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies. . .

(1 Timothy 5:13)

See also
2 Thessalonians 3:6–13

Instead, we are to use our time working hard:

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

(Titus 3:14)

Enjoy life

A common mistake is to think that a godly life is not enjoyable. This is far from the truth. God does want us to enjoy ourselves as the following verses show.

But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

(Psalms 68:3)

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

(Ecclesiastes 3:12–13)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

(Philippians 4:4)

Summary

- All of our time should be spent in doing things which are to the glory of God.
- God gave Israel instructions about how to spend their leisure time each week, and how to spend their annual holidays. In all cases, it involved a mixture of worship and social activities.
- Many modern leisure activities can lead a believer away from God.
- The Bible warns against idleness and laziness.
- God wants us to find enjoyment in all that we do.

Thought provokers

1. What are your hobbies or favourite recreational activities? Are they helpful to you spiritually?
2. Read Colossians 3:5–8. Think of the last movie you saw. Did it help you put these things “to death”, or make it more difficult to do so?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the following leisure activities? Which of these things would Jesus have done if he lived on earth now?

- organized sport
- watching television
- going to the beach
- joining an orchestra or band
- travelling overseas
- reading
- gardening
- going to a theatre
- joining a club
- attending dinner parties
- bush-walking

Further investigation

1. What can you find in the gospels about how Jesus spent his leisure time? Begin by reading Mark 6:31.
2. Think of one of your usual leisure activities. What can you do to make this activity more beneficial?
3. Use a concordance to find all the verses in Proverbs about laziness. What do they say are the consequences of laziness?
4. Find as many examples as you can of godly people who “rose up early in the morning”. What does this teach us?

Want to know more?

- *Beyond Bible basics* by Duncan Heaster (published by the Christadelphian Advancement Trust, 1999). Section 2.3 “Redeeming the time”. 6 pages.
- *Reformation* by Harry Whittaker (published by Biblia, 1985). Chapter 21 “Relax!”, Chapter 22 “Nehushtan” and Chapter 27 “Time-wasting” are all relevant.
- *The genius of discipleship* by Dennis Gillett (published by the Christadelphian, 1984). Chapter 25 “Daily exercise”.
- *The new life* by John Marshall (published by The Christadelphian, 1971). Chapter 15: “Leisure”.
- *Freedom in Christ* by H.A. Twelves (published by the Christadelphian, 1968). Chapters 3, 6,–9, 12.

- ▶ **See also:**
- 16. Temptation
 - 27. Alcohol, drugs and smoking
 - 57. Keeping the Sabbath
 - 59. Gambling
 - 62. Careers and employment
 - 63. Friends
 - 65. Gossip