

Play—Games, Sports, Recreation, Amusements, a Summary

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I believe there has been a general misunderstanding for many people regarding play and having fun. God wants us to have fun in life, which includes a proper balance of “worship, work, and play”. It is possible, even inevitable, in whatever one is doing, to receive as we give. Whether we “work” or “play”, if in proper balance (and worship is present), even the unpleasant tasks can be less unpleasant if all three are in proper balance. It is my suggestion that if you feel that there is something out of balance in your life, ask God to fix it—and realize that He may be leading you to take a break. It is possible to have fun in work and to be guiltless in play.—Craig M. Barnes

Christ's Object Lessons 54

The exciting **sports**--theatergoing, horse racing, gambling, liquor-drinking, and reveling stimulate every passion to intense activity. [Note what is *not* mentioned in this list of “sports”. We'll get to those in a little bit, however.] {COL 54}

Reveling - to take part in a wild party or celebration (All of these activities that are listed have issues with selfishness and self-glorification.)

Liquor-drinking - is an obvious physical health issue, and is also part of reveling

Gambling - “If a game isn't any fun without using money, it is not a game.”¹

Horse Racing - Is *geared up* for gambling, besides being dangerous in itself

Theatergoing - Has issues regarding those in attendance and the content of the messages

Education 207

Recreation Versus Amusement

There is a distinction between recreation and amusement. **Recreation**, when true to its name, recreation, tends to strengthen and build up. Calling us aside from our ordinary cares and occupations, it affords refreshment for mind and body, and thus enables us to return with new vigor to the earnest work of life. **Amusement**, on the other hand, is sought for the sake of pleasure and is often carried to excess; it absorbs the energies that are required for useful work and thus proves a hindrance to life's true success.—Education, 207 (1903).

Testimonies vol 1 p484

Recreation and Daily Devotions

1 Raymond H. Barnes, the author's father.

Many pity the Southern slaves because they are bound down to labor, while slavery exists in their *own* families. Mothers and children are allowed to toil from morning till night; they have no recreation. A ceaseless round of labor is before them and crowded upon them. They profess to be Christ's followers; but where is the time for them to meditate and pray, and obtain food for the intellect, that the mind, with which we serve God, may not be dwarfed in its growth? God calls upon every individual to use the talents He has committed to them to His glory, and by thus improving them to gain others also. God has laid obligations upon us to benefit others. Our work in this world for the good of others is not done until Christ shall say in heaven: "It is done." "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." {1T 484.1}

There are persons with a diseased imagination to whom religion is a tyrant, ruling them as with a rod of iron. Such are constantly mourning over their depravity and groaning over supposed evil. Love does not exist in their hearts; a frown is ever upon their countenances. They are chilled by the innocent laugh from the youth or from anyone. **They consider all recreation or amusement a sin and think that the mind must be constantly wrought up to just such a stern, severe pitch. This is one extreme. Others think that the mind must be ever on the stretch to invent new amusements and diversions in order to gain health. They learn to depend on excitement, and are uneasy without it. Such are not true Christians. They go to another extreme.** The true principles of Christianity open before all a source of happiness, the height and depth, the length and breadth of which are immeasurable. It is Christ in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life. It is a continual wellspring from which the Christian can drink at will and never exhaust the fountain. {1T 565.2}

Testimonies vol 4 p567

Your intercourse with the sick is an exhausting process and would gradually dry up the very springs of life if there were no change, *no opportunity for recreation, and if angels of God did not guard and protect you.* If you could see the many perils through which you are conducted safely every day by these messengers of heaven, gratitude would spring up in your hearts and find expression from your lips. If you make God your strength, you may, under the most discouraging circumstances, attain a height and breadth of Christian perfection which you hardly think it possible to reach. Your thoughts may be elevated, you may have noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, and purposes of action which shall raise you above all sordid motives. {4T 567.3}

Counsels for the Church 160-161

Christians have many sources of happiness at their command, and ***they may tell with unerring accuracy what pleasures are lawful and right***. They may enjoy such recreations as will not dissipate the mind or debase the soul, such as will not disappoint and leave a sad after-influence to destroy self-respect or bar the way to usefulness. *If they can take Jesus with them and maintain a prayerful spirit, they are perfectly safe.* {CCh 160.1}

Any amusement in which you can engage asking the blessing of God upon it in faith will not be dangerous. But any amusement which disqualifies you for secret prayer, for devotion at the altar of prayer, or for taking part in the prayer meeting is not safe, but dangerous. {CCh 160.2}

[So, if you find that there is no time or desire for these three activities in your life, re-think your priorities and ask God to make the necessary changes in your life.]

We are of that class who believe that it is our privilege every day of our lives to glorify God upon the earth, that we are not to live in this world merely for our own amusement, merely to please ourselves. We are here to benefit humanity and to be a blessing to society; and if we let our minds run in that low channel that many who are seeking only vanity and folly permit their minds to run in, how can we be a benefit to our race and generation? How can we be a blessing to society around us? *We cannot innocently indulge in any amusement which will unfit us for the more faithful discharge of ordinary duties.* {CCh 160.3}

There are many things which are right in themselves, but which, perverted by Satan, prove a snare to the unwary. {CCh 160.4}

There is great need of **temperance in amusements**, as in every other pursuit. And the character of these amusements should be carefully and thoroughly considered. Every youth should ask himself, What influence will these amusements have on physical, mental, and moral health? Will my mind become so infatuated as to forget God? Shall I cease to have His glory before me? {CCh 160.5}

It is the privilege and duty of Christians to seek to refresh their spirits and invigorate their bodies by innocent recreation, with the purpose of using their physical and mental powers to the glory of God. Our recreations should not be scenes of **senseless mirth**, taking the form of the **nonsensical**. We can conduct them in such a manner as will benefit and elevate those with whom we associate, and better qualify us and them to more successfully attend to the duties devolving upon us as Christians. {CCh 160.6}

The time spent in physical exercise is not lost. A proportionate exercise of all the organs and faculties of the body is essential to the best work of each. When the brain is constantly taxed while the other organs of the living machinery are inactive, there is a loss of strength, physical and mental. The physical system is robbed of its healthful tone, the mind loses its freshness and vigor, and a morbid excitability is the result. {CCh 160.7}

Those who are engaged in study should have relaxation. The mind must not be constantly confined to close thought, for the delicate mental machinery becomes worn. The body as well as the mind must have exercise. {CCh 161.1}

Recreation That May Be Enjoyed by Rich and Poor Alike

Youth cannot be made as sedate and grave as old age, the child as sober as the sire. While sinful amusements are condemned, as they should be, let parents, teachers, and guardians of youth provide in their stead innocent pleasures, which will not taint or corrupt the morals. Do not bind down the young to rigid rules and restraints that will lead them to feel themselves oppressed and to break over and rush into paths of folly and destruction. With a firm, kind, considerate hand, hold the lines of government, guiding and controlling their minds and purposes, yet so gently, so wisely, so lovingly, that they will still know that you have their best good in view. {CCh 161.2}

There are modes of recreation which are highly beneficial to both mind and body. An enlightened, discriminating mind will find abundant means for the entertainment and diversion, from sources not only innocent, but instructive. Recreation in the open air, the contemplation of the works of God in nature, will be of *highest* benefit. {CCh 161.3}

No recreation helpful only to themselves will prove so great a blessing to the children and youth as that which makes them helpful to others. Naturally enthusiastic and impressible, the young are quick to respond to suggestion. {CCh 161.4}

God has provided for everyone pleasure that may be enjoyed by rich and poor alike—the pleasure found in cultivating pureness of thought and unselfishness of action, the pleasure that comes from speaking sympathizing words and doing kindly deeds. From those who perform such service, the light of Christ shines to brighten lives darkened by many sorrows. {CCh 161.5}

There are plenty of necessary, useful things to do in our world that would make the pleasure amusement exercise almost wholly unnecessary. Brain, bone, and muscle will acquire solidity and strength in using them to a purpose, doing good, hard thinking, and devising plans which shall train them to develop powers of intellect and strength of the physical organs, which will be putting into practical use their God-given talents with which they may glorify God. {CCh 161.6}

I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball [baseball]; but this, even in its simplicity, may be overdone. {CCh 161.7}

I shrink always from the almost sure result which follows in the wake of these [expensive] amusements. It leads to an outlay of means that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ. The amusements and expenditures of means [rich and poor alike] for self-pleasing, which lead on step by step to self-glorifying, and the educating in

these games for pleasure produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character. {CCh 162.1}

Adventist Home 499-500

Games With a Ball--Basic Guiding Principles.--I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball [baseball]; but this, even in its simplicity, may be overdone. {AH 499.4}

I shrink always from the almost sure result which follows in the wake of these [expensive] amusements. It leads to an *outlay of means* that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ. The amusements and expenditures of means for self-pleasing, which lead on step by step to *self-glorifying*, and the educating in these games for pleasure produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character. {AH 499.5}

The way that they have been conducted *at the college* does not bear the impress of heaven. It does not strengthen the intellect. It does not refine and purify the character. There are threads leading out through the habits and customs and worldly practices, and the actors become so engrossed and infatuated that they are pronounced in heaven lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. In the place of the intellect becoming strengthened to do better work as students, to be better qualified as Christians to perform the Christian duties, the exercise in these games is filling their brains with thoughts that *distract the mind from their studies*. . . . {AH 499.6}

Is the eye single to the glory of God in these games? I know that this is not so. There is a losing sight of God's way and His purpose. The employment of intelligent beings, in probationary time, is superseding God's revealed will and substituting for it the speculations and inventions of the human agent, with Satan by his side to imbue with his spirit. . . . *The Lord God of heaven protests against the burning passion cultivated for supremacy* in the games that are so engrossing. {AH 500.1} [True sportsmanship can be taught during play.]

The Problem of Many Athletic Sports.--Vigorous exercise the pupils must have. Few evils are more to be dreaded than indolence and aimlessness. Yet the tendency of most athletic sports is a subject of anxious thought to those who have at heart the well-being of the youth. Teachers are troubled as they consider the influence of these sports both on the student's progress in school and on his success in afterlife. The games that *occupy so much of his time* are diverting the mind from study. They are not helping to prepare the youth for practical, earnest work in life. Their influence does not tend toward refinement, generosity, or real manliness. [These can be taught during play.] {AH 500.2}

Some of the most popular amusements, such as **football** and **boxing**, have become *schools of brutality*. They are developing the same characteristics as did the games of ancient Rome.

The *love of domination*, the *pride in mere brute force*, the *reckless disregard of life*, are exerting upon the youth a power to demoralize that is appalling. {AH 500.3}

There are amusements, such as **dancing**² [ballroom], **card playing**³ [gambling], **chess**⁴ [brutal on the mind], **checkers** [similar to chess], etc., which we cannot approve because Heaven condemns them. These amusements open the door for great evil. They are not beneficial in their tendency, but have an *exciting influence*, producing in some *minds* a passion for those plays which lead to *gambling* and *dissipation*. All such plays should be condemned by Christians, and *something perfectly harmless should be substituted in their place* [not excluding changes in the games]. {AH 498.2}

Other athletic games, though not so brutalizing, are scarcely less objectionable because of the *excess to which they are carried*. They stimulate the love of pleasure and excitement, thus fostering a distaste for useful labor, a disposition to shun practical duties and responsibilities. They tend to destroy a relish for life's sober realities and its tranquil enjoyments. Thus the door is opened to dissipation and lawlessness with their terrible results. {AH 500.4}

Biography of Ellen White volume 5, page 36

Some months after getting settled, Ellen White made an earnest appeal to the believers to establish a church school.... *Part of her cow pasture just across the Sanitarium Road was soon serving as a baseball field.* {5BIO 36.6}

[Conclusion: Avoid excess in time and expenditures, and avoid any self-glorification, the love of supremacy or domination. Play games that are safe physically and mentally. Do the best you can and learn the strategies of the game, but teach the tender regard of others that supersedes the results of the game itself or the taking of sides. cmb]

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- 2 Dancing is considered by those who participate to be an invitation to fall in love. It is based on *sensual feelings*, rather than *solid principle*.
 - 3 Card playing, specifically, is a reference to *gambling*, as we will see.
 - 4 Both chess and checkers are *brutal* to the mental faculties, chess more so than checkers. Having to think three or four moves ahead with every conceivable possibility constantly fills the mind to overflowing. Before I knew better, I learned, through playing on my high school varsity chess team, how brutal the game really was! I would shake like a leaf, trying to play those games! It was *work*, not fun. I didn't continue long enough to get my varsity letter. In response, I have developed a game using chess pieces that is unstressful, even hilarious. It serves as a break from so much serious thinking in life.