

# CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE STEWARDSHIP OF LEISURE TIME

Psalm 19; Mark 6:30-32; Philippians 4:4-8

**Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest awhile** (Mark 6:31)

A Christian who believes that “**of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things**” should know the meaning and scope of Christian stewardship. Nevertheless, within the church as a whole stewardship is not the most popular term. This is especially so where it has come to be associated chiefly with money.

Liberty, or love, for example, makes a pleasant appeal to the will and emotions, but stewardship limits, infringes on, and interferes with what we like to call “our rights.” Stewardship is associated with duty, or that which is owed or due; with obligations, that to or by which one is bound; and with responsibility, that for which one must answer. Obligation suggests compulsion, and responsibility implies an accounting, which is quite contrary to the whole nature of man, who wishes rather to manage his own affairs in his own way and for his own benefit and pleasure.

The stewardship of possessions, which we have considered in a previous study, is only a part of our obligation to God and responsibility to others. Christian stewardship has a much wider scope, for it takes in all of life. This is brought out more fully in the original meaning of stewardship.

A steward was an officer or employee in a large family, or on a large estate, whose task it was to manage the domestic concerns, supervise the servants, collect rents or income, and keep accounts. A steward was responsible for that which was not his own, and he was obligated to manage it faithfully, wisely, diligently, and profitably for his master (Genesis 39:1-6; I Chronicles 28:1; Luke 8:3; 16:1-8).

Moreover, we learn from the Word that a steward must be ready at any time to give an account of his stewardship. How often Jesus said, in one way or another, “**Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning . . . Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing . . . Be ye therefore ready also.**”

Stewardship was the theme of many of our Lord's discourses. He spoke of the stewardship of possessions, of talents, and of all of life. He brought out the full extent and implications of stewardship when He said, "**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.**" With the use of various illustrations, and by his own consecrated life, He showed how everything we possess—our material goods, our physical strength, love, talents and time—belongs to God and we are only stewards of it all.

Stewardship in its various aspects is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament (Romans 2:6; 14:6-12; I Corinthians 6:19, 20; II Corinthians 5:9, 10; 8; 9; Galatians 6:7; I Peter 1:13-17). Paul describes Christian ministers as stewards of God over His Church (I Corinthians 4:1, 2; Titus 1:7), and believers are said to be stewards of God's gifts and graces (I Peter 4:10).

Concerning the stewardship of all of life Paul cried, "**Ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.**" At another time he pleaded: "**What? know ye not that . . . ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.**" Paul echoed the teachings of his Lord when he said, "**It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful . . . so then every one of us shall give account of himself to God**" (I Corinthians 3:23; 4:1, 2; Romans 14:7-12).

Christians belong to Christ, and are accountable for every hour of life (Matthew 12:36; 20:1-16; Luke 12: 46.) Therefore, they must "**walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil**" (Ephesians 5:14-16). How well Paul knew the meaning of stewardship! (Philippians 1:20, 21; Acts 27:23) What does Christian stewardship mean for each of us?

We differ in material possessions—the poor widow had but a mite, the rich farmer had to build many barns to store his goods.

We vary in abilities, for God has given a "**diversity of gifts**" to His children. To some He gives ten talents, to others only one. What God expects of us is in proportion to what He has given us. He said, "**For to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much they will ask the more.**" However, the Lord has given the same amount of time in every day and week and year to each of us.

"**We spend our years as a tale that is told,**" the psalmist said, as he talked about the hours and days and years that make up a life (Psalm 90:4-12). "**My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,**" said Job, as he pondered on the time appointed for man on the earth (7:1, 6). To this his friend Bildad quickly added, "**For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow**" (8:9). The days pass all too swiftly for us, too, and all around us we hear: "I am so busy . . . I don't have the time . . . how the years have gone . . ." if Christ is the Lord of our time, we should make haste to make the best use of it, to faithfully and diligently manage it so that it may bring forth an abundant life, "**to the praise of His glory.** Our daily prayer may well be that of the psalmist (90:12), "**So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,**" and so teach us to use our time, that we may give a good account for every hour of every day.

A large share of our time is taken up with the daily work which we should perform as “**unto Him,**” and to “**walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called**” is good stewardship. But what of our leisure time? Is Christ the Lord of it? Is leisure also “unto Him”? Or is leisure my day off, my free hours, my surplus time? It may be that we are better stewards of our possessions and of our strength, as it is expended in daily work, than we are of our leisure time.

Leisure has its place in life. Some ignorantly, others boastfully, ignore this. The person who “never needs a rest, only a change” might do well to reconsider. Why? The normal person who never takes time to rest is apt to become tense, strained, overwrought and narrow in his conception of life. It is imperative that we recognize the need for rest in our complex age. If Job compared the pace of life in his day to a weaver’s shuttle, we may compare ours to an electric mixer, or to jet propulsion. Unless we take time for leisure, and use it profitably in our kind of world, we are likely to become as off key and useless as a violin whose bow is always kept taut. God made man to need, and fulfill his destiny in, both work and rest. Christ, who is in all things our perfect example and teacher, said to his tense and tired disciples, “**Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while**” (Mark 6:31). He knew what they needed to keep life serene and whole.

Moreover, it is necessary to consider seriously the stewardship of leisure time because modern life promises to provide more leisure than men ever had before. The burden of work is increasingly being carried by the machine. Manual labor has been reduced from as much as two hundred hours to five, with the use of automatic machinery. The fully automatic factory is coming, some scientists say; there is likelihood of a three-day week end, say others; some even foresee a twenty-hour work week by the year 2000. Housewives are constantly provided with more and better time and energy-saving appliances.

How people will use this abundance of leisure to be created by the technology of tomorrow is a question which looms large on the horizon of our day. In many ways the battle for free time is over; the harder challenge—what to do with the free time—now has to be faced. Scientists see a great opportunity for a revival of culture, with more time for reading, sculpturing, composing, discussion and adult education. Man will have more time to think about himself and the artistic and spiritual world around him, they say. However, there is little indication at present that leisure will be used profitably. The problem of insuring creative leisure is serious, for misspent leisure may destroy the soul.

The scientist says that we must plan ahead for the best use of the leisure time we are going to have; the Christian knows that there is no time like the present to use leisure in the best way, for he must be “**ready also**” to give an account of his stewardship of leisure at any time.

Shall we begin with the family, at home? What has become of the leisure hours, the evening family life? Parents who think that the duties of parenthood are over when the day’s work is done, or the dinner dishes put away, are losing a great opportunity. For the spiritual, social and cultural purposes of the family, the most important hours are those which are generally regarded today as of the least importance—those precious hours of freedom and leisure which families ought to enjoy together, when a home can be all it is meant to be.

It cannot be that the Lord meant homes to be dormitories, restaurants, telephone booths, or a mere economic convenience. Does it not seem that something is wrong with a home whose children are out every night—whose parents do not think that the only hours the family can be together in are worth planning for? The school and many other activities threaten to take away our children altogether unless we make good use of the four to six hours of the day which remain.

In millions of homes television has become a convenient scapegoat for delinquency and parental neglect. Parents must realize that leisure is not idle time. It is for family fellowship and recreation; it is for creative activity, for the finer things of life. These do not just happen. They must be planned, with the knowledge that the need for recreation and social and creative activity is as real as the need for good food. It is the only way that homes can be made more attractive than street corners, the wide highway, or wasted hours in unworthy leisure.

How shall we use these evening hours, long weekends, and vacation days in the best way? Jesus said that we can learn something from the **“children of this world who are in their generation wiser than the children of light”** (Luke 16:8, 9).

Some scientists have wisely suggested the cultural use of leisure time. A Christian can listen and learn, but he has infinitely more to guide him, for he has the revelation of God in His Word, as well as in His world. **“In Him, and through Him, and to Him”** is the Christian’s directional for leisure. He knows that leisure is legitimate and good, for it is in God’s plan for a full orbed life. Then, too, work must be done whether we like it or not, but leisure ought to be enjoyed, or it is not leisure. It ought to allow room for the expression of preferences, and for the satisfaction of wholesome desires. Leisure may be used for what we like to do, but a Christian should learn to like the best things.

Leisure should be cultural, if by culture we mean the cultivation and appreciation of all that is true, good and beautiful in God’s world, there has always been an attempt to separate the spiritual from the natural, to make Christ a spiritual Saviour, but not the Lord of life with all its variations. But, we cannot keep Christ in our hearts and out of our lives and out of our world, for **“by him all things consist”** (Colossians 1:16, 17; John 17:21). Paul says, in summing up his letter to the Philippians, **“Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things . . . and the God of peace shall be with you.”** The question naturally arises—what are some of these finer things of life, and how can they be acquired?

Paul says, **“Think on these things,”** and Peter says, when he speaks of **“passing the time of your sojourning here,”** to **“gird up the loins of your mind”** (I Peter 1:13). There is more truth than we like to admit in the observation of some, that the art of reading and the disposition to think are lost. Television has largely displaced bookshelves, and people seem afraid to be alone with their thoughts. We only have to note that five dollars for gasoline is routine, but that much for a book is absurd. The Christian should rejoice in knowledge and its quest, for all knowledge comes from God.

The Christian must cultivate the open mind; he should eagerly read and learn all he can about God's wonderful world, it's fascinating people—how they think and work and live—about the being and purpose of God in all of life. There is no end of value, inspiration and pleasure in the world of literature.

We cannot all be scholars, but we can all learn to read with more satisfaction than we do. Mary Margaret McBride, a well known columnist, who was interviewed in her book-lined library, said that she has read three books an evening for the past twenty years. How does she do it? Many people do not read three books in a year! The secret is that reading is an art that must be developed. To "**girds up the loins**" of the mind points to intense exertion of thought, to serving God with all of the mind. We must learn to read more efficiently, faster, more comprehensively, and much more than we do or life will be narrow, biased, incomplete, and much of what makes life worthwhile, true, honest, pure, lovely and of good report will pass by our door.

God is the author of beauty as well as of truth. The Bible, the natural world, and the talents of men all testify to this. God is all-glorious in the perfection of His beauty and He delights in all that is harmonious and beautiful in sound, rhythm, form and color. "**The whole earth is full of his glory.**" He pours out his beauty through artists, musicians, poets, cathedrals, mountains, flowers, the song of the bird, in the rustling grass—everywhere, for us to contemplate and enjoy (Job 28; Psalms 8; 19; 96; 98; 104; 150; Song of Solomon 2:12; Isaiah 35:1, 2; 44: 23; Luke 12:27, 28). Nevertheless, most of the time we rush along with our eyes on the road, and hurry through life with blinders on, unmindful of God's voice in the world, unmoved by the beauty around us.

Christians have a mandate, a responsibility, to cultivate all that is true, good and lovely in the fine arts, in poetry, literature, music, painting, in architecture, in the physical and natural world. In all beautiful things, whether man made or natural, we seem to find unity, harmony, truth, proportion, the right relation of background to subject, fresh individuality and distinction, and freedom from monotony. The same measures for beauty should be found in the home and family. Each woman should be an artist, each home a masterpiece of spiritual and physical beauty.

Leisure should be healthy and restful if we would recreate our energies and our zest for life. Some people come back from their vacations exhausted, or spend their free hours in a mad round of wearing social life. Some want always to be entertained in one way or another. It is much better to have a mental life of one's own, and to participate in wholesome activity, if it is physically possible, than watch it. There must be family fun, for in life there is a "**time to play.**"

Creative and educational hobbies can give hours of pleasure and relaxation, and become an outlet for latent abilities. God has crammed life full of joys, but they are not all on the surface. It takes effort to find, appreciate and use them, but it is infinitely worth it.

Most of all, leisure should be spiritual. This should be the first tithe of our leisure time. Jesus called His disciples "**apart to rest a while**" with Him. If we are to see anything at all in the right perspective we need time for contemplation on the work of the day, on the goodness, care and love of the Lord.

We need a time for turning the thoughts inward, for thinking on the purpose, aims and direction of life; time to talk with and listen to Jesus, as the disciples did; time to refresh depleted inner springs; time to regain that delicate balance between the material, physical and spiritual. In doing so, as Paul said, “**the God of peace shall be with you.**”

Only a Christian can seriously take God’s pre-eminence in culture, and he can and should make the best contribution to it. Who knows what Christians, who take seriously their stewardship of leisure, can give to the advancement and enjoyment of culture—to literature, music and art; and to a greater appreciation of the artistic and spiritual world around them. The world is waiting for it as it waits for the sunrise of a new day. “**Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing . . . Be ye ready also.**”

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The author of *Arts and the Man* writes: “To say that the arts are impractical, and irrelevant, is but to comment on how far we are from paradise.” How would you explain this?
2. What do we mean by the stewardship of time?
3. What is culture? Refinement? Why can only a Christian properly see God’s pre-eminence in culture?
4. What do such Psalms as 19; 45; 50:1, 2; 148; 150; Job 28; Luke 12:27, 28 tell us about the Lord?
5. Show from the Word that God loves beauty in music, architecture, literature and art.
6. What would you say is expressed in a beautiful building; in sculpturing; painting; music; literature; in an attractive home, or dinner table?
7. Do you think that modern art glorifies God less than traditional art? Why, or why not?
8. Does it make any difference what kind of literature a Christian reads?
9. Why do you think that children like to go out every evening? Discuss their social and cultural needs; and parental responsibility.
10. What had the disciples been doing when Jesus said, “**Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while**”? How applicable is this for today?
11. How can we determine if Christ is the Lord of our leisure?
12. Make suggestions for the use of leisure time. List worthwhile activities for the family’s leisure hours.
13. In what way can we say that Christians are God’s poems, His artistry?
14. Suggestions: Study together (or personally) the art of reading. Interesting and helpful material on this subject should be available in your public library.

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