Articles by Horace G. Lockett

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Christian Use Of Leisure (May 1967)

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Not many years ago the use of leisure presented few problems since so many people had very little. Stores were open most evenings, office hours included Saturday, and employees in industrial plants worked from early to late. Now stores are open few evenings and stagger the hours of their employees; not many offices open on Saturday and every new industrial contract sees a reduction in the weekly hours of work.

Our educators then began to see that they had a double task: (1) to educate young people for their life work; (2) to guide them to use their leisure time profitably. The old adage is true, “Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.” For the Christian the problem of using his leisure time profitably is also a double one for he has a two-fold citizenship: (1) on earth, (2) in Heaven.

Two general principles should govern the Christian’s life and these, of necessity, apply very strongly to his use of leisure. (1) God’s people in Old Testament times are referred to in Isaiah 43:7 in this way — “Everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made.” “Called by His name, created for His glory” — what a challenge to appropriate conduct! The New Testament (1 Cor. 6:19, 20) presents the same challenge, “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body.”

(2) In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul discusses the Christian attitude towards food and drink that have been offered to idols. Should he partake of it? He concludes (verse

31). “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Then, almost as an afterthought he slips in the words, “whatsoever ye do” and these prove decidedly embarrassing at times. They are directed to every phase of our life, including leisure. Paul’s conclusion in verse 32 is most clearly expressed in Weymouth’s translation, “Do not be causes of stumbling, either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.”

The purposes for which we should use our leisure time may be grouped under three major headings: Self-improvement; Recreation; Service. Our Christianity will be shown by our choices in these three divisions.

Self-Improvement

Under this heading we will make first a broad division into (a) General, (b) Spiritual. Under the General we shall first consider the Reading of Good Books. We could hardly have taught English for forty years in a Teachers’ College and be among those who say that a Christian should read nothing but the Bible, although if leisure time is very limited that might well be the advice. Reading good books: furnishes us with ideas, enlarges our vocabulary and moulds our style of speaking or writing. Sometimes we are amazed by the fashion of speaking and the vocabulary of some who have little formal education but who have made the English Bible a life-time study; nothing can surpass the diction of the King James version of the Scriptures. Many modern books, however, classed as good literature present ideals far removed from the teaching of the Bible. The Christian is urged to see that he chooses good literature in the fullest sense of the word.

In the second place, we shall consider the use of Television as a means of improvement. Whatever our opinion of the perils connected with Television, and they are many, we may as well realize that Television is here to stay. It is being used increasingly in all types of educational institutions and some predict that the TV screen will eventually displace the teacher. Through it we may visit all continents and get an outline of many important events in history or the present day. In the TV guide for the week in which I am writing, we have interesting and instructive documentaries on Leningrad, the Danube and The City of the Sea (St. John's, Newfoundland), visits to Jack Miner's Bird Sanctuary and California's Marineland of the Pacific Ocean and for music-lovers an hour with Bach, Beethoven and Mozart.

The October 1966 issue of Moody Monthly contains a number of articles on 'A Christian View of Television.' It is well worth reading.

The third means of improvement which I am suggesting is one which I find much used in my own assembly, Bethany, Hamilton. We have a number of elementary school teachers who for some years used, or are still using, a great deal of their leisure time in evening classes and summer courses to improve their standing and eventually qualify for their B.A. degree. In a large university city like Hamilton, evening classes of various types are given and it is amazing to see how many avail themselves of them. A Christian concerned to fit himself to do his best work undoubtedly commends the gospel and should also in the end make himself a more useful servant of Christ.

I may surprise you by adding participation in a school or university athletic team as an important means of self-improvement. During my forty-five years in educational work I was always actively associated with one or more athletic teams. I am convinced that if athletics are properly conducted, they develop in the participant qualities that make for good citizenship, both in respect of his every day life and his heavenly citizenship. Team work should develop a spirit of co-operation, so essential in ordinary life and in the church; keen competition should lead to self-control and ability to take success and set-backs well. One can hardly call participation "recreation" since it frequently involves keeping going when somewhat exhausted. This quality of "stick-to-itiveness" is a very important one in life in general and in Christian work in particular.

The factors mentioned so far, are concerned with development in general and might be recommended to anyone. It is a tragedy, however, if the Christian is not concerned with spiritual development. What steps can he take to promote spiritual growth?

At the Guelph Bible School a good deal of stress was placed on the morning Quiet Time and at our request, A. P. Gibbs wrote a pamphlet on the subject which is still available. Put the Quiet Time, even if it has to be short, on your morning program and you will never regret it. Nothing can take the place of individual Bible Study.

In a busy world there is a danger that we may substitute attendance at meetings for this individual study. Lists of helpful books: commentaries, Bible dictionaries, etc. are available. Books are expensive but a wise choice of each purchase will enable you to build a satisfactory library.

Bible courses, such as those issued by the Emmaus Bible School, help to systematize our Bible Study. In many cases groups work together and thus Christian fellowship is added to the value derived from the study itself.

Attendance at the regular meetings of the local church promotes growth. The Bible exhortation (Heb. 10:25 R.S.V.) is “Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Uniting with others in prayer and worship is stimulating and the ministry from gifted brethren should increase one’s Bible knowledge. A sense of responsibility will make us support the gospel testimony by our presence, even if we have no active part in that particular service.

The summer vacation affords a fine opportunity for growth in the things of God which many, unfortunately, are neglecting. It is true that with the present-day tension in the business world some need a quiet holiday in a summer cottage. To ignore God, however, in vacation plans and rush off thoughtlessly into a worldly atmosphere divorced from Christian privileges, may result in spiritual shipwreck. A Bible conference, if well-chosen, supplies a happy combination of helpful ministry, delightful fellowship and relaxation. Try a Bible conference or camp next summer.

Recreation (June-July 1967)

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Horace Lockett

The late Dr. Rendle Short once wrote, “Too earnest people who never allow their minds any relaxation and have no sense of humour often come to a bad end.” You cannot keep a bow taut all the time, and one who tries to go through life without taking time out for relaxation is encouraging a mental breakdown.

The choice of recreation, however, is a problem to the Christian, and one that demands spiritual discernment. In this, as in other things, his first responsibility is to God and and not to his brethren. Paul makes this very clear in the fourteenth chapter of Romans, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls” (verse 4, R.S.V.) This first responsibility to God carries with it an individual conscience. In 1 Corinthians 10:27 (R.S. V.) Paul says, “If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go” — Some of us would have said at once that the invitation should be refused but Paul leaves it entirely to the individual’s conscience. Christ was criticized in His day for “eating with sinners” and afforded a chance to a blasphemer like Ernest Harrison in his book, A Church Without God to say, “He lived it up among the drunkards and maybe got drunk.”

In discussing recreation, we should first of all make a primary division: (1) things in which we participate, and (2) activities which we watch or hear. In these days when most families have one or more automobile, there

is a strong danger that we will participate too little and get insufficient exercise for health.

Here is a partial list of activities used for recreation today. The Christian will examine them and approve or reject them by measuring them by divine principles. In the out-door section for the younger people there are rather strenuous games: hockey, basketball, softball, volleyball, etc. A number of local churches have their own organization for such games and volleyball and shuffleboard courts will be found at most Bible conferences. Less strenuous active games are: golf, alley-bowling, lawn-bowling and shuffleboard. It is obvious that there can be no objection to such games in themselves and only if the association is undesirable will they be questioned. The dance is another very popular indoor activity to which the Christian must give very serious consideration before he approves it.

Indoors, in the world at large the most common evening recreation is bridge and other ‘card’ games. The close association of ‘cards’ in the past with gambling will, of necessity, make a conscientious Christian very careful before he includes them. There are many other games suitable for the home. We mention just a few—Monopoly, Scrabble and Anagrams, the last two developing one’s spelling ability. Bible games of many types are very fine Sunday recreation. It is unfortunate that they are not used now nearly as much as in the earlier days.

For those talented in various special fields, painting and similar activities may be both recreational and instructive.

What are the things that are watched or listened to each week? Prominent among them are athletics, theatrical

plays, concerts, and movies, all of which may be on television or radio as well as live. The television and radio will also present a host of other programmes of various types and quality.

The individual must be particularly discriminating and apply Christian principles rather than rules. Laws are human; principles are divine. Laws are transitory and shifting; principles are unchanging and eternal. You may establish a rule; you can only declare a principle.

One important principle is that we must maintain the proper balance between the time spent on recreation and the other activities of our life. If we neglect our work to engage in recreation, the result will be disaster. The result will be the same if we neglect self-improvement and service for recreation. If, on the other hand, recreation is crowded out and we spend all our time on our daily work, improvement and service, we may find ourselves unable to concentrate.

A second principle is that true recreation will re-create, as the word really signifies, and not dissipate. Many present-day forms of recreation are linked with extremely late hours and leave one unfit for next day's work. The recreation may be mental or spiritual as well as physical. We should be the best judges of the effect on ourselves. Does it rest the tired body? Does it rejuvenate the jaded mind? What effect does it have upon our communion with God? The Swedish nightingale, Jenny Lind, won great success as an operatic singer. Yet she left the stage when she was singing her best and never returned to it. Once an English friend found her sitting on the sea shore, looking out into the glory of the sunset. They talked and

the conversation turned to the inevitable question. “Oh, Madame Goldschmidt, how is it that you ever came to abandon the stage at the very height of your success?” “When every day,” was the quiet reply, “it made me think less of this (laying a finger on the Bible) and nothing at all of that (pointing to the sunset) what else could I do?” No one else could make such a decision for her. It had to be her own.

A third principle is this—do not consent to be amused by anything that is debasing the lives of those who amuse you. The principle is sound, but it is not so easy to be sure that it applies in particular cases. Professional sports were once looked upon as being very damaging to the character of those participating. Now we have The Fellowship of Christian Athletes comprised of hundreds of Christian athletes, who are most active in their witness to the saving power of Christ. They frequently appear on Billy Graham’s platform and have published two main books, ‘The Goal and the Glory’, and ‘Courage to Conquer’ in which as they express it in the subtitles, America’s athletes speak their faith. Brooks Robinson of the Baltimore Orioles, selected as the outstanding player in the 1966 baseball World Series is a very prominent member and I have yet to see a baseball writer say anything derogative to his conduct on and off the field. Many students have had their interest in spiritual matters awakened by the testimony of this group. It is, then, the responsibility of each individual Christian to decide before the Lord how this principle applies to entertainment in which he might be interested.

A fourth principle—beware of any association in which it would seem incongruous to engage a companion in a conversation about spiritual matters. We are not

thinking of addressing a large group; that would often be out of place. Nor are we suggesting interrupting a concert or game to present some Christian truth. You would not upset a volleyball game at a Bible conference in this way. But if, at an intermission, the things of God came up would it seem quite out of place to present the truth of the Gospel? If so, you had better seriously consider whether you are not in the wrong place.

These principles should guide in selecting recreational activities. We prefer that you should make your own application before the Lord.

Service

Obviously, discussing service last is not meant to suggest that it is the least important of the three. On the contrary, it must be considered as the goal and objective of the other two. I remember Professor Coombes questioning a large group of teachers at the beginning of a course qualifying for a degree in Education. “Are you taking this course just to get another degree or to become better teachers?” He made it very clear that he had no sympathy with the first viewpoint.

If by reading or special courses we improve our ability to express ourselves, let us be more active in Christian service. If we increase our Bible knowledge, let us pass it on to others. Use the re-created body, mind and spirit for the glory of God.

At one time General Booth was prevented from attending a world convention that he was scheduled to address. When asked to cable a message instead, he sent one word “Others.”

That is the key-note of Christian service. Before He left this scene, Christ commissioned His disciples, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). “All nations,” “all the world,” “every creature” all present a clarion call to consider others.

In the Christian family the emphasis is the same. In Galatians 6:2 (R.S.V.), Paul exhorts us, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Think of others!

May we conclude this discussion of The Use of Leisure Time with the words of the beautiful hymn:

Just as I am, young, strong and free,

To be the best that I can be,

For truth and righteousness and Thee,

Lord of my life, I come.

I would live ever in the light,

I would work ever for the right,

I would serve Thee with all my might

Therefore, to Thee I come.

Now for Thy sake to win renown,

And then to take the victor’s crown,

And at Thy feet to lay it down,

O Master, Lord — I come.