

Teacher’s Guide for Living Holy

Theme: Holiness in Recreation Choices

Life Application:

Applying Biblical standards to our choice of recreation options.

Key Verse for Meditation:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. – 1 John 2:15-16

Focus Scriptures:

Psalms 101:2-4; 119:37; Proverbs 4:14-15; 15:26; Romans 8:6-7; 12:1-2; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-16, 19; Colossians 3:16

Lesson Key:

Paul said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12). As Christians, we must be spiritually sensitive in the decisions we make regarding our recreational choices, carefully protecting holiness and guarding our minds from influences that would fuel the flesh instead of the spirit.

Introduction:

The world we live in is much like a supermarket. As we walk down the “aisles” of life, we are exposed to a variety of products. These products can be seen and heard through television, music, movies, magazines, books, internet sites, and other sources. In a way, we are “shopping” in the marketplace of ideas. As Christians, we need to carefully consider what is being sold and be sure that we make godly choices.

We are all aware that if we want to be physically healthy, we must eat nutritious food. The same is true of our minds. If we want to be spiritually healthy, we must be sure that when we “go shopping” in the world of recreation, we choose wisely so that what we ingest into our minds is beneficial and not harmful.

If we are determined to live holy lives, we will search for the direction and approval of God in our recreational choices, along with every other area of our lives. Obviously, contemporary recreational choices are not mentioned directly in Scripture. Thus, we are challenged to make decisions about recreational time based upon the application of Biblical principles. We must stay alert to what our minds absorb through the media. Remember, a worldview is being promoted through what we read, hear, and watch!

Opener Ideas/Activities:

Make up a jar or cup full of colored water as you would for coloring eggs. In front of your class, dip your fingers into the dye mixture. Then show your stained fingers to the class. Bring out that we may underestimate the capacity of our minds to absorb and remember. We may think it does not matter what books, movies, or images are fed into our minds, but it does. Our minds, like the stained hand, are “colored” by what they encounter. Discuss how what we read or see stays with us just like the dye.

To make the point that we want to keep our minds free of pornography, sexual content, foul language, and graphic violence, bring a big picture or poster of a hamburger to class. Then ask your class

how they would react if they pulled up to the drive-thru window of their favorite fast food restaurant and saw a sign that read, “Serving E. coli contaminated beef today.” (You may wish to make a sign with those words to hold up.) Ask them if they would order. What if ten cars in front of them all bought the burger—would that make a difference? No doubt they will respond that they would quickly head elsewhere! We must guard just as carefully against “*E. coli* entertainment.” We must stay away from the toxic nibbles of what the world is eager to serve.

Bring a plate of brownies to pass around. However, when you make the brownies, put in a lot of salt, and add onion powder or Tabasco to the icing. When your group begins to eat the brownies, they will instantly discern that, however good they look, they are NOT delicious! Make the point that Satan is the master of making bad things look appealing. The point is, when something “contaminated” becomes a part of us, it will leave a “bitter” result—no matter how good the outward appearance may be.

Bring to class a selection of things representing recreation options: mp3 player, book, magazine, cell phone, TV, DVD, craft item to represent a hobby, etc. Give each student a sheet of paper containing a list of the items you have collected and ask them to jot down the approximate number of minutes per day that they spend using each item. Then ask them to take their lists home and sometime during the coming week, to quietly and prayerfully evaluate them. Suggest that they ask themselves: Am I maximizing the use of these sources for spiritual benefit? How does my time spent in recreation compare with my time spent with God and in His service? Are my specific choices related to each option consistent with my Christian testimony? Encourage your students to lay this area of their lives out before God, asking Him to help them make sure their recreation choices fit with a holy lifestyle, and to carefully guard their minds from influences that would fuel the flesh instead of the spirit.

Corporate investment in product placement is evidence that what we watch does in fact impact us. Companies spend thousands of dollars each year to have their products shown in movies and TV shows. Here are two examples. Example 1: Reese’s Pieces candy was shown briefly in the film *E.T. the Extraterrestrial* (rated PG); sales increased sixty-five percent following the film’s release (see “Product Placement: Reese’s Pieces on E.T.” on www.YouTube.com). Example 2: Oakley paid \$100,000 for the use of their sunglasses in the opening scene of *Mission Impossible 2* (rated PG-13) and saw a thirty-nine percent increase in sales from the same quarter the previous year following the film’s release (see “Mission Impossible 2 Rock Climb” on www.YouTube.com). These and more examples of product placement and other effects of media can be found in *Focus on the Family’s* article “How Entertainment Can Influence Thoughts and Actions” at http://www.focusonthefamily.com/entertainment/mediawise/media_awareness/how_entertainment_can_influence_thoughts_and_actions.aspx.

Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” In class, make the point that having hobbies is not wrong, but they should be done “as to the Lord.” Create a list of the students’ hobbies, and then go back and write ideas of how each activity could be done for God, either to promote fellowship, spiritual learning, encouragement, or some other godly purpose. Here are some examples:

- o Watching movies – create a family or friends movie night (fellowship)
- o Sports – join a community team (evangelism); create a fantasy league among friends (fellowship); coach a children’s team (evangelism)
- o Cooking – give treats to neighbors or shut-ins (evangelism, encouragement); invite a group of friends over for dinner (fellowship); cook meals for new mothers or grieving families (encouragement)

- o Reading – start a book club among friends (learning, fellowship); consider writing in some capacity, perhaps as a pen pal, author, family newsletter, etc. (teaching)
- o Watching the news or listening to talk radio – get involved in local politics (evangelism, teaching)
- o Scrapbooking – invite friends over for a scrapbook party (fellowship), offer to help others scrapbook special events like weddings, births, or funerals (fellowship, encouragement)

Use the *Focus on the Family* handout provided in your supplemental resources as an aid to discussion. You could have various members of your class take an item on the bulleted list and put it in their own words. Then distribute the handouts for your group to review.

Questions from Student Handout:

1. Jesus prayed that His followers would be kept from the evil of the world, even though they were in the world (see John 17:15-16). How will a purpose to keep ourselves separate from the world affect our recreation choices?

If we have a purpose to keep ourselves separate from the world, we will have a different criteria than the world—everything will be measured by whether or not it will please God. Will it help us draw closer to God? Will it hinder us from drawing near to God? If there is a question, we will not do it. The lesson introduction might be helpful when discussing this question.

Obviously, contemporary recreation options are not specifically mentioned in Scripture. Thus, as holy people who have set ourselves apart for God and His use, we must make decisions about recreation options based upon the application of Biblical principles. Caution and discernment must be used, understanding that a worldview or philosophy of life is being promoted through what we read, hear, or watch. We cannot afford to approach these activities with the thought, “It’s just recreation.” There is too much at stake if we care about our minds, our hearts, our Christian witness—and our future! We must scrutinize recreation choices with a heart tuned toward God, a responsive attitude to the leading of His Spirit, and a determination to preserve and protect our Christian testimonies.

2. What guidelines should we develop and apply as we make those choices? See Psalm 101:3; Proverbs 14:16; Isaiah 30:21 and Philippians 4:8.

Both a sensitivity to God’s Spirit (Isaiah 30:21) and common sense are helpful as we develop guidelines regarding our recreation choices. Proverbs 14:16 tells us, “A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.” We should be cautious and turn away from evil. Sometimes we need to stop and think about what we are seeing or hearing. We might be surprised at the evil that is being subtly communicated.

Another verse to consider as a guideline could be Psalm 101:3. If we purpose to “set no evil thing” in front of our eyes, that will definitely negate watching much of what is presented through today’s media. Philippians 4:8 is also a check.

We could ask ourselves if we would participate in this media activity if Jesus was with us at that moment. He is with us! And we want to keep it that way.

3. How does the use of our time relate to media? See Ephesians 5:15-16.

In Ephesians 5:15-16, the Bible says, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” This does not mean that a Christian is never supposed to take time for relaxation. However, it could be helpful to encourage your class to see how easily the many forms of recreation and media about us can distract us from serving God with all our hearts.

4. Paul said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12). How might a form of media usage become something that is not spiritually expedient?

Here are some points you might wish to cover with your group as they discuss this question.

Any form of diversion or entertainment—books, games, hobbies, not just media—can take up an exorbitant amount of our time, energy, and thoughts, leaving us with less time, energy, and thoughts for God and His work.

If we are not willing to give an activity or type of media usage to God, it can become a spiritual hindrance.

Many forms of recreation are “addictive.” The internet sometimes entices people in insidious ways. Be aware!

Class members might have some personal illustrations they would be willing to share.

5. How can we maintain holiness and grow even closer to God despite the influences of an unholy society? See Mark 12:30 and 1 Timothy 6:11.

God needs to have first place in our lives. Then, our purpose and our willingness are key issues. We must have a purpose to stay true to God, seek to stay close to Him, and be willing to follow the promptings of His Spirit when He checks and directs us.

We must live the Gospel. It needs to be exemplified in our principles, and we need to embrace its precepts. We want those who are watching our lives to see holiness, not irregularity.

6. What might be some warning signs that we are having problems with Satan’s attempt to regain control of our hearts and minds through lawful activities?

Your class could help you make a list. It might include:

- *Too much time spent on an activity.*
- *Thinking about the media device/activity all the time.*
- *Spending less time reading the Bible and praying.*
- *More and more interest in things that are questionable.*

Additional Questions:

God’s people are called to be holy. What recreation choices will “fit” with that characteristic of our lives? What will not fit?

Recreation choices that fit are things that are uplifting, encouraging, and in line with the values we find in God’s Word. Vulgar, suggestive, violent, and ungodly things do not fit.

It is not uncommon for students to be given a reading assignment that they find offensive in either language or content. Normally, Christians are expected to respect and obey authority figures such as teachers and professors. What should students do if their teacher requires them to read something they find offensive?

There may not be one right answer to this question. High school teachers are often willing to substitute a book upon request—which can become an opportunity to share one’s testimony. Sometimes the Lord will lead one to drop a class because of its content, or to skip a reading assignment and rely on Him to get through the class. At other times, the best alternative may be to simply read the offensive assignment, while asking God to insulate their minds from being influenced by it.

The point should be made that God will lead us into what is appropriate in each circumstance if we seek His guidance.

The eyes, ears, and mind are the avenues the enemy uses to try to access our hearts. How can we protect these avenues?

We need to carefully control what we can, rejecting ungodly material whenever we have an option to do so. However, we will be exposed to some influences that we cannot control. We can pray that God will keep us from the evil of the world. (See John 17:15.) We can plead the Blood over our minds. We can fill it with alternatives by meditating on a Bible verse, or singing a Christian song in our minds or out loud.

How should we handle differences of opinion regarding “proper” recreation when we are in a group setting? For example, what do you do if your friends start a DVD that bothers you?

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to guide our response to such a situation. It will be helpful to make our position known ahead of time by casually stating our guidelines and convictions about appropriate viewing material before a situation arises. If a questionable DVD is started before you have an opportunity to express your personal guidelines, you may wish to quietly excuse yourself, pick up a book or magazine, and engross yourself in that. Or you may directly suggest something more uplifting. God can help you set a good example in a manner that is not prudish or holier-than-thou, and you may positively influence your friends to be more conservative in their media choices by the stand you take.

Some movies and books graphically portray the darkest side of mankind, including things like the brutality of war, violence against women and children, the minds of psychotic criminals, etc. Does the fact that these things are non-fictional make them non-defiling? How should Christians respond to the idea that they have an obligation to be educated about the “real world” and its problems?

Even images that portray the darkness and evil in the “real world” can be defiling. Reminding ourselves of the admonition in Philippians 4:8 can bring clarity about this question. We need to remember that those presenting the “real world” and non-fictional items have a worldview, and that will influence what they say. Our holiness worldview must be kept as a priority.

What might be the pitfalls of thinking we are immune to the evil in some forms of media, in essence saying, “It won’t hurt me”?

None of us are beyond the temptations of the enemy, and he is very sly. The evil about us can slowly desensitize us to what God hates, and that is extremely dangerous.

Word Search:

Perhaps one of the most succinct statements of Christian ethical principles is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Can you think of any words more encompassing than “whatsoever” and “all”? These words should be the measure for every aspect of our lives, including our recreation choices.

Supplemental Materials:

“Measuring the Message” by Trina Paulsen, *Higher Way* Vol.94-5

“God’s Design Was Best” by Holly Friesen, *Higher Way* Vol.92-1

Focus on the Family handout