

MEN AT
PLAY

M E N A T
P L A Y

K E N F L O Y D

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Sharon,
and daughter, Allison,
who help make all moments
of my life balanced
and filled with joy.

MEN AT PLAY

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PREFACE

Many years ago, Gordon Dahl observed the cultural landscape of America in a book titled *Work, Play, and Worship in a Leisure Oriented Society*. In his review of the American culture, Dahl observed, “Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. That which we worship, we serve, and that which we serve we will give our all—heart, soul, mind, and body.”

The heart, soul, mind, and body require balance, or symmetry. Greek architecture offers a good example of symmetry. Divide a Greek-style building in half from top to bottom, and the left side will mirror the right side.

Greek architectural symmetry reflected the philosophy that a balanced life is the highest ideal. The ideal Greek was, therefore, as accomplished in the arts as he was in athletics. He was a good steward of his intellect as well as of his body. Long before Greece existed, God ordained a balanced plan for human life. That plan reflects the rhythms of life:

worship—our spiritual ministry to God;

work—our service ministry in the world;

play—the stewardship ministry of ourselves.

We can never overestimate the importance of symmetry in the heart, soul, mind, and body.

Playwright George Bernard Shaw observed, “We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” Shaw’s statement contains a thread of truth. The type and frequency of a man’s play, or recreation, can greatly affect the quality of his life.

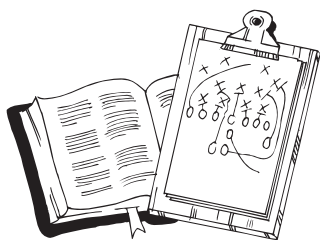
“Playing” is a multibillion dollar industry in America. Anyone

seeking opportunities for play and amusement can certainly find them. In a culture where spiritual pursuits are an ever-shrinking pastime and recreation is pursued daily with unbridled passion, devoting time to the subject of men's recreation and leisure may seem foolish. Instead, it is quite the opposite. Since we live in a world where values and practices move in opposition to Biblical directives, it has never been more important for Christians, especially men, to understand and practice Biblical, purposeful recreation.

The goal of this book is not to list or endorse certain styles of recreation in which Christian men can engage. Nor is it to promote hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure. Rather, the goal is to help men realize that the God-given purposes for recreation and leisure should define how we Christian men practice them in daily living.

The Greek philosopher Plato stated, "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." I hope that a study of *Men at Play* will not lead to *confined* activity but rather to *refined* activity that will open doors of new purpose for those times when you as a man step away from your daily routine.

1 GRASPING THE FUNDAMENTALS



Sometimes men just need to get back to the basics.

Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers in their powerhouse years of the 1950s and '60s, was noted for his ability to motivate his teams through his consistent discipline of the players and his emphasis upon the fundamentals. Lombardi is often quoted by those who seek to motivate organizations and teams to pursue excellence.

A defining moment for Lombardi's leadership as a coach came one morning at practice following some consistently sloppy play on the part of the team. He stood in their midst, held a football high in the air, and proclaimed, "Gentlemen, this is a football." With that statement he led the team through a series of drills aimed at emphasizing the fundamentals of sound football. The results were legendary: several world titles, many Hall of Fame inductions, and a legend

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that is colored in green and gold. At the center of it all was a man who reminded his team that the key to winning is more about focus and emphasizing the fundamentals than it is about flashy plays and high-profile names. The name “Lombardi” became synonymous with excellence and success to the point that the Super Bowl championship trophy bears his name.

God’s desire for men at play is that they understand the fundamentals of the Christian life. His desire for Christian men is balance. Yet to achieve this balance, Christian men must grasp what the Playbook (God’s Word) has to say about the fundamentals.

Defining “Play” and “Leisure”

In our normal vocabulary we use several words that relate to recreation. The English word “play” has obscure roots. Some authorities on word origins relate it to words implying joy, exercise, rapid movements done for recreation, and involvement in dramatic work. “Play” depicts that which is out of the ordinary.

The word “leisure” comes from the Latin word *licere*, which means “having permission” and, therefore, “having the freedom to do as one likes.”

The word “recreation” comes from the word “create” and carries with it the idea of growth. To “re-create” means, therefore, to “re-grow.”

Using these three English words as a starting point, it would seem that to be healthy and balanced in all areas of life, we must permit ourselves the opportunity to relax and be creative.

The Bible also gives perspectives on play, leisure, and recreation. It is significant that the early pages of Scripture (Genesis 1; 2) reveal that God designed a time for rest and reflection, later called “sabbath.”

Read Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 23:12, and Mark 6:31 to discover what these Scripture passages relate about “rest.”

Grasping the Fundamentals

1. How many days did God take for creation, and how many were designated for rest? _____

2. What seems to be God's underlying reason for stretching out creation over six days and then concluding the week with a seventh day designated for rest? _____

3. Since an all-powerful God does not need rest for physical restoration, why do you think God set an example by resting?



God rested, neither because He was exhausted nor because He ran out of ideas, but because He desired to place a proper perspective on reflection and rejoicing. Even the daily routine in God's creative activity was divided into the work of creation (i.e., "God made") and then reflection and rejoicing over that work (i.e., "God saw that it was good").

4. Following God's example, why is it necessary for men to take time from their labors for reflection and rejoicing? _____

Rest is even more significant for Christian men. We should not view play, or recreation, as a diversion from the routine of life. Rather, we should incorporate it as a part of that routine. God's Playbook demands recreation.



Upon Further Review

-  Take a few minutes to review your typical weekly routine. (Review your weekly average over a three-month period to help with the accuracy of this review.) Evaluate the quantity and quality of time spent regularly on the following: private time with God; work-related matters; family issues; recreation.
-  What types of activities make up the time you spend in recreation? With whom are you spending your recreation time? Who participates most frequently in your recreation?

Developing an Appreciation for “Rest”

Often Christians rush past the principles of the sabbath concept because it is formally linked to the Jew and the Old Testament mode of operation. While it is not our purpose to do a comprehensive study of the sabbath, a general understanding of this God-designed concept will help us appreciate how Christians should approach times that are distinct from the work cycle.

The Hebrew origin of the word “sabbath” means “to desist from exertion, to cause to cease, to be put away, to rid of, to be quiet, to take away.” A 1998 Reuters news report revealed that the average American is interrupted 169 times a day. This rate of interruption contributes to a high state of stress. Most Americans, if they were completely honest, would answer the commonly asked question, “How are you?” with “Busy!”

God introduced the importance of rest at the completion of creation in Genesis 2.

5. What did God do in Genesis 2:2 and 3 that we often fail to do?
-

6. When did God introduce the idea of rest to mankind: before or after man fell into sin? _____

7. What does the timing of God's introduction of rest to mankind tell men about the purposes of God for rest? _____

8. How does God view a man's unwillingness to rest as He has designed? _____

After God established the nation Israel, He commanded the observance of the Sabbath.

9. Read Exodus 20:8–11. What additional rules and standards did God add to the concept of man's rest? _____

10. Following the four hundred years of bondage in Egypt, why was it important for the Israelites to receive God's command to keep the Sabbath? _____

God also established Sabbath years to allow the land to rest. He even established a super Sabbath called "Jubilee" to take place once every fifty years. It is significant that God shared with the Israelites, who had just been released from four hundred years of slave labor in the Egyptian clay pits, that the cycle of work and then rest is an important one to observe.

However, that generation of Israel seemingly could not understand the significance of this command because for four centuries of

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bondage they knew nothing but work. That unbelieving generation died in the wilderness. When God gave the Decalogue again—this time to the new generation whom He would allow to enter the Promised Land—He gave a new illustration to illuminate the importance of Sabbath observance.

11. Compare the words of Deuteronomy 5:12–15 with those in Exodus 20:8–11. What differences do you observe between the two commandments regarding the Sabbath and rest? _____

12. What do these verses teach us about God's view of work? about God's view of bondage? _____

13. What is God's warning to men regarding their work ethic?

14. One of the meanings of the word "sabbath" is "to cease striving." Imagine a day where you would "cease striving." What would that day be like? _____

15. Why not plan a sabbath day now? Select a date and write it here.

Allowing rest to be a regularly scheduled part of our lives helps protect us from allowing work to develop into bondage.

Sabbath rest gives our souls, minds, and bodies the opportunity to be refreshed and renewed to maximize our God-given potential.

It gives us the opportunity to be brought back to the proper life perspective. How? First, we realize the pursuits that monopolize much of our weekly time are trivial when compared to the pursuit of godliness. Second, when we take time to reflect upon and commune with God, He alters the way in which we approach the coming days. Sabbath is designed to take man's attentions and efforts off the temporal to pursue that which is significant and eternal. God's Sabbath command is His imposition of rest upon His wearied subjects who have been created for much more than what they can conceive on their own.

Americans today are consumed with busyness, which seems to fuel a person's desire for a sense of importance. To be quiet, to move from the busy pace, goes against the drumbeat of a fast-paced world. Quietness provides time for reflection and solitude. Apparently some men fear that kind of reflection. They fear it might reveal inadequacies they would normally not have the time to discover. The Biblical call to "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) seems imposing and threatening to the ambitious overachiever.







God isn't silent. We just have trouble hearing Him. We need to allow our overtaxed and dulled sensitivities to be stimulated through communing with God and His Word.

Read what God's Playbook declares in Psalm 1:2 and 3 about the "blessed man."

16. What does the symbolism of the tree teach men about the importance of rest? about the time investment for rest? _____



Upon Further Review

-  How would you describe the current pace of your life? Does it have a good balance of work, rest, and refreshment?
-  When was the last time you took a significant break to seriously evaluate and cultivate your relationship with God? your spouse? your children? your friends?
-  What do you learn from God's emphasis upon the Sabbath?
-  What is the typical routine of your "day of rest"?
-  In building a balanced, godly home, what are the results of overworking and overachieving? Have you been overworking and overachieving?
-  Sabbath rest affects your soul, mind, and body. In regard to these three, where are you the most out of balance?