

The Safety Net

National Church Growth Research Center

P. O. Box 368 · Mt. Hood OR 97041 · 541-352-7636 · sishot@aol.com · www.liftedhands.org

Silas Shotwell, Regional Director

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“Leisure”

Dear ones,

The word for this month is *leisure*.

I want to talk about church leadership and leisure.

I won't quote Biblical admonitions or point to examples from Scripture. I don't know that they are there. Frankly, I can't even imagine John the Baptist riding a four-wheeler through the sand dunes or Mary and Martha having a Bunko party on Saturday night.

But I know church leaders today need leisure, and many don't have it.

I've had more than one preacher tell me they don't have any idea how to have fun. Especially those who have become Christians later in life. They used to drink, carouse, and live for sports. Now, they don't know what to do to have fun.

Oh I know reading the Word, going to singings, and working in the soup kitchen can be pleasant. But those things, for the church leader, are still *work*.

Two weeks vacation is still all the time off a lot of preachers get and they often go to college lectureships or hold revival meetings during those two weeks.

I have people come to Higher Ground with their families because they simply need a break. They can pray here, but they can also fish, bike, sleep, or play games. I had one family here who was taking their first vacation in seven years and about six families that were taking their first in five. They almost didn't know what to do to relax.

There is a book entitled, “When I Relax, I Feel Guilty.” The title says it all, you don't need the book.

Once I had a young ministry intern who was pious and determined to save the world. He was almost afraid to smile. We provided him room and board, a car to drive, encouragement and exhortation. After a week he told us that he didn't think we were serious enough about ministry. Why? We spent too much time working in the yard! He couldn't figure how we could waste time mowing a lawn when there were souls to save. He's been one of the most zealous critics of our ministry. He doesn't know I pray for him while I'm pulling weeds.

We (and I'm including *you* in this) live in a pressure cooker world. We all do. I see people move from Southern California to small towns in the Northwest, thinking their lives will become simpler. Doesn't happen! It's the nature of our world and our times. You can't even take a leisurely walk in the woods on Mt Hood without thinking of the possibility of running into armed marijuana growers or mushroom thieves. Seriously!

I have enough demands on my time that I have to schedule leisure. It wouldn't happen otherwise. I fish a little, go to four rodeos a year, and play dominoes online. I collect Texas artifacts, like armadillos and horned toads, and I grow flowers inside the house and outside.

Am I wasting time? No, I'm actually gaining time. I can do more of the essential stuff if I take moments to relax with the trivial stuff.

We can feel too much responsibility. During a difficult time in my life I was seeing a psychiatrist. He was Jewish. I spent most of my time trying to explain my faith to him and especially my church and the screwy way it utilizes leadership. Anyhow, he stopped me mid-conversation one day and said, "I'm confused. I thought you Christians believed Jesus is the Messiah but it seems to me that you are trying to be the Messiah!"

Slap!

But it was true!

That was a turning point for me. I was trying to be the Messiah. I thought I was the hope for mankind. Pretty laughable huh?

I don't know what Jesus thought about leisure. He didn't start His formal ministry until He was 30. My young intern friend would have thought it was foolish to wait so long. And Jesus did keep the Sabbath, a sort of God-imposed break in the routine.

What about you?

When you relax do you feel guilty?

Are you addicted to the tyranny of the urgent?

Slow down. Take a break. Have some fun. The result may surprise you.

In Christian love,
Silas