

Christian Recreation and Entertainment

*Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.
2 Corinthians 7:1*

Issues in Recreationⁱ

Christianity is by no means opposed to healthy fun and true recreation (which is a refreshing of the powers of body and mind). In fact, games, music, reading, listening to the radio, or watching television can be beneficial and uplifting. However, Christians are tempted to participate in unwholesome activities. The infiltration of the values of society coupled with a wish not to appear odd may lead to compromise. The attractiveness of the entertainment with its appeal to the strong urges of body, mind, and heart makes some Christians vulnerable. The lack of creative and purposeful effort of church family and society to provide healthy and wholesome entertainment may create a dangerous vacuum of boredom. Finally, adult examples often orient the youth in a direction that contradicts what they teach and profess. We will briefly touch on several of these issues.

- a. **Reading.** Written materials are strong instruments in communicating ideas, views, and concepts. A skillful writer can paint a picture in the mind of the reader so well that no enactment on screen or stage can match it. Thus the printed page enters the storage rooms of our heart and mind and supplies the inventory from which we draw our actions and reactions. The dangers of improper reading are many. For example, the reading of fiction may separate the reader from reality; the world of fantasy can become an easy refuge when real life demands immediate, hard decisions. Harmful or even sinful values can steal their way into our mind and heart when camouflaged in an exciting style and thrilling plot. Slowly and imperceptibly we become what we read because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart.

The choice of reading must be guided by the same biblical principles that govern all of recreation. All reading must glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31) and edify the mind and spirit (Phil. 4:8).

- b. **Radio and Television.** Enormous sums are spent to capture radio and television audiences. With rare exceptions, the purpose of these media programs is to sell, either ideas or products. By listening or viewing, one is exposed to constant advertising that brings skillful sales techniques into the privacy of one's home, attempting to create needs that will translate into purchases and a consumer mentality.

The standards of conduct portrayed in many of the programs are not in harmony with the Christian lifestyle. Sex and violence permeate songs and programs. Disrespect for authority and even God is portrayed routinely. Even news broadcasts and talk shows are generally designed with an agenda foreign to the disciple of Christ.

The quantity of time consumed by television viewing in the average home often

far outstrips the amount of time spent in family camaraderie or shared activities. Thus television is becoming the role model and mentor of today's children. Even in Christian homes, family worship is often displaced by television programming. The time spent by many listening to the radio is equally striking.

Although it might be safer not to have a television set, the option is probably unrealistic. However, great care must be exercised in choosing programs to view. Some find it helpful to consult the newspaper or program guide regarding programs to be seen. In any case, carefully considered rules must be implemented and applied, especially in a home where there are children. For the sake of their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, children should have restricted viewing times. Parents should watch television with their children in order to know what they are seeing and be able to discuss with them the benefits and dangers of such programs. There should be no hesitation to change the channel or turn off the television if a program turns out to be undesirable. Even so, the human brain is so quick to capture ideas, attitudes, and feelings that by the time one realizes the program does not meet Christian standards, it may be too late to prevent some ideas, words, or mental pictures from finding their place in the recesses of the mind and heart. It is important to choose judiciously who will speak, sing, or appear in our home, be it in person or on screen.

- c. **Theaters.** Much of what has been said about television programming holds true for movie theaters. In addition, several other issues emerge when films are viewed in the theater. To begin with, the viewer has no control over the film or its scenes. Next, one becomes part of the group of viewers, with personal tastes, values, and preferences overshadowed by the majority. When a Christian has negative feelings about an action presented, the crowd might cheer or laugh; when a Christian feels good or happy about something, the rest might judge the scene the opposite way. The impact of the majority easily weakens one's judgment (Ps. 1:1–3). Besides, the theater is not an ideal place to sense Christ's presence. Finally, having paid the entrance fee, one may feel reluctant to leave.

While some of the problems posed by viewing a film in a theater disappear when one watches a video in the privacy of one's home, the basic issue remains the same. Biblical principles of purity and appropriateness must be followed in choosing what one allows to enter into the mind and heart (Prov. 4:23).

- d. **Dancing.** While dancing for joy and the spontaneous expression of happiness occur in the life of God's people (Ex. 15:21, 22; 2 Sam. 6:14), biblical dance as cannot be compared with its modern counterpart. First, the contemporary social dance does not *express* a mood, rather it is programmed to *create* a specific mood chosen by entertainers. The participants in such a dance become vulnerable to influences and values they would not otherwise choose. Experience confirms that the moods expressed in the biblical dance (joy, gratitude, praise) are diametrically different from those created in dancing places (excitement, lust, seduction), which cannot fit the Christian lifestyle. Romantic music and rhythm target the intimate feelings and private emotions in a public context. Inevitably a Christian is faced with unnecessary temptations and incredible challenges to his or her Christian identity. Social dance legitimizes physical closeness that would never be sanctioned in any other situation. Such closeness tends to rouse sexual desire not to be satisfiable outside the marital

relation. Finally, dancing is most often accompanied by drinking, drugs, violence, and unrestrained behavior. The sensual apparel, ambiance, and music foster casual contacts, which lead to impure thoughts and unfortunate consequences. Christians must ask themselves if they can be assured of God's presence while visiting such events and places (Ps. 1:1–6).

- e. **Music.** Music is a powerful medium of communicating ideas and affecting the moods and dispositions of listeners. Several elements combine to exert this strong influence. First, the melody and harmony, which can be pleasing or threatening, mournful or joyful, romantic or cold, reaches the mind and heart, creating a corresponding inner atmosphere. Rhythm and tempo only enhance the effectiveness of the melody and harmony. Lyrics add the poetic expression of words and intensify the overall impact. Because by nature music's influence is mostly subliminal, objective measurement and evaluation are difficult to achieve. Guidelines in this context must rely on the principles of recreation mentioned above.

For example, the combination of religious lyrics with romantic or comical melodies trivializes sacred themes. In a similar way, beautiful harmonies and appealing melodies excite feelings and reduce watchfulness, especially in a group setting. Moreover, very distasteful lyrics can be masterfully concealed in otherwise harmless music. Finally, music can become a bonding agent that transcends culture and church boundaries, disseminating its good or bad impact on the formulation of ideas or tastes. Generations are divided along these lines and Christian values are strongly affected. Only uncompromising firmness and careful vigilance can provide a measure of security for the inventory of our minds and hearts.

SDA Church Manual on Musicⁱⁱ

"Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594 ...

Music is one of the highest arts. Good music not only gives us pleasure but elevates our minds and cultivates our finest qualities. God often has used spiritual songs to touch the hearts of sinners and lead to repentance. On the contrary, debased music breaks down morality and draws us away from our relationship with God.

We should exercise great care in the choice of music in our homes, social gatherings, schools, and churches. Any melody partaking of the nature of jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms, or any language expressing foolish or trivial sentiments, will be shunned [by a Christian].

We should therefore carefully evaluate our mental habits. What we choose to read, hear, and watch, whether by book or magazine, radio or television, the Internet, or other modern media shapes and impacts our character.

Biblical Principles that Should Govern our Entertainment

1. Jesus offers lasting and true joy: Following Jesus does not kill our joy

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

“... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

2. Principle that ‘by beholding we become changed’: What we look at and contemplate on, transform us

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Prov 23:7)

3. A good person will produce good fruits in their life, fruits consistent with a godly character

“Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Matthew 7:17, 18)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22, 23)

4. The values of this world versus those of God are diametrically opposed to each other

“What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ... ‘Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’” (2 Corinthians 6:15-17)

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:15-16)

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” (Ephesians 5:8-11)

5. Principle of a purity: Reject any evil thoughts as unwelcome and dangerous

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” (Job 31:1)

“I will set before my eyes no vile thing.” (Psalm 101:3)

6. Principle of total commitment to God: Seek God’s pleasure above all else

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” (Matthew 22:37)

7. Principle of stewardship: We belong to God and are accountable for the use of our resources (time, money, health, etc)

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:20)

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 25:21)

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2)

8. Principle of self control: Put body, mind and spirit under the control of the Holy Spirit

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and **self-control**.” (Galatians 5:22, 23)*

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” (Proverbs 25:28)

9. Principle of God's presence: An habitual consciousness of God's presence can keep sin at bay

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." (Psalm 139:7-10)

10. Principle of following Jesus' example: What would Jesus do when confronted by a similar situation

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (1 John 2:6)

11. Principle of dependence on God's Word for counsel and direction

"But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

"I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread." (Job 23:12)

12. Principle of the indwelling Christ to transform the life: God empowers us to say "No" to harmful entertainment

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Potential Dangers of Secular Entertainment

Much of the entertainment and literature in our society is ungodly. This doesn't only apply to obvious material such as pornography but also to many regular television programs, movies, books, magazines and music. Let's take a look at some of the potential dangers of secular entertainment:

1. We can accept a secular picture of the world.

Much entertainment presents a false or incomplete picture of reality by leaving Christ out. Even if there are no negative references to Christianity, the picture of the world we expose ourselves to may ignore the most important element of truth – God. It is like reading a book about how to survive in the wilderness that does not mention food or water. If the main thing we fill our minds with are these godless versions of reality, we can come to see Christianity as irrelevant to human interactions and "religion" as only belonging in church.

2. We learn lessons that are not true to life.

If we watch television sitcoms, movies or pornography, we will internalise a false picture of human relationships. For example, if we regularly watch soap operas, we may become frustrated that our spouse is not as romantic or sexy as the actors and actresses on screen.

3. We don't feel refreshed.

If we spend a couple of hours every night after work watching sitcoms and other television shows, thinking it's a way to relax and unwind, we will likely discover thereafter that we are not truly relaxed, closer to our spouse / children or nearer to God. Instead we will more likely feel mildly drugged.

4. We can become cynical.

We can develop disrespect for pastors or Christianity since few movies or television shows portray Christians or pastors in a positive light. Pastors and evangelists often are shown as greedy or as lunatics, or both.

5. We can develop impure sexual thoughts.

The sexuality in most secular entertainment is unwholesome for the Christian striving for a godly character. It presents sex simply as an instinctive drive, or it makes adultery and other sexual sins appear romantic and wonderful. When we expose ourselves to these messages, our thoughts about sex are likely to become similar to the world's and less like God's. It may even lead us to fantasize about sexual sins.

6. We can accept violence as normal behavior.

If we aren't careful, we can find ourselves unwittingly accepting onscreen violence, or even laughing at it. Some of us may actually find ourselves imitating the violent behavior we see on TV or the movies.

7. We can become materialistic.

Most advertising has one purpose: to make us think we must buy some particular thing in order to be happy. Movies and TV shows often feature luxurious living and give the message that happiness comes from material things.

Enjoy Healthy Activities and Entertainment

When you choose entertainment activities, identify those that are both fun and edifying.

The following is a short list of ideas. Check those that you would enjoy doing:

- Make a great meal and share it with friends.
- Listen to inspiring sermons.
- Visit with friends.
- Read and share inspirational stories.

- ___ Listen to uplifting music.
- ___ Go backpacking or climb a mountain.
- ___ Play tennis, golf or another sport.
- ___ Sing at home.
- ___ Join a choir.
- ___ Go for a walk in the park.
- ___ Play games with friends.
- ___ Learn to play a musical instrument.
- ___ Read Christian magazines.
- ___ Study the Bible.
- ___ Watch a movie that affirms your Christian values.
- ___ Read an inspirational, educational, or religious book.
- ___ Read biographies.
- ___ Listen to an orchestra.
- ___ Grow a garden.
- ___ Write encouraging letters and emails.
- ___ Start a collection or develop a hobby.

Don't Spend Too Many Hours on Entertainment

When we spend too much time watching television, surfing the internet or engaging in sports or other activities, we often neglect our family and friends, and our relationships suffer. Plus, we are not fulfilling God's purpose for us. He wants us to develop our gifts and to reach out and minister to others. We are called to make a difference in this world, not merely to be spectators.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Watch for Rationalisations

Let's be honest with ourselves. Would God want us to watch that movie or television show? How would it really affect us? Here are two common rationalizations.

- a. **"I filter out the bad parts."** This may be true to a degree, but repetitive exposure usually affects us. Furthermore, the reason we watch or read questionable material is often because we want to enjoy things that we should not enjoy.
- b. **"Christian media sometimes gets boring."** If we get bored with Christian TV or radio shows, that should not be an excuse to watch or listen to unprofitable things. There are lots of other ways to spend our time.

This is not to say we should only watch, read or listen to things which are overtly Christian. Some secular materials are educational, entertaining and uplifting. But we should carefully evaluate what we do for recreation and entertainment, and how these activities affect us spiritually.

Pray for Wisdom and Balance

Recreation is fine if it is part of a balanced life, but if you mainly live to have fun, you are missing out on God's purpose for your life and the joy that comes from serving God and helping others. Set your mind on things above.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-2).

Personal Application: Evaluate What You Do For Entertainment

Would Jesus enjoy what I enjoy?	Yes / No
Would Jesus find the same jokes or stories funny?	Yes / No
Would Jesus read or watch the same things I do?	Yes / No
Would Jesus listen to the same music?	Yes / No
Would Jesus do the same things I do?	Yes / No

What changes do you think God would like you to make in what you do or watch for entertainment?

What changes do you think God would like you to make in how much time you spend on entertainment?

ⁱ Miroslav Kiš, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 710-712

ⁱⁱ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 143-144