

Week Two: *Intentional Play*
Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. In a “work hard, play hard” culture, sometimes we never get around to the “play” part. A 2017 article by CNBC cites a poll that estimates 52% of Americans do not use all of their paid time off. Which half of Americans do you fall in: the half that uses all of your time or the half that wastes it? Is that an intentional choice you made? Why or why not?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 9:7-10. Does this passage affirm the way you chose to use your vacation time?
3. Look specifically at Ecclesiastes 9:7. Does this verse surprise you? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe your attitude about enjoying eating and drinking?
5. For many of us, we have guilt over what we eat or drink. While our choices impact our health and well-being, how does the truth that what we eat or drink does not affect how God feels about us make you feel about your choices?
6. Look again at Ecclesiastes 9:7. What would it take for you to have a joyful heart while enjoying life?
7. Maybe you don't have an easy answer to the question above. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God in prayer to help you experience joy in your leisure time.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. It seems everyone has an elder relative who has at least one prized object that was deemed too valuable to use. In my case, I inherited a beautiful flower vase from my grandmother. She had cleaned it religiously yet kept it tucked away in a hutch. I had never seen it hold flowers. By the time I received it, the pattern was showing serious wear from being cleaned, but not from fulfilling its purpose! Share an example of this from your family.
9. Look again at Ecclesiastes 9:8. How does this verse say we are to live?
10. How often do you wear white clothes? Many people today avoid doing so because white is so hard to keep clean. Just imagine how impractical it was in the days when people walked most places on dirt roads. What was the author of Ecclesiastes implying by saying it is good to wear white?
11. Anointing your head with oil might seem equally as frivolous as wearing white. The perfumes and oils used for anointing were expensive. What would be an equivalent of wearing white and anointing with oil for you today? What do you love but decide is too expensive or frivolous to wear or do too often?

12. When you think about your answer to question 11, is this how you see God? As someone who wants you to *enjoy* these behaviors? Why or why not?
13. Spend some time reflecting on your answer above. What experiences have shaped your attitudes about enjoying these simple pleasures? As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray that God would help you see more clearly his intention for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. What do you do for a “living”? Are you a student, do work inside the home or outside the home, or are you retired? What is your primary “job to do”?
15. How do you feel about your current job? Is it fulfilling or toilsome? How would you describe it?
16. Look again at Ecclesiastes 9:7-10. How does this passage describe the work we do?
17. Sometimes, we feel as though the work we do is a form of punishment. Read Genesis 2:15-17. What purpose did God give Adam? What had he commanded him?
18. Oftentimes, we see our work as punishment as part of the fall because of sin. Yet in the Genesis account, we see that work was given to man before he sinned. How does this affect how you feel about your work?
19. Look again at Ecclesiastes 9:7-10. What does the author call both our labor and our enjoyment?
20. If they are both a necessary part of our life, can one be more valuable than the other? Can we experience fulfillment without one or the other? Explain your answer.
21. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to give you a greater appreciation for your work and leisure.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Often when people think of life as a Christ-follower, they expect it to be somber. What do you think has helped form their perceptions?
23. Jesus experienced similar attitudes during his ministry. Read Matthew 11:16-19. How did Jesus characterize the people of his time?

24. Describe an example where you might be criticized by one camp if you participate in an activity yet criticized by another if you don't?
25. How do those opinions tend to impact your decision-making?
26. In Matthew 11, Jesus used the example of eating and drinking. John the Baptist lived in the desert and often fasted and denied himself pleasures. Yet he was criticized as ungodly. Jesus both ate and drank as an ordinary person would and was considered a glutton. What do these criticisms say about the people of Jesus' day?
27. Look again at Matthew 11:19. What did Jesus say about wisdom?
28. In the end both Jesus' and John's actions were proven right through their miraculous deeds. Each man's choices were appropriate for their circumstances. Hard and fast value judgments about eating and drinking were not. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask that God give you wisdom to make good choices when you are unsure of the best action to take.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Paul also addresses the issue of eating and drinking in his ministry. Read 1 Corinthians 10:22-33. What is the only parameter Paul lays out for Christians?
30. What was his reason for that boundary?
31. Paul's parameters leave a very broad array of foods to choose from. We are free to eat any food that is eaten in gratitude and has not been sacrificed to idols. What does that tell you about your enjoyment of what you eat and drink?
32. Food and drink are a small part of our lives. To what other parts of life might this freedom also apply? In other words, what other manmade parameters do we put on our own choices that are not restricted by God?
33. Where is your favorite place to vacation or just relax? Why do you like it?
34. The answers to question 33 are as varied as the people who answer the question. What does the beautiful, broad array of God's creation tell you about his nature to love and bless us?
35. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, consider all that it means to be loved and blessed by God here on Earth. Then end with a prayer of gratitude.