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The Hidden Value of Fun

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The Hidden Value of Fun

Learn to recharge by having fun.

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Introduction

Take Time to Titter and Tee-Haw

By Dana Wilkerson

My cousins have cornered the market on having fun. These three sisters—a teacher, a manufacturing specialist, and a farmer—live no fewer than 150 miles from either of the others, and their kids range in age from eight to twenty-eight. Yet they find every opportunity they can to get together and have a blast. Sometimes it's all three of them, sometimes it's just two. Sometimes they bring the family, sometimes they don't.

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They might spend a night at a hotel, reminiscing about the old days, talking about their kids and jobs, and "tittering and tee-hawing," as they call it, all night long. Or maybe they pack up the kids and head to Silver Dollar City, where they have more fun on the rides than the kids do. Once or twice a year they have a scrapbook weekend and trim and stamp their way through family outings and kids' milestones together. But most often, they just congregate at their parents' house and tell stories until they laugh themselves silly.

Every so often my schedule allows me to be a part of their fun. Just last night I got to spend several hours with two of them, and it hit me that they are great examples of what this study is all about. All of them are devoted wives and mothers; they make sure their families are well taken care of in every way. Yet they all understand the importance of taking time for themselves—to have fun, to enjoy life, and to occasionally just take a break (however short it may be) from the demands of their lives.

Genesis 2:3 says, "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work." If God can take a rest from His work, surely we can, too. In fact, God even tells us to take a break sometimes. Remember that commandment about the Sabbath? I'm pretty sure He wasn't joking.

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So let's make sure we take time to stop, smell the roses, and titter and tee-haw so we can recharge and be energized when we jump back into the fray of life. This collection of articles will give you a host of ideas and advice about ways women, just like you, take the time to have some fun—both by themselves and with friends. I hope they will encourage and inspire you to do the same.

Blessings,

Dana Wilkerson
Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
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Leader's Guide

How to use "The Hidden Value of Fun" for a group study

"The Hidden Value of Fun" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
5. When working through the "Reflect" questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
6. End the session in prayer.

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Girls Just Wanna Have Fun!

Bring excitement and challenge to your life with a new hobby.

By Nia Ricks Davenport

My fingertips are throbbing. The skin is red, dented and very sore. I haven't been this happy in years! At the ripe age of 33, I'm learning to play my guitar. It was tucked away in the closet for almost 11 years. Like most moms, I believed hobbies were a thing of the past. But now I'm convinced that *anyone* can have a hobby if they want to.

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The dictionary defines a hobby as "an activity engaged in for pleasure and relaxation during spare time." In other words, a hobby involves using your brain and/or your body and is strictly for fun—unlike the rest of your activities that are done for necessity. A hobby doesn't add stress to your life, but relieves your stress. In reality, few moms have hobbies because the concept of "spare time" is almost laughable. We can barely find time to eat and sleep, let alone time for ourselves.

Finding a hobby became important to me when I woke up one morning and realized a part of me was dying. There were things I was good at and used to enjoy that my husband and children didn't even know about. I'd become a one-dimensional, task-driven woman who lacked a lot of the zeal and spunk I used to have. My idea of pleasure and relaxation was an uninterrupted nap!

One of the moms in my church motivated me to try a hobby. Lisa, who has two girls and works part-time, found reading pleasurable and relaxing. So she joined a book club with 10 other women who share the same interest. She finds this hobby fun, stimulating and engaging. It's also inexpensive because most of the books they read are available at the public library or in paperback. Lisa is a more vibrant, knowledgeable and outgoing woman because she's added this dimension to her life.

I've always loved and appreciated music, so playing the guitar as a hobby was a natural fit. I didn't have any extra money in the budget, so I found a community center that offered free lessons while my children played in the corner. I found creative times to practice, like

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dinnertime or during "free-play" time. At church, I open the preschoolers' lesson with a song accompanied by a few simple chords. Playing guitar is both challenging and relaxing for me. And it's great fun.

What kind of hobby would you enjoy? Think about what you have always wanted to do, and what fits into this season of your life. Then go for it. For help starting the process:

Get motivated. Find another mom who seems balanced and happy and get ideas from her. Talk to some of your friends and brainstorm with them. Take a trip down memory lane and think about what you liked to do for fun before you had children.

Gain your family's support. Help your family realize that your investment of time in yourself and your hobby is important. Strategize ways for other family members to take on responsibilities that give you time for your hobby.

Be flexible but realistic. Look at how much time and money you want to dedicate to your hobby versus how much you can truly afford. Ask yourself: *Will the activity I'm considering bring "pleasure and relaxation"?*

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With a little planning and creativity, you can revive the fun in your life with a hobby.

Nia Ricks Davenport enjoys hobbies ranging from kickboxing to guitar. She's a Certified Public Accountant working part-time for their family business. She's also a stay-at-home mom with four children. This article first appeared in the March/April 2007 edition of MOMSense *magazine.*

Reflect

- *What are your hobbies? Why do you enjoy them?*
- *What is one hobby you've always wanted to try but haven't? What has stopped you?*
- *What are the steps you need to take so you will be able to try out this new hobby?*

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Maybe It's a Little Bit About Me

Make time for yourself.

By Camerin Courtney

As I was standing in the paper-goods aisle at my local grocery store last December angrily concocting a singlehood conspiracy theory, I knew things needed to change.

You see, I wanted to buy a four-pack of toilet paper. Just four. Not a dozen, not eight, just four. As a one-woman, one-bathroom household, and one a bit short on storage space at that, I just didn't need that much toilet paper. I wanted four rolls, and I couldn't find such an offering in the huge aisle of mega-packs before me.

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Dang suburbia, I thought. *All these huge-o families all around me with their Costco-sized paper-goods needs. Destroying the environment and making it impossible for a single woman like myself to meet my grocery shopping needs. It's an anti-single conspiracy, I tell you.*

As soon as my mental tirade got to "conspiracy," I stopped. Took a deep breath. And started giggling. An elderly woman made a wide berth around me—a lone woman giggling at a 12-pack of Charmin—as she went for a roll of Brawny paper towels down the aisle.

It was the final straw. I knew I'd been a bit burnt-out lately. And overworked. And overtired. And possibly a bit crabby and proud of my bad attitude. But when I had my little crazy moment in the toilet paper aisle, I knew I was officially in a Bad Place.

In my defense, it *was* the holidays. But I'd also taken on a few extra freelance assignments recently. And I had gotten in a bad habit of sticking around work until a couple hours after closing time. My time away from work was largely spent with Jean Luc, my aging laptop computer, at church committee meetings, or at my weekly volunteer gig.

But somewhere in all this important adult stuff I'd lost the fun. Somewhere in prioritizing work and ministry and responsible adult chores, I'd lost the priority of me.

I chafed at this at first. Prioritize me? How very un-Christian. How many sermons and purpose-driven bits of wisdom have wisely informed us, in our egocentric American culture, that "It's not about me."

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Following this advice, and my renewed sense of wanting to do something significant with my life, I was toiling away at all these good godly pursuits—a ministry-centered job, church work, volunteer hours. Somehow it didn't seem right to leave at the end of a workday saying, "I really need to get home and park myself in front of *The Gilmore Girls* on TV." Or to pass up a church meeting because I really need to foster community by watching the Olympics and eating dinner at Lisa and Paul's house.

I had a sneaking suspicion, however, that if I'd had a family to go home to at the end of said workday, or to play hooky from ministry events with from time to time to snatch some needed down-time, I wouldn't have batted an eye. I would have made an effort for such a noble quest as "family time." But me-time seemed somehow selfish.

However, standing there in the grocery store aisle facing the scary results of little to no me-time, I began to rethink that concept of selfishness. All strung-out and crabby, I wasn't in the best state to be a good worker, volunteer, ambassador for Christ. While I'd known this truth all along, somehow in the crush of day-to-day living and just keeping up with a frenetic schedule, I'd let my priorities shift… and all but disappear.

I also realized that without someone else to prioritize me (and yes, to place extra challenges and demands on my time as well), *I* need to do this. To make sure I'm getting enough sleep, time with God, fun, time with friends, and down-time so that I can be effective in the pursuits to which God calls me. And, in prayerful moderation, this isn't selfish or un-Christian at all.

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So I started the new year with a new quest: better balance. I started by making weekend plans on Mondays and Tuesdays, sometimes even a week or two in advance (whoa!). I felt a bit society-girl at first, making social occasions such a priority, but I realized it wasn't the social occasions that were the priority but the community. I needed people time, and as one who lives alone, it doesn't come just by returning home. It takes intentionality and prioritizing.

And part of that prioritizing, I realized, was allowing the right things to rise to the top. I've renewed my prayer of "God, show me what this season of my life is about. Show me what you want me to accomplish right now, and what I need to let someone else handle."

Part of that learning to say "no" more often was walking away from this column for a couple months. Not writing about the singles experience as much and actually getting out there and living it. And in doing so I was reminded afresh what a fun gig this can be.

I made a spontaneous dash to Lisa and Paul's house to watch Olympic ice dancing one night, pursued new friendships with my hairstylist and a woman I met at a singles event, took wonderfully long Sunday afternoon naps, read page-turners into the wee hours of the night, took a day off work in the middle of the week to help a friend celebrate a milestone birthday.

I've spent a couple recent weekend nights closing down local restaurants by talking with friends old and new for hours. We've laughed, cried, challenged, commiserated,

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and encouraged one another. Just this past weekend, in another closing-down-the-restaurant evening with a new single friend, we were treated to a free dessert by the chef—because they had one left at the end of the day and because of course you give it to the two single women still chatting and laughing the evening hours away.

In this process of prioritizing people and striving for better balance, I've felt the crabby and the conspiracy theories melt away. I even got crazy one day and bought an eight-pack of toilet paper. With the extra company I've been inviting over, I've actually needed it.

This article first appeared in March 2006 on ChristianSinglesToday.com.

Reflect

- *The author says, "somewhere in all this important adult stuff I'd lost the fun." What kinds of things have caused you to "lose the fun"?*
- *How do you feel when you spend time doing something for your own enjoyment? Do you enjoy it? Feel guilty? Feel selfish? Why do you think you feel this way?*
- *How do you need to shift priorities so you can get some much needed me-time?*

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Party Time!

Every year this group of women gather to celebrate their birthdays, friendships, and sense of fun.

By Jane Heitman

I assessed myself in the mirror, admiring my triangular pink nose and long tail. Fitting my pink ears in place, I dashed into the Cheshire Cat's waiting car.

We were on our way to Alice in Wonderland's tea party. Upon arrival, we met the Mad Hatter, the White Rabbit, and two "civilians." Soon we were sipping tea, swapping tales, and savoring our friendships. Another annual birthday party was underway!

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Our group of six women—Cherry, Sue, Karen, Viki, Florence, and I—met at church while we worked together in Sunday school, and on education and youth committees. About five years ago, Cherry and Sue started to meet over coffee to discuss problems they were having with their kids. Karen joined them—then eventually the rest of us did, too. "We made our connections through planning and doing so many things together at church," says Karen. "It was our therapy session," Cherry adds. But despite the fact the kids outgrew their problems and we eventually resigned from our church duties, we discovered we enjoyed being together anyway.

To maintain contact, we attend as many of our occasional coffee klatches as possible, where we've loved and supported each other through work problems, the deaths of parents, and personal injuries. Sometimes we trade recipes, books, and shopping tips. But it's when we gather once a year to celebrate our birthdays that the fun really begins!

Three years ago, when we were planning to celebrate Sue's birthday, we knew we needed something creative to match her sense of humor. Someone suggested a Barbie theme—in honor of Sue's hatred of Barbies—and we got on a roll. For our Barbie party we wore pink and set the table with Barbie plates and napkins. Karen created a doll cake, with Barbie standing in the middle of a big cake skirt. Karen also made tiaras and magic wands for each of us. Once Sue got over her horror, she—and the rest of us—laughed and enjoyed the festivities. The theme party appealed to the child within each of

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us, and a tradition was born! Since three of us have birthdays in January, we decided to meet around that time, as our busy schedules allow.

The next year we chose an Alice in Wonderland theme. The party took a Victorian tone when we decided to meet for lunch at a local bed and breakfast. The owner who hosted us prepared scones, marmalade, tea, and other British treats. The table, adorned with lace and fine china, looked fit for royalty. After much squealing and picture-taking, we poured the tea, talked, and laughed. Our hostess said wistfully, "It's great to have such good friends." We heartily agreed.

Our fun-loving, creative group includes a retail clerk, two clerical workers, and three teachers. Through the years we've encouraged each other as we've changed jobs and work assignments. Some of us have moved from working at home to working outside the home. "You can do it," we assured Pat when she was named department head at a craft store. "They're lucky to have you," we told Karen when she switched from substitute to full-time teaching.

When we met, these married women accepted me as a divorcee. Later, they shared the joy of my remarriage and gave me thoughtful gifts though I'd requested none.

Though two of us are childless, we all listen to "kid problems" and applaud the achievements of each other's families. When Cherry's son died last year, Viki and Sue stocked her refrigerator, tidied up her house, and left a note with all our names on it while she was out.

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One of the best things we do for each other is listen. "We spend a lot of time comparing notes," says Sue. "Nobody has a map through life, but we help each other around the bumps and curves."

While our coffees and conversations allow us to vent, we set our everyday lives aside for our annual parties. They're purely for fun, a celebration of friendship. Our families support our parties, probably because we're all so happy preparing, attending, and recounting them. Sometimes our families assist in the plans. Two years ago, Cherry's husband made her a White Rabbit's giant pocket watch out of a pie plate.

Planning the parties is easy. Having worked on committees together for so long, we know each other's talents, likes, and dislikes. One or two of us brainstorm the theme idea and ask the others' approval. One of us finds the place. One of us creates and delivers the invitations. Costumes are encouraged but optional. Cards and gifts aren't required either, but we bring them. Someone usually brings party favors. We keep the cost as low as possible, emphasizing the fun of making our own entertainment and just being together.

Last year's party, which had a '50s theme, consisted of lunch and zany games at a local diner. It all began with invitations complete with a picture of Elvis. We dressed like the *Happy Days* cast and enjoyed burgers and shakes. Our antics amused the other customers, whose eyes got even wider when they saw us in the parking lot after lunch, where our bubble-blowing and hula hoop contests capped off another great party. "It's fun to be a kid again," Karen says.

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We dare to act silly with each other because we trust and accept each other. "It's just girls getting together and sharing," Pat explains. We know each other's foibles and share a common outlook. We know where we stand as sisters in Christ.

Though our group began with some formal church committees, group dynamics are open to change. This past year, we invited Florence, a young-at-heart senior citizen from church, to join our get-togethers. She arrived at our '50s party in her leather jacket. "But," she said, between bites of hamburger, "I left my bike back at home."

We're already anticipating our next party, when we'll revisit the '60s. "I look forward to this a year in advance!" admits Karen. "The birthday stuff I do with my family is nice, but this is my *real* party."

We've still got a few months to prepare for our '60s celebration. Someone will wear bell bottoms. Someone will show up in love beads and granny glasses. And we'll all continue to be clad in love and laughter to see us through the years ahead.

Jane Heitman, a library technician and freelance writer, lives in Colorado. This article first appeared in the September/October 2000 issue of Today's Christian Woman.

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Reflect

- *What do you and your friends do "purely for fun, a celebration of friendship" like the author and her friends?*
- *Did this article spark any ideas of something you and a group of friends could do for a hilariously fun time?*
- *If you were to plan a girls' party, who would you invite? Why?*

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How Do You Pamper Yourself?

Women like you share how they give themselves a little TLC.

Women are great at taking care of others, but when it comes to giving ourselves a little TLC, we're usually sorely lacking. So, why not borrow one of these nifty ideas for selfcare from busy, stressed-out women just like you?

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A Calgon Moment

My favorite way to pamper myself is to take a vanilla-scented bath and think about the incredible blessings God has given me. While my body relaxes from the warm, scented water, my spirit relaxes as I reflect on how God has worked in my life.

—Stephanie Lee, Colorado

Silly Singing

Last year my husband and I bought a home karaoke system. We have an extensive library of accompaniment tracks, and when I want to relax, I pop in one of my favorites, put on the headphones, grab the microphone, and wail! I look forward to evenings when I'm home alone so I can be as loud and ridiculous as I please.

—Elly Boyd, Ohio

Lifting Her Spirits

The way I pamper myself may not sound very relaxing, but it increases my energy reserves. I have a neighbor who's a personal trainer. We get up at 5:30 (A.M.!) three times a week and lift weights for an hour. After years of doing for others, this has been the year I'm finally doing something for me. I'm getting strong and I have better posture and more energy and confidence.

—Laura Verdone, Michigan

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A Handy Idea

To pamper myself, I occasionally get a pedicure and/or a manicure. I'm a stay-at-home wife, so to keep within our modest budget, I go to our local beauty school where beauticians-in-training do a marvelous job for a much smaller fee.

—Kim Hubbard, Missouri

Noon-time Escape

On workdays when I need a pick-me-up, I take the latest travel narrative novel I'm reading and head to my local coffee shop over my lunch hour. I indulge in a yummy mocha while I travel vicariously to Italy or France. I always return to work refreshed and revived after this little "getaway."

—Eva Carson, Kansas

Taking Five

When my husband takes our kids with him on an errand, I sometimes drop what I'm doing, light some scented candles, make a cup of tea, and read a decorating magazine for a few minutes. It's a short, refreshing break from my normally busy day. I also keep a small box of "mom's chocolate candy" on my nightstand!

—Sonjia Penny, Virginia

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Enjoying the View

One of my favorite ways to pamper myself is to take a long walk or bike ride in a nearby forest preserve. I stop and rejoice in every little thing that speaks of God's beauty and majesty, such as the brilliant leaves that dance in the warm, windy sky; the multicolored fruits and berries that burst through the golden canopies overhead; the gathering geese above; the colorful ducks that glide along in the ponds; the many bird songs. Along the way, God reminds me of His faithful provision, His mercy, grace, and loving kindness toward me. I usually return home while the purple, orange, and pink sunset spills over with the joy, peace, and pampering of the Lord.

—Laurel Heiss, Illinois

This article first appeared in the March/April 2004 issue of Today's Christian Woman.

Reflect

- *How do you give yourself some TLC?*
- *How often do you give yourself some TLC? What keeps you from doing something more often?*
- *Which ideas in the article sparked your interest? Which one will you try first?*

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Sweet Monday

Check out this recipe for no-fuss, all-fun female gatherings.

By Camerin Courtney

If you could see the scores of women chatting and munching on yummy desserts on Monday nights in Kim Newlen's Richmond, Virginia, family room—wearing funny hats, bidding in a "clutter auction," or mugging in an impromptu fashion show—you'd never believe this gentle southern woman ever was desperately lonely. But seven years ago, when Kim, now 45, left her teaching job to stay home with her then two-year-old daughter, Kali, Kim was home all day *every* day. And for the first time in her life, she experienced loneliness.

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"I asked my husband, Mark, if he thought there was something wrong with me because my best friend was our 72-year-old neighbor across the street," says Kim. "As a Christian, I know God loves me, but I couldn't understand why I had these deep feelings of loneliness."

Kim thought about inviting people over, but the effort involved in entertaining seemed daunting, especially with a toddler at home. "I was raised in South Carolina, where you prepare a five-course meal when you entertain," Kim explains. "In the past, I'd work myself to the bone cooking and cleaning to get ready for company. Right before my guests arrived, I'd wish they weren't coming. I hated feeling that way, and I knew it didn't please God either."

Driven by her need for friendship, Kim decided to scale back on her concept of "entertaining." She dreamed up a monthly gathering for women to munch and mingle that didn't require an RSVP or the need to extend a reciprocal invite. Her proposed gettogether would provide women with time for brief spiritual encouragement and the opportunity to learn from each other. But simplicity, she knew, was key to making this work.

Kim looked at her family's schedule and decided the first Monday of each month throughout the school year worked well. She figured it wouldn't take too much work or break her family's budget to make one dessert a month and invite some women over to enjoy it. Kim decided to call this new, no-fuss monthly gathering "Sweet Monday."

Kim whipped up a simple invitation and passed it out to all her neighbors—many of whom she didn't know well.

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Then she stood in front of her small, growing church that Sunday and invited all the women to attend. While outwardly she was enthusiastic, inside she was a nervous wreck. "The night before my first Sweet Monday gathering, I dreamed I was sitting on my front porch waiting with my dessert ready, and nobody came," Kim admits.

But the next night her dream proved untrue: Thirty women packed into Kim's kitchen and family room to chat and snack their way through the inaugural Sweet Monday. That night Kim couldn't sleep for a whole different reason: She was so jazzed from the buzz of activity in her home, the new friendships she was developing, and the obvious blessing from God.

Seven years of monthly Sweet Mondays later, Kim still has a difficult time falling asleep on the first Monday of the month.

Monday Night Ministry

On that first Sweet Monday, called a "Beauty-Full Evening," Kim asked all the women to share their favorite beauty tip (and offered a "sweet" tie-in by passing around Brach Peppermint Kisses). She was pleasantly surprised to see most of the women taking notes throughout the evening and talking excitedly about the tips they were learning from one another. "Another thing I missed as an at-home mom was learning from other women," Kim says. And the diversity of women at the Sweet Monday gatherings allows for great interaction and sharing.

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At her most recent Sweet Monday get-together, Kim says the ages ranged from early
20s to 76. Often single working women sit in Kim's family room next to stay-at-home moms. And those who may never have darkened the door of a church find themselves sharing tea and beauty tips with women who've taught Sunday school for decades. The common thread, Kim says, is the need for meaningful relationships that are hard to come by in our increasingly isolated society. "Our lives are so busy! Sweet Monday gives us a place to connect every month with people we normally wouldn't see because of work schedules and family activities," says Kim. "My life has been so much richer because of gathering with these women."

Kim's been delighted to see women take the initiative to invite new people to come to Sweet Monday. Her sign-in book's had newcomers' names in it every month except one in the seven years Sweet Monday has been meeting in her home. "When a woman meets someone new, she probably won't ask her to go to church with her the following Sunday, but she's much more likely to invite her to come into a home," Kim explains. This mixture of Christians and non-Christians in attendance has given Kim a unique opportunity to share her faith.

"Every Sweet Monday I share something from the Bible," says Kim. For example, before launching into the beauty secrets that first night, Kim read Proverbs 31:30—"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised"—and shared a few thoughts about true beauty. "I want to leave these women with something that really matters. And Isaiah 55:11 says God's Word never

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returns empty. While Sweet Monday is different than any sort of Bible study or prayer meeting, Christ is definitely here."

This is quite a stretch for a woman who says she used to be afraid even to say God's name around others. "But I realized we're living in a hard, hurting world. And I believe God's called me to bring some of the softer, sweeter things to the world through Sweet Monday," says Kim. "That's biblical. God tells us in Hebrews 10:24 to spur one another on to love and good deeds, and we certainly try to do that. Sweet Monday is just a creative tool for living out these biblical principles."

Kim's neighbor Linda invites her coworkers to Sweet Monday all the time. One of those women, who hadn't been going to church in years, started attending Kim and Linda's church after her first visit to Sweet Monday. She's now in a small group Bible study and soon will be going on a mission trip. "All it took was Linda inviting her!" says Kim.

Likewise, when Kim met a woman at the post office about six months ago, she invited her to Sweet Monday. The woman showed up at the next one, and, surprisingly, responded to Kim's usual invitation to all the women to talk with her if they have any spiritual questions. The woman asked Kim to call her, which eventually led them to have lunch at Kim's house one afternoon. Over grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup, Kim led this woman to Christ.

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Candy and Creativity

On a typical Sweet Monday, women arrive at 7:30 p.m. and head straight for the kitchen, where they get some dessert, decaf coffee, and the best of all- gab time. At 8:00, Kim rings a bell and herds the crowd into her family room. After recognizing the newcomers and reminding everyone about the next Sweet Monday gathering, she sometimes throws out a getting-to-know-you question such as, "What are you most thankful for today?" or "What's your passion?" Other times she launches straight into her short devotional time, during which she reads Scripture and shares a few thoughts. After that comes the evening's program, which can be anything from a proper English tea party to a clutter auction (during which women bid with play money on someone else's "clutter"). The spirited gathering ends promptly at 9:00 p.m.

For "Mug and Muffin" night, women were encouraged to bring their own coffee mug (and a few extras for newcomers), then share their mug's significance and vote for the funniest, flashiest, or most feminine mug. The candy tie-in for this wintertime gathering is Brach Wintergreen Starlights. For "Hair-dos and Hairdoozies" night, Kim asked a former stylist to give her neighbor a makeover while "talking hair" for 20 minutes. Several women shared their own "hair-doozies" stories while they all snacked on Shock Tarts. When Kim discovered a woman in her church decorates cakes, she planned a Sweet Monday called "Piece of Cake," during which the woman shared how to make a Super Bowl football cake and a heart cake without buying any special cake pans. The "Piece of Cake" sweet? Reese's Pieces, of course.

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Kim says ideas for Sweet Monday themes come to her all the time. Some are suggested by friends and Sweet Monday attendees, and her favorites are inspired by noticing other women's passions—such as the cake decorator at her church. "Not every woman is going to be a Sunday school teacher. But there are so many women who are passionate about cooking for their family or making a beautiful cake," says Kim. "Many times I try to write a Sweet Monday based on one specific woman's talents. I love to see these women shine when they share their passions and gifts. And I learn so much from them."

Passing It On

Kim's husband, Mark, who usually spends Sweet Mondays in his study after putting their daughter, Kali, to bed, was so amazed at the ministry happening in their home that first year, he encouraged Kim to write a book of all her ideas. "'Other women can do this, too,' he told me. 'Get your ideas down,'" says Kim. "He kept nudging me to do it, but when he finally said, 'If you put the ideas down, I'll go make 50 copies,' I knew I had to because he doesn't like to spend money!"

A neighbor offered to type up all of Kim's hand-written Sweet Monday notes. And another Monday night regular, Dawn, offered to design the cover for the book. "The whole process taught me how God uses our different strengths to accomplish what He wants," says Kim.

True to his word, Mark had 50 spiral-bound books, entitled *Sweet Monday, Women's Socials on a Shoestring,* printed. When Kim was asked to speak about her creative evangelism at a women's retreat not long after—a stretch

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for this woman who had a big fear of failure—she sold all but 5 of those 50 copies. Through word-of-mouth, speaking engagements, radio show appearances, one TV spot, and magazine and newspaper articles, Kim's shared the success of Sweet Monday. She printed *Sweet Monday Volume Two* in 2001, and so far has received more than two thousand requests for her books. Many of the requests come from people involved in women's ministry or outreach at their church. Since they often have little or no budget, the simple, "on a shoestring" ideas appeal to them.

A friend helped Kim set up a website to handle all the requests for information she receives from women who want to start their own Sweet Monday group. Currently Kim's aware of several Sweet Monday gatherings across town from her in Richmond and in Virginia Beach. She also knows of groups in Wisconsin, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and on several college campuses. She's sent her books to women in 37 states and to missionaries in Bulgaria, Mexico, and the UK.

"There's no other way to explain this widespread interest except God's using Sweet Monday as a tiny tool to reach women. The success certainly hasn't been based on *my* confidence, but on *Christ's* confidence. My heart is to share this surprise ministry God's given me so that He can be glorified," says Kim, who hopes that one day there'll be a Sweet Monday in every city and suburb. She also deeply desires that every woman who attends Sweet Monday leaves blessed and encouraged. "That's my mission—to

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encourage women. To encourage means 'to give courage to.' I want to give the women courage for the many difficulties, joys, and trials they face in everyday life. The courage to know they're not alone—that Christ is with them."

This is a truth Kim knows quite well. Looking back seven years, she realizes God was with her even in her loneliness. Not only did He answer her prayer for friends, He also gave her a ministry of connecting women to each other and to the Best Friend they ever could find. Today she loves sharing this example of God's amazing grace. How *sweet* the sound!

For more information about Sweet Monday go to **www.sweetmonday.com**. *This article first appeared in the September/October 2002 issue of* Today's Christian Woman.

Reflect

- *What is your definition of a fun time?*
- *How do you create fun times for yourself?*
- *Kim not only created a fun event for herself, but for many other women as well. Think of a simple way you can help other women find time for fun.*

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A Wild Women Weekend

These women gather twice a year to renew friendships and faith.

By Nancy Rutherford

As the last car arrived that cold January night, seven of us women crept out onto the balcony of our YMCA mountain cabin. When our friends Margo and Julie emerged from the car, we belted our song, "It's fun to stay at the Y-M-C-A!" to welcome them to the fun and fellowship of another Wild Women Weekend. After our "stellar" performance, we carried their luggage and food supplies inside and reheated some fish stew for their belated meal.

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For the past thirteen years, ten to twelve of us have packed our cars with cross-country skis, fishing poles, cross-stitch, Scrabble, and M&Ms for a bi-annual retreat in the Colorado mountains. Most of us met through our church's singles class eighteen years ago. Though more than half of us are now married, these relationships have grown into some of the deepest friendships we have—and our weekends away give us needed freedom, healing, and meaning as we celebrate them.

The idea originated from an article that Diane, now a mother of three, read about several women in their sixties who hiked together annually for twenty years. She shared her dream of staging a similar weekend with Phyllis, a friend from church who agreed this kind of retreat was exactly what she needed. So that first weekend, spent in a Glenwood Springs, Colorado, condo, these two new mothers alternated between pumping breast milk (for the little ones they'd left at home) and discussing with three other friends how to balance their roles as wife and mother. The second weekend these women realized that with no husbands or children around, they could "go wild" and do whatever they wanted. Thus, the name *Wild Women Weekend* was born. Since then our weekends have expanded beyond the initial five to include up to a dozen or more women, some joining us only for the daytime activities.

Our weekends usually begin with Friday night dinner, then continue to some sort of adventure on Saturday—such as hiking, skiing, or fishing—and end after lunch on Sunday. We try to eat most of our meals together, with each woman cooking only once. The rule of thumb is: If you cook, you don't clean up. Mealtimes create an

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atmosphere to brainstorm, reminisce, and enjoy prolonged conversations. During dessert one winter weekend, four old college roommates, Pam, Deb, Martha, and Phyllis, entertained the rest of us with dating stories from their single years. At the culmination of the weekend, Pam shared, "As we talked about that period of time, it gave me a better appreciation for my past, and for how much we've all grown."

Married, single, working, and stay-at-home women alike enjoy the break from our usual agendas. Phyllis, a self-employed businesswoman, wife, and mother of four, relishes these two times a year when she can choose her own schedule. She usually stays up and chats into the wee hours of the night. In contrast, Sharon, a single college professor, communes with God during her early morning hike, sometimes returning before the rest of us have even awakened.

Another bonus is sharing some of our favorite activities with some of our favorite people. Last summer we all packed into our cars to go to nearby Shadow Mountain Lake. The slower, catch-up-on-all-the-news group of Margo, Deb, Pam, Sue, and Martha chose the "low road" around the lake. Phyllis and Sharon, always challenged by a tough climb, attacked the "high road" to the summit. Eager to cast their flies in the water, Nance and Diane followed the river downwards looking for just the right angling spot, while Cordie and Nancy took off for the lake.

Getting away allows us to meet one of our greatest needs: conversation. As we cover subjects ranging from child discipline to aging parents, new recipes or a favorite

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book, we're blessed with wisdom and healing. At least four mothers in our group have children who are gifted or strong-willed. During the car ride up last summer, Pam talked with Sue, a mother of two girls, about her child-raising strategies. Later Pam talked with Diane, who recommended the book, *Raising Your Spirited Child* by Mary S. Kurchinka (Harper Collins), to use with her adopted precocious three year old. These two conversations provided her just the "medicine" she needed.

One weekend, DJ questioned aloud what it would be like to be married to her boyfriend. Kathy—who makes sure we get our daily minimum requirement of chocolate—asked her, "Well, has he seen how many M&Ms you eat yet?" Though tongue-in-cheek, this piece of advice encouraged DJ to be herself for her potential mate.

Two summers ago, Cordie, a hospital nursing supervisor whose motto seems to be "I want to try everything at least once," wanted to hike to the top of Hanging Lake, a 1,000-foot climb to a glacier lake near Glenwood Springs. The trek to this aquamarine water provided an adventure for us all. When she reached the lake summit, shouts and clapping reverberated across the lake. Cordie's achievement was commemorated with a group photo for our memory book.

The summer of 1992, two of DJ's high school-age nieces, Kerry and Kelly, were invited to join us for our weekend while on their Colorado vacation. One evening as our aching muscles reaped the benefit of DJ's massage therapy skills, we shared stories of our lives. These observant teenagers questioned us about dating, marriage, and faith.

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DJ recently wrote, "They still talk about that weekend. The most significant thing for them was seeing the love of God in our lives and how it's shared between us all. It encouraged them to maintain contact with their own friends and gave them hope to see so many of you at my wedding."

Within our group is a contingent who have answered God's call to evangelize the world beyond the United States. These women especially delight in renewed friendships when home on their furloughs. One of Patrice's furloughs coincided with our women's weekend. For the past several years she'd worked in a third-world country while doing research on her doctoral thesis. To her surprise, we staged a mock graduation ceremony to celebrate the degree she'd received two months earlier from UCLA. We dressed her in a cap and gown and stood her on a chair while Diane, our emcee, presented her with our special "Wild Women Weekend" diploma. This wasn't the first accomplishment we'd celebrated together. Over the years, we've toasted new marriages, births and adoptions, degrees, first published works, and new businesses. Commemorating these events together makes them—and our weekends—even more meaningful.

Sue joined us for the first time last winter—despite the chemotherapy treatments she was receiving at the time. Sporting a wig and wearing a smile, Sue's exuberance overwhelmed us. Her bout with breast cancer was sobering, and reminded us of how many had endured hardship over the past year. Six women still grieved for their fathers or close friends who had recently passed away. Three juggled transitions: into a new business, into first-time

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motherhood, and into a new neighborhood. By Saturday evening, instead of the usual games and storytelling, we were sharing tears. That evening, Margo, known for her sensitivity to the Spirit, began formulating a theme for our Sunday morning worship time. She asked us to listen while she read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11: "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. ..." Then Margo asked us to reflect on which verse most described what kind of season we'd found ourselves in that past year. Sniffling and rustling tissues could be heard while each woman related her own story. Our shared grief and the ability to understand each other's pain united us into an even deeper bond of love, courage, and faith in our comforting and healing God.

In the context of women simply being together, healing occurs. But as Pam reminded us, "You can't manufacture things like trust, honesty, and a safe atmosphere." Perhaps it's the longevity of our relationships and the bond we share in Christ that's led to our deep friendships. Though we don't know what our lives will look like during our next retreat, we look forward to processing the issues midlife brings, eating chocolate while listening to friends share their stories, and posing once again for our last-minute group picture.

Nancy Rutherford is an engineering technician and freelance writer living in Colorado. This article first appeared in the March/April 1998 issue of Today's Christian Woman.

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Reflect

- *Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." How often do you find yourself in a time of laughter? How might you increase that time?*
- *Who are the women that you can go "wild" with? What do you do together?*
- *How can you take an idea from this article and implement it in your life?*

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Getting Away with God

Quiet your soul and renew your faith with a spiritual retreat.

By Brenda Jank

The scenery turned from concrete to cornfields as I reluctantly made my way to a retreat center 30 miles from home. Is this really going to be worth it? I questioned the value of taking a day of personal retreat when my calendar boasted little breathing room and my desk resembled the haystacks I was passing on these lonely country roads.

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I was working at a church on the outskirts of Chicago. The senior pastor had recently mandated a series of monthly personal retreats for all staff members. My hungry heart eyed the potential of a few quiet hours. I was acutely aware of the gaps forming in my own spiritual growth, but I was strangely anxious, fearful of my inability to attend to the quiet things of God for that length of time. I let out a fair share of frustrated sighs as I overloaded other days to carve out this day of rest.

Pastor Ficken shared three words of encouragement with me on the morning of my departure.

Rest well.

Listen closely.

Produce nothing.

Twelve years later I cannot recall what specifically happened that day of retreat—except that I wanted to return. And I did, again and again. Nourished from these face-to-face encounters with the Almighty, I have been able to weather the challenges of a growing ministry, the loss of two children, the birth of a child with Spina Bifida, and the long goodbye to my mom, who died of Alzheimer's.

Over time, I noticed two specific gifts that regularly emerged from my private encounters with the Lord: stillness and rest. Together, these two gifts can replenish our souls, restore a sense of God's holiness and sovereignty, and strengthen our resolve to serve Him.

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The Importance of Stillness

Stillness offers me the distinct beauty of hearing God whisper my name, as only He can do it. The words quiet, alone, and undistracted do not describe the vast majority of my waking hours. It is in this mixture, however, that God often makes Himself known. God shouts to us through the glories of His creation, but when calling our name, He speaks with a quiet voice.

Living in a world of iPods, cell phones, and CNN, it's hard to turn down the volume. But going away to a quiet place is a routine 21st-century Christians would do well to cultivate. God treasures these intimate hours with us. Alone, Moses heard the Lord call his name through a burning bush. Alone, the young boy Samuel responded to the voice of God. Alone, Mary said yes to the most world-shattering announcement of all time.

While away on a personal retreat, I have not experienced dramatic career-changing encounters like that of Moses or Mary. I have, however, been inspired to pursue new ministry adventures—leading a small group Bible study, embracing a season of foster parenting, and mentoring college students—all while meeting with God in the stillness of an unhurried afternoon.

Jesus' words echo in my ear, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31).

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As His disciples, do we respond to Jesus' invitation? Do we long to hear His voice— to hear Christ call us to Himself? If our answer is yes, then we need to remind ourselves that it begins with being still and knowing that He is God (Ps. 46:10).

The Importance of Rest

Rest is something we try defiantly to live without in our daily lives, and our empty hearts and threadbare joy offers testimony to this glaring disparity. Rest is a gift that refuels, renews, refreshes.

Everyday life batters our souls. Weighty responsibilities at work. Frazzled relationships. Looming deadlines. Today's modern pace of life does not orient us to the things of God. The missing ingredient is, simply and profoundly, rest.

A rested soul alters your attitude about everything—from purpose and pleasure to pressures and problems. Because of this, I attempt to carve out regular extended getaways to be alone with the heavenly Father. Sometimes I get away for a full day. Occasionally, it's an overnight adventure. I no longer work at a church, and taking a full day is even more challenging now with my responsibilities at home. But I have discovered that two to three hours alone on a Sunday afternoon is enough time for me to meet the Lord, face to face, in a way that centers my soul and redirects my gaze—off me and onto Him.

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These are precious hours for me. I do not have to do anything. I do not have to accomplish anything. I do not have to produce, poke, prod, or provide anything for anyone. I can just be. I listen. I rest. I read. I journal. I hike. I go into each hour with no expectations. I follow no agenda, yet each time God tenderly and passionately renews my mind and refreshes my soul. Sometimes God offers an explosion of insight, other times His presence is like a gentle breeze. Each time away is unique.

But we resist! We wait for a quieter season to arrive, a season that will never transpire. We drag our feet, forfeiting this gift and making it a burden—another item to add to our overloaded to-do list. There is hope, however. We do not need to be paralyzed by our fears.

Over the years I've made three discoveries about extended time alone with God. These discoveries have removed many self-imposed roadblocks—for me and for others.

Removing the Roadblocks

I. You don't have to go it alone. A getaway with God does not have to be a solo experience. A personal retreat can take place in tandem with another believer who also desires to experience time away with the Lord. Traveling to a retreat center, city park, or quiet corner with a spouse or friend is an equally valid way to "take a break" with your Creator. Fellowship around a meal is a refreshing way to enhance what God is doing in our hearts during the time we spend alone. When combined with a few hours of solitude, a personal retreat taken with a friend offers the best of both worlds.

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2. Relax, there's freedom in Christ. I've had to remind myself that there is no single, right way to meet with God. Some believers meet best with God when traipsing through a grassy meadow. Others recognize the Father's voice through liturgical prayers and predetermined Bible readings. Some sing and feast. Others are nourished through fasting and complete solitude. Celebrating this freedom allows me to recognize the creative genius of God's handiwork when He fashioned my soul, and the unique pathway He travels to meet with me, His beloved. Personal retreats are not about me and what I'm going to do to experience God. Personal retreats are about the Lord and what He wants to do in me when I'm willing to slow down and listen.

3. Personal retreats are for everyone. Personal retreats are not a luxury for the elite, but a necessity for all. Technological advances rob us of rest, allowing believers to fall victim to a hurried lifestyle. Nurturing the gifts of stillness and rest fan into flame the abundant life Christ offers all believers. Even those of us who have obligations that might, on the surface, "disqualify" us from doing a retreat (e.g., financial limitations, lack of child care, etc.) can find ways to spend time alone with God.

Whether once a month or once a year, I encourage you—I challenge you—set a date, find a place, and go—go away to be alone with the One who knows and loves you best.

Brenda Jank, a freelance writer and Christian camping professional based in Albion, Indiana, has been leading retreats for over 20 years. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of Today's Christian.

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Reflect

- *Think about the pace of your life. How do you make time for stillness, rest, and reflection?*
- *Have you ever taken a spiritual retreat? If so, how did it impact you?*
- *Compare this article to the previous ones in this study. Why do you think an article on rest is included in a study about the hidden value of fun?*

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The Gift of Rest

Embrace the blessings of the Sabbath.

By Lynne M. Baab

When I first started observing the Sabbath 25 years ago, it wasn't by choice. My husband and I lived in Tel Aviv, Israel, at the time, and everything in our neighborhood—stores, movie theaters, and restaurants—closed from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Even the buses stopped running for 24 hours. Since we didn't own a car, this greatly affected our lives.

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At first, we struggled to find activities for Friday evenings and Saturdays. But after a few months, we began to enjoy a day with few entertainment options. We read, we walked, we talked. My husband sometimes went bird-watching in the field near our apartment. I wrote long letters. We napped. Sometimes we prayed together leisurely. We simply slowed down. We rested in God's love and experienced His grace.

Our Sabbaths in Israel became God's gift to us individually, and enriched our life as a couple. Through Sabbath-keeping, we experienced the truth that God's love for us isn't based on what we *do*. We yearned to keep growing in our ability to receive that unconditional love once we returned to the U.S.

Back in the States, our family decided to continue observing the Sabbath on Sundays. Our first son had been born in Israel, and our second son was born soon after we returned home. As a young family, we read to our children, took long walks, and went to the zoo and the park after church.

As the years passed and our children grew up, our Sabbaths changed. But two things stayed constant: a slower pace and no work.

Slow Down

Never did a culture need the Sabbath as ours does today. It pressures us to be productive 24/7. Everything we do has to look good and accomplish something. Nothing encourages us to stop. But the word "Sabbath" literally means stop, pause, cease, desist.

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One young woman recently told me, "I'd like our family to observe the Sabbath. I've been reading books about it, talking with my husband and kids, and we're going to start soon."

"Great," I replied. "Tell me about what you plan to do and not do on your Sabbath."

"I love the idea of starting on Saturday at sunset with a festive meal," she explained. "I'd like to have special food, blessings for the children, prayers and candles, like Jewish people do. Maybe we could sing some songs. Then the next day, after we go to church, I hope we can read some Bible stories and do some crafts to help the kids center the day around God."

"What do you plan to *stop* doing on the Sabbath?" I asked.

She looked at me blankly. Slowing down hadn't figured into her Sabbath observance. She was focused solely on adding new activities.

As women, we can easily bring our culture's values into our attempts to observe a Sabbath. We so easily forget the core meaning of the Sabbath—stopping and resting—that we end up turning our observance of it into one more thing to achieve.

We certainly want to experience God's presence on the Sabbath, but we need to experiment with unforced ways to do it. "Simple" is a great word to describe the ideal activities for the Sabbath. As soon as we're working too hard to achieve anything on the Sabbath, we've violated the central idea of the day.

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One Jewish tradition bans intercessory prayer on the Sabbath because it's viewed as too much work. In that tradition, appropriate Sabbath prayers are prayers of thankfulness. On the Sabbath, I spend time focusing on the beauty of the world God made and the good gifts He's given me in the previous week. I try to rest in thankfulness. While I don't try to be "hyper-spiritual" all day long, I've discovered a little thought discipline goes a long way towards giving me a day that's restful and rejuvenating.

Take the Day Off

In the Ten Commandments, the Israelites are commanded to keep the Sabbath day holy, or separate, from the other weekdays. The marker of that holiness is the absence of work. But the Old Testament doesn't give many specifics about what constitutes work. One of the few clear commands forbids lighting a fire (Exodus 35:3). This mandate assured that wives, daughters, and female servants wouldn't be expected to cook. All the food had to be cooked before the Sabbath began, and the dishes washed afterwards. The Sabbath granted rest to everyone, even the women who labored the other six days of the week.

In our time, what's the equivalent of "lighting a fire"? What are those actions that send us into work mode?

When we first returned to the U.S. years ago, I was a part-time student and stay-at-home mom. For me, work consisted of studying, housework, and shopping. For my husband, work involved anything from his paid job as well as house repairs and lawn mowing. We simply didn't do any of those tasks on Sundays.

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Today, turning on my computer, balancing the checkbook, weeding my garden, and cooking put me into work mode. I know some people find gardening and cooking relaxing; those women have a different list of work activities to avoid on the Sabbath.

One woman who works at a desk job finds her best Sabbath activities involve vigorous exercise outdoors. For many people, being outside on the Sabbath—walking, riding bikes, flying kites, sitting on a park bench—helps them feel closer to God. Sabbath time outside can be a time of reflection and prayer alone, a time of relaxed conversation with a friend, or an exuberant playtime with family members or friends.

Many women also benefit from some silent time on their Sabbath day. One single woman who works in a people-intensive job spends her Sabbath afternoon entirely alone. Then she often meets up with friends at the end of the day for a special meal.

One mom with young children prepares a "Sabbath box" of special activities for her children. During one hour on Sunday afternoon, her children know they're expected to play alone, enjoying the delights in the Sabbath box while their parents get some silent time.

Some of the "work" from which we need a rest is mental. A woman I know tries to avoid worry on the Sabbath. She considers herself a worrier and feels overwhelmed at the thought of trying not to worry every day. One day a week, however, feels manageable. A day free—or at least mostly free—from worry has been a great gift to her.

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Similarly, as a person who's disliked my body for as long as I can remember, I attempt to keep my Sabbaths free from obsessing about the way I look. On the Sabbath, I don't try on clothes and I don't read novels with slim, beautiful heroines. When I find myself thinking negative thoughts about myself, I try to set them aside for the day.

My husband and I have received many gifts from our commitment to honor the Sabbath: a day to spend with our children—and each other—without needing to get something done. A day free of multitasking. A day free of striving for perfection and productivity. A day to rest in God's goodness. Over the years, these gifts have continued to bless us and grant us glorious freedom in Christ.

Lynne M. Baab lives in Washington. She is the author of several books, including Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest *(InterVarsity). This article first appeared in the September/October 2005 issue of* Today's Christian Woman.

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Reflect

- *How do you typically spend the Sabbath day?*
- *In order to have a day of rest, what activities would you need to stop doing?*
- *Consider thinking of the Sabbath day as not only a day of rest, but a day of fun with your family, as the author does. What are some things you could do to make the Sabbath a day of restful fun?*
- *How do you think a restful Sabbath day would affect your life?*

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Additional Resources

Born to Be Wild: Rediscover the Freedom of Fun by Jill Baughan (New Hope, 2006; 208 pages). This book is a delightful story-driven invitation to women in midlife to hop onto their "inner Harley" and live life as an adventure instead of a dreaded succession of midlife responsibilities and losses. Baughan uses bite-size chapters that include wonder-filled stories, humor, and relevant Scripture to take the reader on an adventure.

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Girlfriends' Getaway: A Complete Guide to the Weekend Adventure that Turns Friends into Sisters and Sisters into Friends by Elizabeth Butterfield and Kathleen Laing (Random House, 2002; 192 pages). Butterfield and Laing underscore the countless benefits of taking time away with the most important women in your life and provide a step-by-step plan for making it happen. Readers will embrace this welcome opportunity to get out with the girls, take time out for fun, de-stress and unwind, build bonds that last a lifetime, renew their spirits, affirm their friendships, and, in general, become happier, healthier wives, mothers, coworkers, bosses, and friends.

Sisterchicks on the Loose by Robin Jones Gunn (Multnomah, 2003; 325 pages). In the first installment of Gunn's Sisterchicks fiction series, best friends Penny and Sharon embark on a zany adventure. When Penny goes in search of her Finnish relatives—and drags Sharon along—Scandinavia may never be the same again!

The Daring Female's Guide to Ecstatic Living by Natasha Kogan (Hachette, 2006; 208 pages). This book will turn any woman from a frazzled female into a daring female, one dare at a time. By using this book as a springboard, you can launch yourself into a life that is more rewarding, exciting, interesting and fun.

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The Frazzled Female: Finding God's Peace in Your Daily Chaos by Cindi Wood (B&H, 2006; 122 pages). This book reaches out to busy ladies everywhere, guiding them to sanity, peace, and a deeper, more vibrant relationship with the Lord. Cindi Wood's approach isn't "no-nonsense," —she's as hilarious as she is helpful.

Chick Flicks: Dinner and a Movie (Group, 2006; 96 pages). Chick Flicks makes it easy to create a friendship-building atmosphere where you'll gather around a great movie, eat, laugh, and comfortably talk about the movie's spiritual implications. Great for fun nights, Bible studies, or weekend retreats.

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