

HOBBIES + + +

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Do you guys, do you guys mind if I play through real quick? Got to get to a, I got to get to my sermon later and it'd just be a great thing to get on the course right now. Actually, I've been kind of wondering in my yardage book, how far away these cameras are, camera one and two, 11 yards. That's good to know. Camera three, 21 yards, camera one and two is what I'm normally looking at, by the way, but camera three is 21 yards. We got a camera all the way back there. Camera four, I'm grateful the lights are on. I can actually see these things. 31 yards away. I note that in my yardage book. Very good.

Hey, it is great to be with you. Happy Father's Day. It's a wonderful day to be here. And I want to start with a question today. What's your hobby? What's your hobby? What do you think? Actually, let's go deeper. What do you think people did for hobbies when our nation was founded? Like in, imagine you're a farmer in the mid 1700s. What's your hobby? Pickleball, fantasy football, golf, collecting sports cards. No, your hobby back then was not dying. It was surviving. You woke up and you worked the field and you cared for the animals and hauled water and fixed tools. And in the winter, you did your best to just wake up the next day and do it again. For most of human history, life itself was the hobby.

I imagine if I were on the phone with a LCMS pastor from the 1780s and he asked me, Hey, what are you preaching on this weekend? First off, there wasn't an LCMS in the late 1700s. And by the way, there was no phone either. Um, you get my point. If he said, what are you preaching on? And I said, well, I'm, I'm preaching on hobbies. I want to talk about the blessing that hobbies are, but how they don't overtake our lives because people are spending. And I'm even tempted at times to spend a lot of time and money and energy and my passion on golf, maybe for you on travel, baseball and dancing and mahjong.

That pastor would have been like, wait, what are you preaching on? And yet today it's one of the first questions we ask. What do you do for fun? What do you do for fun? We have entire stores, entire YouTube channels, entire weekends devoted to hobbies and dad, since it's father's day, some of your hobbies require more square footage in your home than your children do in your man cave with your golfing tools, your hunting stuff, your woodwork and things, and your project car that probably hasn't been working since the Huskers won their last championship, which has been a little bit.

If you're meeting somebody new or on a dating app, it's one of the first questions that pops up. What do you do for fun? And before anybody gets defensive, I love hobbies. They're a gift. This is not a sermon where you're going to hear me say, don't have hobbies. They're one of God's greatest gifts to teach us delight. So the question isn't whether we should enjoy them. The question is when does a hobby stop being a gift and start becoming a God? We're in our guardrails series and we're looking at realities of our world. And how do we live with certain realities when at their best, their gifts, we've looked at entertainment and social media and politics. And today we get to talk about hobbies.

I want to talk three pieces of the sermon today. Number one, I want to look at the history of hobbies because I want to show you why hobbies are such an interesting topic to talk about today, unique.

Secondly, I want to start with a history lesson that will end up where we always want to get to on Sunday. What does God's word say about it? As great as learning history is, we want to know what does God's word say regarding hobbies? And then finally, once we look at God's word, we'll get into some practical, three practical questions, guardrail questions for hobbies to ensure that these things remain gifts and don't become gods.

So first let's talk history of hobbies. The way we're experiencing hobbies is relatively new today. Do you know that? I hadn't thought much about that before. I think I've kind of just taken it for granted, but, but the amount and the time and the energy that we have towards hobbies is a relatively brand new concept for most of us, because the fact is that hobbies throughout human history have been largely designed and only primarily available to the wealthy.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived during the intertestamental time between the old and new Testament, he was wealthy himself. And he once wrote this, that we work in order to have leisure. A way we might say it today is we work hard to what? To play hard. The very fact that you can play hard is interesting. And I think when Aristotle said this, I think some of the other people chuckled because it's easy for you to say, Aristotle, you're wealthy. You're in the upper class. We've got to go feed our goats again. Leisure belong to a really small class of people. Most people didn't have the energy to debate, or certainly a preacher wouldn't spend time talking about how to use all of the free time in your life. Most people were trying to survive another day. Get through the winter.

If you fast forward a few decades after Christ ascended, we get into Rome, the great superpower, and you see this awesome image, the Colosseum, where there were many people that, yes, attended these events where they would go and watch to see if Russell Crowe, the gladiator, which gladiator would win. Somebody had to fund those spectacles and it was the ones in the seats less people, someone had to own the land, control the resources. And the leisure of the few was often built on the labor and the backs of the many. In fact, the ancient world had a word for leisure and it's the word skole, which is where we get the word school from.

And so if you think about it from this perspective, even school, the ability to think rationally, learn, be educated, talk wisdom, gain and talk philosophy, like even that for a long period of history was only designed for the wealthy. Point being, for thousands of years, most people did not have the discretionary income and time that many of us that are listening to me right now have. Something shifted. Likely it shifted around the industrial revolution where work moved out of the home. Efficiency began to accelerate. The middle class expanded. Weekends emerged. Evenings opened up. Disposable income was a reality for many.

And suddenly something that had rarely happened before in human history was now available where ordinary people like you and I have free time and since then, hobbies have exploded. Gardening, fishing, woodworking, photography, sports, music, painting, collecting, travel. For the first time in history, millions upon millions of people have the ability to do something just because it's fun and we enjoy it. And that, again, it's not a bad thing. That's a gift. But it's a gift that I don't think I certainly haven't taken enough time to appreciate that multiple generations prior to ours have been praying for some of the very things that you and I get to experience just because of the day that we live in.

How awesome the ability to spend a Saturday afternoon fishing with your grandkids, not because you have to catch a fish to eat that night, but just for fun. The ability to work and restore an old car, not

because it's your one and only old broken down car, but because it's a toy for you. Fun. The ability to go play golf for a few hours with friends. Fun. What an amazing blessing. What a great time we live in. And God's word is not silent on hobbies. So let's jump to section two. What does God's word say?

We'll start in Ecclesiastes with these words from King Solomon in chapter two, verses 24 and 25. A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too I see is from the hand of God. For without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? Solomon is saying that there are things to enjoy, but without God, ultimate enjoyment won't happen. One of the surprising things about Solomon throughout Ecclesiastes is how much he talks about enjoyment being a gift from God. God created it. God created delight.

Think about that. That God, God didn't just create food. He created taste buds to enjoy them. God didn't just create flowers. He created us with an appreciation of beauty. God didn't just create music to listen to, but music we can be moved by. God didn't just create hobbies to enjoy. He created them so we could delight in them. And the ability to delight is itself a gift given to us by God. It's a gift.

And how do we use these gifts in our day to day so they remain gifts, but they don't become God's? That's the question. One of the early church fathers, Irenaeus is famously quoted as saying, the glory of God is a human being fully alive. The glory of God is not a human being that's just surviving. It's one that's fully alive. God is not against enjoyment. He is not frowning when you're having a good time out on the golf course or in your garage, working on your hobby. He created you to enjoy, to enjoy your meals, to enjoy your work, to enjoy your family, and even to enjoy hobbies.

And that's where Solomon takes us. It's an interesting book, Ecclesiastes. And in the book, the main question that Solomon is trying to ask, and he gets at it from many different angles is what actually satisfies. And the reason Solomon is such an interesting author and guide is because he had even more opportunities than are available to us. He imagined if someone today had unlimited money, unlimited resources, unlimited access, unlimited influence, this is like Elon Musk. And maybe a little bit more after he just crossed the one, do you know, trillion dollar mark when space X went public a couple of weeks ago, Solomon is essentially the wealthiest hobbyist in human history.

And here's what he says. Listen to how he describes his hobbies. I undertook great projects. This is earlier in chapter two. I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks. I amassed silver and gold for myself. I acquired male and female singers. I denied nothing myself, nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart, no pleasure. When he wanted a project, he built one. When he wanted a garden, he planted one. When he wanted entertainment, he hired it out. When he wanted a collection, he bought the whole thing. And when he wanted to experience, he had it.

And many of us spend our lives wondering, I wonder if that, whatever that is, would make me happy. And Solomon saying, I've been down that road and I've climbed every mountain and that if it's your ultimate joy, will never satisfy you. You can enjoy it, but it is not ultimate. After reaching the top of every mountain, he could climb. His words come back like this. When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was what? Everything was meaningless.

That's the word over and over and over again. Everything was meaningless. Meaningless. That's the word over and over and over and over in Ecclesiastes. Meaningless. A chasing after the wind. Nothing was gained under the sun. That word meaningless in Hebrew, we learned when Rabbi Chad Foster

came to our church a little over around a year ago. And he said that Hebrew word is Hevel. Hevel. It's translated to us as meaningless, but the way he described it and the way they would understand it in those times is like, you know how a fire like you can smell the fire and you can see the smoke. You know, you can see the smoke. Is the smoke real? Come on. Is the smoke real? Yeah.

But the moment you try to touch it, can you get it? No. And it's like this. I know it's real. I know it's there. I can smell it. I can see it. But the moment I try to touch it, it's I can't get it. And that's what Solomon describes about life, including hobbies is when it's your ultimate joy or ultimate satisfaction. The number one thing in life. It's real. You can get joy in it. But the moment you try to make it the number one thing you try to grab it, it's gone and it can't give for you. What only God can give for you.

There was another theologian in the 1200s named Thomas Aquinas that was once asked. What would we need in life without God to fully satisfy us? And here's his answer. Everything. We would need have to experience everything and everybody and be experienced by everything and everybody to feel satisfied, eat at every restaurant, travel to every country, every city, every exotic locale, experience every natural wonder, make love to every partner we could possibly desire. When every ward climbed to the top of every field on every item in the world, we would have to experience it all to ever feel satisfied.

Sound exhausting? Which again shows us like all of these gifts in their proper place that we're talking about this month, that if it is your ultimate, that it is a terrible master. But a hobby is a wonderful servant. When it gives you delight, when it brings you joy, but not ultimate.

So let's get into the three guardrail questions. First question is this. Is your hobby becoming your identity? A hobby is something you do. It is not someone that you are. So one of the questions I think you ought to ask when it comes to your hobby is, if this hobby disappeared tomorrow, would I still know who I am? If I couldn't golf anymore, would I still know who I am? If you couldn't hunt anymore, would you still know who you are? If your kid stopped playing sports tomorrow, would you know who you are? If your collection disappeared, would you know who you are?

The danger again is not enjoying something. The danger is building your identity on something that can so easily change and easily shift over time. I think a lot of that's true with collections, right? You see there's these crazes that are really big in a moment. And then like years later, you're like, man, what was that? Anybody remember beanie babies? As a kid, I loved collecting baseball cards, basketball cards, football cards.

And though it wasn't perfect, it felt, I don't know, just more innocent back in the good old days of the 90s than today. A few years ago, my youngest kind of got back into it for a little bit of a time. And so my heart was getting pulled in there again. I'm like, oh, cool. We can go on this journey together. But I quickly realized this is not the same thing anymore. There's a lot of like greedy, rich adults that are scalping and buying everything up. And the kids, well, they don't get a chance at actually collecting anything rare, turns out.

Even Kevin O'Leary, Mr. Wonderful, guy on Shark Tank. I've found out lately that he's trying to collect the 20 most expensive football, baseball, Pokemon cards that exist in the world. The greedy. And fine. But eventually, collections lose value. Trends change. Some of our hobbies, age catches up with us. Injuries happen. Money changes. Life situations change. And that's why it's never okay to have your

identity rooted in something that you do or something that you enjoy. It's why it's so great when your identity is rooted in Jesus.

Second question, is your hobby replacing worship? Does your hobby consistently compete with your relationship with God and maybe regularly even win in that competition? Here's a few questions to consider. If you have time to watch every National Football League game every night in the sports, in the football season, but you don't have time to open up your Bible, something's off. If I have time to go play five hours of golf, but I haven't prayed for five minutes, well, something's off. Something's off.

If I can shell out thousands of dollars for my game or my hobby over the course of the year, and I have not found out how to regularly and joyfully give to God's work, even and especially through the local church, something's off. If I can tell you every statistic about my favorite team in the current season they're in, but I can't tell you what Scripture's taught me lately, something's off. If I can gather my family around a television and watch a show or a movie every night, but we haven't had a conversation or a devotion around Christ for a month, something's off.

Not because the hobby is bad, but because it's become first. You know that quote I shared with you earlier from Irenaeus? The glory of God is a human being fully alive, but there's not a period, there's a comma there. He continues to say, and the life of man consists in beholding God. In other words, you cannot be fully alive if you are stuck in things of this world, even hobbies. You're only fully alive when you behold God. Because the things that you behold, the things where your heart gets pulled, you end up becoming those things. And whatever you behold, you become. And so where are your eyes? Where are you spending your time? What is that for you?

Question number three, is your hobby damaging relationships? This is an interesting way to think about it. Do the people closest to me experience my hobby as a blessing or a burden in their life? Because hobbies are meant to bring life. They're meant to, when they're in their proper place, give us rest and delight and enjoy. Maybe even part of our Sabbath experience in this world. I think they're awesome to use to connect with other people, especially our family, our kids, our spouse, and maybe even our neighbors. Meant to be done in community a lot of times. Awesome.

But when everybody around us is paying the price for our hobby, something's shifted. How do you know if that might be true? Well, let me give you a few examples. If everything rises and falls in your home based on the result of the latest football game, something may be off. If your marriage suffers because every weekend belongs to your hobby or your game, not to your spouse or family, something may be off. If your kids have to compete for your attention, something may be off. If life is challenging, work is hard, marriage is tough, kids are frustrating, and you're using your hobby primarily as an escape, something's off. If everybody around you is making sacrifices so you can keep feeding the hobby, the hobby may have become your master.

A hobby should never define your identity. A hobby should never replace your worship. And a hobby should never damage your relationships. You get what I'm saying here on the relationship piece?

There was a period of time when I had to put this not all the way away, but away mostly. You get what I'm saying? Jerry Seinfeld uses the joke that the acronym for golf is get out, leave family. Including travel and practice, and especially if you have a drink or a meal before or after, you might be looking at a six or seven hour game. And you know when that's not wise to do very often? When my kids were

four and six months. And so if wisdom, right? Wisdom is knowing this is a gift. And Lord willing, I love it and I'll be able to pick it up more when my kids are older, which by the way I have been able to pick it up more. But putting it away for a season or on the back burner, understanding and knowing its place.

And so if these are the things that it shouldn't do, shouldn't define your identity, shouldn't define your identity, replace your worship or damage your relationship. Just like Solomon is saying like these things aren't, they're not evil, but they're limited. They're gifts. They're not God. And when we stop at the gift and stop at the gift and we don't get to the giver, then we're off.

And so what can we do? Here's a positive question to spin it. How can you use your hobby to glorify God? Because again, there's so much to delight in. You can use your hobby to rest, to relax, to come around others, to include others, to have community, to share a bond with someone around that. Spend time with your spouse and your kids. I think about someone that loves gardening. I think about someone that loves gardening. There's something deeply good and right and beautiful and intrinsic of who we are, of like getting your hands in the dirt and planting and watering and waiting and watching something grow. I mean, I hate that, but some of you like that. And that's good. It's awesome.

I think it's like what God created some of us to, he created us to be creators. And some of you, that's your outlet to do that. I think about somebody that loves woodworking or restoring cars or fishing or golfing or cooking or painting or music, making music. Like these things can again become ways to connect with other people, ways that we can slow down, ways that we can serve.

I am like the least mechanical person you would know. And you know what I'm grateful for? I'm grateful for my next door neighbor that is really mechanical, that knows what he's doing, and that taught my oldest son, here's how you change oil in a car. Awesome. What a great way to use that hobby.

I think about a true story of somebody in our church that has a large collection of comic books. And instead of keeping that collection private, he uses that hobby to gather people together and raise funds to support veterans transitioning back into civilian life. Sweet.

For me, I love the game of golf. And so how can I use it in a way that glorifies God? This works for me, it may not work for you, but me and my friend Tim Allman from Phoenix, every year we put on a five-day golf trip that we call Oasis. It's meant for 16 to 20 pastors to come together. This was our trip in Alabama earlier this year. I questioned the shirt choice of the other team, right? So we don't have great discernment across our church body apparently. Half of us don't. But I love this trip. It's one of my favorite weeks of the year, and I'm not ashamed to admit that.

We play a lot of golf, but every morning we wake up and we have a couple of hours of devotions and check-ins. And we open up scripture and we pray together and we celebrate together and we mourn together. We cry and we laugh. And like 10 minutes after we say amen, we want to kick the you-know-what out of the other team. And we talk so much trash to the other team. Biblically, of course, trash talk. Like Elijah stuff. In the Old Testament stuff of like your God sitting on the potty stuff. Anyway.

But I kid you not, and some people think that's kind of a joke to go on a trip like that. But it has saved, of course, the Holy Spirit working through it. Marriages, families, and ministries. And I look forward to it every year.

How can we use these gifts and put them in the proper place? How can they be life-giving and relational and bless others around us?

And dads, let me speak to you for a moment, because one of the greatest gifts you can give as a father to your children is showing them what or who is worthy of delight. I just want you to know, you know this. Don't feel pressure and guilt on this, but hopefully hear opportunity that your kids are watching you. And they know what excites you, and they know what frustrates you, and they know what gets your attention. They know where your heart is. They know what you do on the weekends. They know how you spend your money. And they know what makes you come alive. By the way, moms, they know that about you, too.

Long before your kids understand great theology, they understand your passions. They may not be able to define identity. They may not be able to define idolatry at a young age, but they can see it in what you worship and how you worship. They know if the house rises and falls on a football game. They know if weekends revolve more around activities, even their own activities, more so than around worship of God. They know if success in sports or clubs or activities matters more to you than actually their character being built. They know when a hobby overtakes Jesus. And the opportunity is for you as a dad to love Jesus, to worship Him, and to enjoy football, enjoy hobbies, enjoy life, laugh deeply, work hard. Appreciate that we can play hard in ways that many haven't been able to. But nothing comes before Jesus.

Jesus doesn't make life smaller. He makes life fuller. And as we talk a lot in this series about good gifts, including hobbies, good gifts, gifts God gives to us. May you hear that the greatest gift has already been paid for, already been doled out by Jesus Christ. And the good news and the gospel truth, not only for dads, but for moms and for grandpas and grandmas and kids, everybody.

The good news is that price has already been paid. And when you go over the guardrails, when you go over the guardrails unsettled for lesser things, any of the hobbies we've talked about today, or anything else in this world. When you go over the guardrails knowingly, when you go over a little bit, God gives you this beautiful gift of grace that brings you right back to where you need to be. He gives you chance after chance after chance to make it right.

And if you've made a mess of your life up to this point, if you've made a hobby your God, you have the opportunity today to actually go before God, receive his grace and talk to your kids about how you failed. Because it's okay to talk to your kids about how you failed because it opens up an opportunity to tell them about how God never has failed. And how even though you may fail as a dad, you've got a heavenly father that never failed and sent a son to give them a gift of grace.

And so let's enjoy, let's enjoy the good gifts. Let's have great meals. Hope you get great gifts today from those same kids that are such a blessing in our lives like 40% of the time. Gosh, maybe it's even going to be fun to watch the US Open later for a guy like me. And that's fine. It's good. But these things are not my identity. They're not your identity.

And I tell you what, this is a message that American Western Christians in 2026. This is a message that Omaha Nebraskans that live the good life need to hear and take heart. Because I see this idolatry everywhere. And I see it in my heart far too often. And so will you pray with me? Will you repent with me? And repentance means, yeah, feeling sorry. But changing our ways.

So God, heavenly father, we come before you. You are the great father, the perfect father. You sent your son to die on a cross for us, to give us the greatest gift. We receive that gift of grace for when we've made mistakes and failed. We thank you for the forgiveness that we've tasted. That we hear about and that we know is ours this morning. And with this gift of forgiveness. God, thank you for the gift of just being able to enjoy things that generations prior have been praying about.

Help us not take them for granted, but help us to maximize our days and to live our days as if they matter most for you more than anything else. Jesus, we love you. And it's an honor to be your family, your kids. Thank you, heavenly father. We pray this in your name. And together, the church says, amen.