

Time for Me

Finding time for self is difficult, yet necessary.

WE KNOW IT'S IMPORTANT TO FIND TIME FOR THE THINGS WE ENJOY; YET SO MUCH OF SINGLE PARENTING IS MORE DUTY THAN DELIGHT. WE LOVE OUR CHILDREN, AND WE SACRIFICE EVERYTHING FOR THEM—EVEN OUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH. THE JOB, THE FAMILY, THE CONSTANT PRESSURE OF PAYING BILLS—ALL THESE THINGS CAN DRAIN US OF THE DESIRE FOR A MORE CREATIVE LIFE. THEN ONE DAY, WE BLOW UP AT THE KIDS AND WONDER WHY.

RECREATION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL. AS WE LEARN HOW TO RELAX AND RECREATE, WE BENEFIT. PLAYTIME FOR MOM OR DAD IS ALSO GOOD FOR THEIR CHILDREN. BUT FIRST, WE HAVE TO EXAMINE OURSELVES AND FIND OUT WHY WE DON'T TAKE TIME FOR FUN.

ARE WE IGNORING OUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH OUT OF FEAR OR GUILT? DO WE HAVE THE ATTITUDE THAT WE ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN MEET EVERY NEED FOR OUR CHILD? HAVE WE DECIDED TO BECOME LIFELONG VICTIMS? THESE ARE SOME OF THE IDEAS WE'LL LOOK AT IN THIS STUDY.

LESSON #3

SCRIPTURE:

PSALM 27; 71; EZEKIEL 36:23–36; EPHESIANS 4:26–32

PART 1

IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE YOU'VE HAD ANY FUN. ONCE YOU BECAME A SINGLE PARENT, TIME FOR YOURSELF WAS GONE. YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A RUT BETWEEN WORKING 8 TO 5 AND RUNNING THE KIDS ALL OVER CREATION FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES. THE TEACHERS WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR MIDDLE CHILD, THE JUNIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL NEEDS A PROM DRESS DESIGNED AND SEWN BY YOU, AND THE FIRST GRADER IS HAVING

TROUBLE LEARNING TO TIE HIS SNEAKERS. EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF YOU, AND EVEN AT CHURCH THEY THINK YOU SHOULD LEAD A GROUP ON SINGLE PARENTING. USE YOUR GIFTS. SERVE. DIE TO SELF.

BUT THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A REAL MOVIE, POPCORN WAS 30 CENTS. YOU DON'T REMEMBER HOW IT FEELS TO HAVE DREAMS ABOUT THE FUTURE. YOUR CLOTHES ARE OUTDATED, BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO SHOP. OTHER PEOPLE GET MANICURES, AND YOU SECRETLY ENVY THEM. YOU JUST WANT 15 MINUTES AT THE LOCAL COFFEE SHOP TO SIP A LATTÉ AND READ A MAGAZINE. BUT IF YOU DO THAT, LIFE AT HOME WILL FALL APART AND YOU'LL FEEL GUILTY AGAIN.

YOU FEEL LIFE ISN'T FAIR, AND JUSTICE HAPPENS ONLY ON TELEVISION LAW SHOWS.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

[Q] WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HAD FUN? WHAT DID YOU DO? WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO IT AGAIN?

[Q] WHY DO YOU THINK WE AVOID HAVING FUN?

- **WOULD IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO OUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH IF EACH MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HAD FUN TIME?**
- **IS IT MORE IMPORTANT TO SCHEDULE FUN TIMES WITH THE CHILDREN OR WITHOUT THEM?**

PART 2

DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

TEACHING POINT ONE: DISCOVER THE ROOT.

GARDENERS KNOW THAT WHEN YOU PULL THE LEAVES OF A DANDELION, YOU ARE WASTING TIME. TO ERADICATE THOSE PESKY WEEDS, YOU HAVE TO GET THE ENTIRE ROOT SYSTEM. IF YOU DON'T GET THE ROOT, THE DANDELION WILL SOON GROW BACK AND DESTROY THE BEAUTY OF THE GARDEN.

THE SAME TRUTH APPLIES TO OUR STUDY. GOD INTENDS FOR US TO BE BALANCED PEOPLE WHO ARE MODERATE IN ALL THINGS. WE HAVE TO WORK HARD AT PARENTING AND AT OUR JOBS, BUT WE ALSO NEED TO DEVOTE TIME TO PLAY. WE BUY OUR CHILDREN TOYS BECAUSE WE KNOW HOW IMPORTANT PLAY IS TO THEIR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH. WE ALSO NEED TO SPEND TIME IN PLAY.

BARBARA SCHILLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SINGLE PARENT FAMILY RESOURCES, WRITES, "I'M OFTEN DRIVEN BY GUILT. I PUSH DOWN MY NEEDS IN ORDER TO SATISFY MY CHILDREN'S NEEDS." SCHILLER GOES ON TO ASK THE QUESTION, "AM I DRIVEN BY THE

FEELING THAT I NEED TO MAKE UP FOR WHAT MAY BE LACKING IN THEIR LIVES?"

ALL PARENTS DEAL WITH GUILT, USUALLY A FALSE SENSE OF GUILT. BUT IF GUILT IS KEEPING US FROM PLAY, IT IS CREATING AN UNHEALTHY ATMOSPHERE IN OUR SOULS.

READ EPHESIANS 4:26–32.

IF GUILT IS THE CULPRIT, THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US HOW TO DEAL WITH IT. CONFESS. GET RID OF THE ANGER, THE SLANDER, THE BITTERNESS, AND ALL THE UGLY ROOTS. FORGIVE AND LEARN TO GIVE KINDNESS TO THOSE WHO HAVE HURT YOU. FORGIVE YOURSELF AND LEARN TO BE KIND TO YOUR OWN SOUL.

[Q] DO YOU THINK GUILT HAS KEPT YOU FROM PLAY?

- **HOW DOES GUILT AFFECT YOUR MOOD?**
- **HOW CAN GUILT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

[Q] WHAT ARE OTHER ROOTS THAT CAN DESTROY YOUR SENSE OF FUN?

- **IS FEAR A VALID REASON TO KEEP AWAY FROM PLAY? ARE YOU AFRAID OF PLAYING ALONE?**

[Q] HOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE TRAITS OF FEELING LIKE A VICTIM?

- **COULD THESE TRAITS ALSO KEEP US FROM PLAY? HOW CAN WE AVOID SELF-PITY?**

[Q] IS CHRISTIAN COUNSELING A GOOD OPTION? WHY OR WHY NOT?

TEACHING POINT TWO: FUN BEGINS WITH BABY STEPS.

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS OF NO PLAY, WE MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO HAVE FUN. SO WE'LL NEED TO BEGIN WITH TINY STEPS. THE FIRST STEP IS TO CONVINCING OURSELVES THAT IT'S OKAY TO PLAY. THERE ARE NO COMMANDMENTS AGAINST PLAY. IN FACT, JESUS INVITED CHILDREN TO BE AROUND HIM, AND KIDS LIKE PEOPLE WHO ARE FUN.

READ EZEKIEL 36:23–36.

NOTICE HOW GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE IN STAGES. THIS IS A PASSAGE ABOUT THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL, AND WE CAN APPLY IT TO OUR LIVES. FIRST, WE FOCUS ON WHO GOD IS AND WHAT HE CAN DO. HE IS THE ONE WHO CLEANSSES US FROM GUILT, FEAR, OR OTHER HARMFUL ROOTS. ONCE WE ARE CLEAN, HE GIVES US A NEW HEART AND A NEW SPIRIT. HE REMOVES THE HEART OF STONE, THE HEART THAT CANNOT PLAY. HE TEACHES US HOW TO OBEY HIS LAWS, AND HE SAVES US FROM ANYTHING UNCLEAN. HE PROVIDES WHAT WE NEED SO THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO WALLOW IN WORRY

OR SELF-PITY. HE CULTIVATES GOOD THINGS IN US, REBUILDS OUR LIVES, AND RESTORES US FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

ONCE WE ARE FREE FROM THE BURDENS OF THE PAST, WE CAN RE-DISCOVER THAT UNIQUE PART OF US THAT ONCE ENJOYED LIFE. IN HER BOOK *CRAZY TIME*, ABIGAIL TRAFFORD WRITES ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT GETTING STUCK BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE. SHE DEVOTES ONE CHAPTER TO THE “EMERGENCE OF SELF.” TRAFFORD DECLARES THAT AS WE MOVE OUT OF THE PAIN, REAL LIFE CAN SNEAK UP ON US. AS WE ACCEPT IT, WE “BRING TO NEW LIFE A SURVIVOR’S CONFIDENCE AND A TOURIST’S VISION THAT THE WORLD OFFERS MANY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES. IT’S JUST A QUESTION OF DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.”

GOD GIVES US CHOICES, AND EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE MANY RESPONSIBILITIES, WE CAN ALSO ASK OURSELVES, “WHAT DO I REALLY WANT TO DO?” MAYBE WE CAN SPEND FIVE MINUTES PLAYING A GAME OF SOLITAIRE. TOMORROW, 10 MINUTES STROLLING AROUND A GARDEN. ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, GET A MANICURE. AND DON’T FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IT.

[Q] IF YOU DIDN’T HAVE TO WORK, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?

- **WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM A PIECE OF THAT DREAM?**
- **WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP TO REALIZING THAT DREAM?**

[Q] WHAT CREATIVE GIFTS DO YOU HAVE? HOW ABOUT COMPOSING A SONG, WRITING A POEM, OR PAINTING? DO YOU LIKE TO JOURNAL? MAYBE YOU HAVE GIFTS THAT YOU HAVEN’T EVEN DISCOVERED. WHAT CREATIVE GIFTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO PURSUE?

[Q] WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE AUTHOR? WHY?

- **HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT JOINING A READING GROUP? OR A COMMUNITY CHOIR? OR BECOMING A MASTER GARDENER?**

[Q] DO YOU HAVE DEBTS THAT ARE KEEPING YOU FROM PLAY?

- **HAVE YOU CONSIDERED CROWN FINANCIAL MINISTRIES OR SOME OTHER TYPE OF FINANCIAL COUNSELING?**
- **WHAT FINANCIAL TIPS HAVE YOU LEARNED THAT YOU CAN SHARE WITH THE GROUP?**

TEACHING POINT THREE: MOVE FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING.

JUNE HUNT, A BIBLICAL COUNSELOR, SAYS THE STAGE OF THRIVING “FLOWS WITH DEEP WATERS OF INNER STRENGTH.” SHE SUGGESTS THAT WE THRIVE BY LEARNING MORE ABOUT GOD AND REALIZING THAT HE IS IN CONTROL OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. HE CARES ABOUT EVERY DETAIL OF OUR LIVES, AND HE KNOWS WE

ARE IN A CHARACTER-BUILDING PROCESS. TRUE THRIVING, HUNT WRITES IN HER *HOPE FOR THE HEART BIBLICAL COUNSELING LIBRARY*, MEANS “KNOWING THAT YOU WOULD NOT TRADE WHO YOU ARE NOW FOR WHO YOU WERE BEFORE THE DIVORCE” (OR BEFORE THE DEATH, OR BEFORE YOU GOT PREGNANT).

TRAFFORD CONCURS. SHE WRITES THAT DURING THE EMERGENCE OF SELF, “YOU ARE LESS AFRAID OF THE FUTURE ... YOU TAKE PIANO LESSONS, BECOME A MINISTER. YOU FINALLY BECOME YOU.”

KING DAVID ADDS HIS OWN COMMENTS IN PSALM 71. HE WRITES ABOUT HOW KNOWING GOD GIVES HIM CONFIDENCE. IN FACT, HE IS SO CONFIDENT THAT HE HAS BECOME A MARVEL TO MANY. HE SPENDS TIME PRAISING GOD AND SCORNING HIS ACCUSERS. DAVID ENDS THE PSALM BY DECLARING THAT EVEN THOUGH HE HAS HAD BITTER TROUBLES IN LIFE, GOD HAS RESTORED HIM.

READ PSALM 71.

[Q] WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER A RESTORED LIFE?

- HOW HAS GOD ALREADY RESTORED YOU? WHAT CAN YOU PRAISE HIM FOR?

[Q] HAVE YOU SEEN CHARACTER BUILDING IN YOURSELF SINCE THE DIVORCE?

- HAVE YOU SEEN IT IN YOUR CHILDREN?
- ARE YOU HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

[Q] WHAT FUN ACTIVITY WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAN WITH YOUR CHILDREN? HAVE YOU ASKED YOUR CHILDREN WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO DO?

- WHAT IS A FUN ACTIVITY YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO ALONE?
- WITH A FRIEND?

PART 3

APPLY YOUR FINDINGS

AS WE LEARN TO PLAY, WE DISCOVER A REBIRTHING OF SELF. WE ARE WRITING NEW SCRIPTS IN LIFE AND CARVING OUT A NICHE FOR OURSELVES IN THE WORLD. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOW REWRITING OUR LIVES AS SINGLES, GOD IS WITH US. AS WE REDEFINE WHO WE ARE, WE GRADUALLY MOVE TOWARD HOPE. WE CAN BELIEVE IN THE JOY OF LIVING AGAIN.

PSALM 27 IS ANOTHER SONG OF KING DAVID'S THAT FOCUSES ON JOY. HE BEGINS BY DECLARING GOD AS HIS LIGHT AND HIS SALVATION. THEN HE REMEMBERS THAT HE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID. IN VERSE 13, THE KING GIVES US A STATEMENT WE CAN

FOCUS OUR LIVES ON: "I AM STILL CONFIDENT OF THIS: I WILL SEE THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING."

[Q] DO YOU BELIEVE THAT STATEMENT? DO YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD CAN MAKE GOOD COME INTO YOUR LIFE AGAIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

[Q] WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN GOD?

➤ **IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU FEEL MOST CONFIDENT?**

[Q] HAVE YOU ALREADY SEEN GOD'S GOODNESS IN YOUR LIFE? SHARE IT WITH THE GROUP.

ACTION POINTS:

SCHEDULE DAYS OF JOY. MOST OF US LIVE BY LISTS, PLANNERS, OR SOME TYPE OF DAILY CALENDAR. THE BEST WAY TO BEGIN HAVING FUN IS TO WRITE IT INTO OUR SCHEDULE. PLAN A DAY OF JOY. LOOK AT YOUR CALENDAR FOR NEXT WEEK. USE A PEN OR A SHARPIE TO FILL IN SOME TIME FOR YOURSELF, THEN FIND SOMEONE TO WATCH THE KIDS. (IF YOU USE A PENCIL, YOU'LL BE TEMPTED TO ERASE IT!) CALL A FRIEND WHO WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A DAY OF JOY WITH YOU.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR A FREE MAKEOVER. MANY OF THE BEAUTY COUNTERS IN DEPARTMENT STORES GIVE FREE MAKEOVERS. THEY HOPE YOU'LL BUY SOMETHING, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO. YOU'RE ACTUALLY BUYING TIME AND ENJOYMENT FOR YOURSELF.

ONE SINGLE MOTHER TAKES HER JOURNAL TO A GARDEN CENTER. SURROUNDED BY FLOWERS AND BUTTERFLIES, SHE WRITES WHAT IS ON HER HEART. THEN SHE PRAYS ABOUT WHAT SHE HAS WRITTEN. SHE RETURNS HOME ENRICHED NOT ONLY BY HER WORDS, BUT ALSO BY BEING SURROUNDED BY NATURE.

DRIVE TO A RECREATION CENTER THAT PROVIDES FREE SERVICES. SPEND 30 MINUTES ON THE TREADMILL OR THE STATIONARY BIKE. TREAT YOURSELF TO AN ICED TEA WITH A DROP OF LEMON.

BROWSE THROUGH A BOOKSTORE. BUY A LATTÉ AND SKIM THROUGH A COFFEE TABLE BOOK. ENJOY THE PICTURES.

RENT A VIDEO THAT YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE. TAKE IT TO A FRIEND'S HOUSE AND WATCH IT TOGETHER. HAVE A CHOCOLATE TREAT OR A BOWL OF POPCORN.

DRIVE TO A MINIATURE GOLF COURSE FOR A FEW HOLES. KEEP SCORE AND TREAT YOURSELF TO ICE CREAM IF YOU MAKE PAR.

SAVE YOUR QUARTERS UNTIL YOU HAVE ENOUGH FOR A MASSAGE. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AND TOTALLY RELAX.

KEEP A DREAM JAR. EVERY WEEK, THROW YOUR EXTRA CHANGE IN THE JAR. START SAVING FOR THAT VACATION YOU REALLY WANT TO TAKE.

MEMORIZE PSALM 27:13. START PRAISING GOD FOR ALL THE GOOD THINGS HE WILL BRING INTO YOUR LIFE. THANK HIM DAILY FOR HIS RESTORING POWER.

CONSIDER THE WORDS OF ADONIRAM JUDSON (1788–1850), A MISSIONARY TO BURMA. “THE FUTURE IS AS BRIGHT AS THE PROMISES OF GOD.”

ARTICLE

TIME FOR MYSELF

IS GUILT KEEPING YOU FROM THE REST YOU NEED?

I'VE BEEN SITTING IN MY FAVORITE OVERSTUFFED CHAIR, BUT FOR HOW LONG? WOW! IT'S BEEN TWO HOURS. WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE?

BUT I DO FEEL BETTER. I'M CALMER, LESS ANXIOUS. HOW COULD I FEEL THIS WAY WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE WEEK HAVEN'T CHANGED? I REALIZE IT'S BECAUSE I'VE TAKEN TIME FOR ME.

WHY HAD I WAITED SO LONG? I SMILED AS I RECALLED MY GIRLFRIEND'S CYNICAL OBSERVATION: "GUILT, BARBARA. IT'S THE GIFT THAT GOES ON GIVING."

I JUST FINISHED A 50-HOUR WORK WEEK, AND NOW I'M THINKING ABOUT ATTENDING AN UPCOMING SINGLE-ADULT RETREAT. BUT I FEEL GUILTY ABOUT GOING BECAUSE I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE MY KIDS—AGAIN. I'M OFTEN DRIVEN BY GUILT. I PUSH DOWN MY NEEDS IN ORDER TO SATISFY MY CHILDREN'S NEEDS—BEYOND A POINT THAT IS HEALTHY. AM I DRIVEN BY THE FEELING THAT I NEED TO MAKE UP FOR WHAT MAY BE LACKING IN THEIR LIVES? MY KIDS DIDN'T DESERVE A SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLD, SO I'LL MAKE UP FOR IT BY GIVING AND GIVING AND GIVING.

A SECOND REASON TAKING TIME FOR MYSELF IS DIFFICULT IS BECAUSE BEING ALONE IS SCARY. PERHAPS I'VE BEEN KEEPING SO BUSY TO AVOID HAVING TO BE ALONE. MAYBE I DON'T REALLY WANT TIME TO PONDER AND REFLECT AND EVEN DREAM.

I REMEMBER THE SUMMER OF 1985, WHEN MY PARENTS ARRIVED AT MY DOORSTEP TO TAKE MY CHILDREN HOME WITH THEM FOR TWO WEEKS. AS THEY DROVE AWAY AND I BLEW KISSES TO THEM, MY STOMACH CHURNED. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D BEEN COMPLETELY ALONE FOR MORE THAN A YEAR. WHAT WAS I GOING TO DO WITH ALL THIS FREE TIME?

JOYFULLY, THAT EVENT BECAME A TURNING POINT FOR ME. I READ. I HIKE. I WENT TO THE MOVIES

(ALONE!). I EVEN SPENT TIME IN THE EVENING WITH FRIENDS WITHOUT HAVING A CURFEW.

SIX YEARS LATER, I BECAME EVEN BRAVER. I DESIGNED A WEEK-LONG SUMMER VACATION JUST FOR ME. NOW I REFLECT BACK ON THAT SUMMER WHEN I SAT IN THE MIDDLE OF A COLORADO MOUNTAIN MEADOW WHERE WILDFLOWERS FLOURISHED. I TALKED WITH MY LORD ABOUT MY DREAMS—DREAMS I HAD THE COURAGE TO SHARE ONLY WITH HIM. THERE WERE TEARS OF GRATITUDE FOR HIS UNENDING FAITHFULNESS IN MY LIFE. IT WAS WONDERFUL TO HAVE THIS PRECIOUS, NO-DEMANDS SCHEDULE JUST TO BE WITH HIM. MY BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT WERE REFRESHED. I WAS READY TO FACE LIFE AGAIN.

“HOW NICE,” YOU MIGHT BE SAYING. “I WISH I HAD PARENTS TO TAKE MY CHILDREN FOR TWO WEEKS!” IF YOU DON’T, CHECK IF THERE IS A FAMILY AT CHURCH OR A NEIGHBOR YOU CAN TRUST TO CARE FOR YOUR KIDS. YOU’D BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH FRIENDS LONG TO HELP.

IF THAT IS STILL AN IMPOSSIBILITY, BEGIN TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THAT YOU NEED SOME TIME FOR YOURSELF. IF THEY ARE ELEMENTARY AGE, TAKE TIME TO BE ALONE IN YOUR ROOM, UNDISTURBED. EXPLAIN THAT YOU’LL COME OUT IN 30 MINUTES AND THEN SET THE EGG TIMER.

IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE YOUNGER, DO SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF AFTER THEY’RE IN BED. READ A GOOD BOOK OR WRITE A LETTER TO A FRIEND. WATCH A FAVORITE TV SHOW THAT YOU TAPED EARLIER. TAKE A LONG BATH.

JESUS IS OUR MODEL. IN THE MIDST OF HIS MANY RESPONSIBILITIES, HE SOMEHOW FOUND TIME FOR SOLITUDE. KING DAVID, IN A TIME OF TURMOIL, REALIZED THAT GOD MADE HIM “LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES,” LEADING HIM BESIDE QUIET WATERS AND RESTORING HIS SOUL (PS. 23:2-3).

GOD CALLS US AWAY SO HE CAN RESTORE OUR SOULS. WHY NOT HEED HIS CALL TODAY?