

Relax, Already

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright loved to tell the story about a walk he took when he was nine years old, across a snow covered field with his no-nonsense uncle. When they reached the far end of the field, his uncle turned and pointed out his own tracks across the field, straight and true as an arrow's flight. Then he showed young Frank his tracks, meandering all over the field.

"Notice how you wander from the fence to the cattle to the woods, and back again," said his uncle, "and see how my tracks aim directly at my goal. There's an important lesson in that."

Years later, the world famous architect related how that experience had greatly contributed to his philosophy about life. "I determined right then and there," he said, "to not miss out on most things in life, as my uncle had."

Most of us, if we're honest, can relate more to the uncle than we can to Frank. We make our plans, set our goals, and march directly toward them. No time for meandering allowed.

But there's a price to be paid for that. According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, some eight million Americans suffer from 'leisure sickness' when they attempt to relax. The symptoms are flu-like: fatigue, muscle pain, nausea. Add in the phenomenon of 'weekend headaches' – which account for roughly one-third of all migraines, and one-sixth of tension headaches – and you get a picture of a culture that doesn't know how to unplug from the stress and demands of the workplace.

As Edward Creagan – a medical oncologist who writes the Mayo Clinic's stress blog – puts it, "It's been my experience that an 'out of office' response means nothing anymore. We're driving ourselves wacko with no time to power down."

At one level, it's easy to see why. Most of us carry a more powerful computer in our pocket than the one we had on our desk just a few years ago. Our office comes with us wherever we go. And, frankly, it's addictive – the adrenalin rush we get from being constantly connected, always on call, can be exhilarating.

But just because we *can* do something doesn't mean we *should*. There's a time and place for working hard, no doubt. It's just not every waking moment. The toll it takes on the relationships within your family is too steep a price, no matter what success you might attain. And if that's not incentive enough, consider what the Bible says:

"A relaxed attitude lengthens a man's life." (Proverbs 14:30)

This weekend would be a great time to get reacquainted with what – and who – you've been missing out on, as you march straight across that field, smartphone in hand. Perhaps the best gift you can give those you love is to unplug from Facebook and MyFace, to get DeTwittered and UnLinkedIn. Turn it *all* off – don't worry, it will still be there when you get back – and observe the people around you. Stay present in the moment. Lighten up. Wander around a bit. Breathe. Pray. Meditate. Relax.

After the initial shock wears off, you might just find that you genuinely enjoy it.

For Personal Reflection and Discussion with Others

1. How would you describe your ability to relax?

2. What obstacles commonly work against you when you try to lighten up and relax?

3. How does that affect your relationship with your family?

4. Read Proverbs 14:30. What can you infer from that verse, regarding what the *opposite* of a 'relaxed attitude' will bring?

5. What piece of technology is most addictive for you? Why?

6. What are your withdrawal symptoms, when you try to set it aside?

7. What would need to change, in order for you to unplug from it and be 'present in the moment' with your family?
